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Personal Development Plan

‘To reach a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, an individual must be able to identify and realize aspirations, to satisfy their needs and to change or cope with the environment’. Corbin et al (2015) Here is my personal development plan, detailing my aspirations.

What do I know already? I have 15 years’ experience as a Teaching Assistant, having worked with Nursery to Year 2 children. I am First Aid Lead and run Pupil Voice Group and PTA/ Fundraising. I am Nurture trained and jointly run a Nurture class. I am currently completing a BA Degree in Early Years Education & Childcare: Practitioner Status.

What do I want to develop? Following my degree, I plan to retrain as a Speech & Language Therapist. My long-term goal is to work part time as a Speech & Language Therapist, whilst dedicating the remainder of my time to developing a small craft business of my own.

Objective	Actions	Resources	Target date	Success Criteria
Personal Target To adapt my lifestyle, giving me more free time to dedicate to creative pursuits.	Set aside more time in the evenings, to prepare new items of stock. Update my knowledge of self-employment procedures. Test out product success at school fayres and amongst friends, family and colleagues	Use of diary and SMART targets, creating a robust time management system. Computer access – research on internet to improve knowledge of business plans, tax and insurance requirements.	Ongoing	In the next two years, I will have an adequate amount of backstock, ready to begin my business. I will have applied to become self-employed and will have undertaken all legal requirements needed to do so.

Objective	Actions	Resources	Target date	Success Criteria
Educational Target To complete my BA degree to the best of my ability.	To attend lectures regularly. To participate fully and be more outgoing in group discussions. To begin draft assignments immediately after the first lecture of each module, giving me a good framework to adapt and build on, once further lectures are complete. Complete independent learning via platforms	Materials and equipment needed to produce stock. Moodle, TEAMS, Library website, Cite Them Right, Turnitin, Linked in Learning, placement activities, feedback from tutors.	July 2025	I will have a good understanding of the current market in relation to handmade crafts and be able to meet the tastes and demands of customers. I will have gained my BA degree qualification, enabling me to proceed with further learning, needed for a Speech and Language Therapist role.

	such as 'Linked in Learning'			
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Objective	Actions	Resources	Target date	Success Criteria
<u>Career Target</u> To be a specialist in Speech and Language Development.	Research qualifications needed to become a Speech and Language Therapist. Assess the time it will take to complete the necessary qualifications. Look for opportunities to develop my skills within my current role.	Computer access – internet research regarding required qualifications. Specialist learning providers – which establishments deliver the training I need? INSET days /visits from outside agencies– gain knowledge and expertise from visiting Speech and Language advisors.	Ongoing – (a more specific date can be applied once research into course lengths is known).	I will have the required qualifications to practice as a Speech and Language Therapist or to be undertaking more Speech and Language related work within my current role.

Reflective Practice

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection involves looking back on actions and decisions made in the past, then thinking about them and analysing them. This process helps you become more aware of your own knowledge and beliefs and enables you to modify, develop or improve activities for the future (**Pacey, 2016**). In an educational setting, reflection is an almost habitual process, resulting in a constantly evolving teaching and learning environment. To become a good reflective practitioner, it is important to be open to innovative ideas, to not be afraid of failure and to embrace new opportunities.

It is often a negative experience or situation that prompts us to reflect. However, it can and should be done, following a positive experience, as it helps you to understand why things went so well and how to achieve the same success next time.

Why is reflective practice important to Early Years practice?

Reflective practice is essential when working in an Early Years environment.

This is partially due to the sometimes-short attention span of young children, meaning we have to constantly look for new ways to inspire and engage them. It can sometimes be necessary to reflect and adapt in the space of a few seconds, when you can see the children losing interest or going off task. As most of the young children's learning is done through play, it is important that we look closely at the play opportunities we provide, be that the toys and activities set out in the classroom, or the wider play opportunities, such as the chance to take risks or engage in activities outside their normal scope. Other reasons to undertake reflection, include improving working relationships with both adults and children, improving the quality of learning, to recognise the current strengths of staff and children and to plan for relevant next steps or continuous professional development.

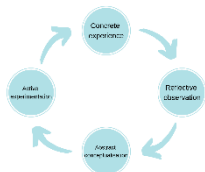
The theory of reflective practice

It is believed the founder of theory on reflective practice is John Dewey. Dewey states that reflection should not just be the act of recalling an event, but a deliberate act of thinking about and analysing the event, in order to learn from it **Dewey (1933)**. Dewey believes there are two types of action - 'routine action' and 'reflective action'. Routine action is very unlikely to change, as it relates to habitual, traditional processes or points of law. Reflective action, however, is a constant process of questioning and analysing the things we do and considering whether it is the best way to do them. Why or why not is this?

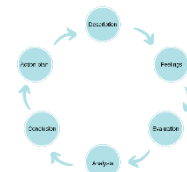
Whilst Dewey viewed reflection as a means of developing personal learning, another theorist, Donald Schön, gave his theory a closer link to professional practice and development. Schön believes there are two types of reflection – reflection 'in action' and reflection 'on action' (**Schön, 2016**). The first entails assessing a situation as it happens, making changes or adaptations on the spot, whilst the second involves analysing the situation after it has occurred and making changes or improvements in readiness for the next time it happens.

It is important to point out that there is no single, all-encompassing definition of reflective practice. You may find it helpful to read further literature on the subject. For example, **Moon, Jennifer A., A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice, p. 82-88, London Routledge**. This text gives further information on the different definitions of reflective practice. To put the theories of reflective practice into action, it is sometimes helpful to use a model framework, to give you a structure to follow. Below are two examples of reflective practice models, which may give you a starting point to begin your reflective exercise.

Kolb's model (1984)



Gibbs' model (1998)



Analysis of models

Shown above are two models of reflective practice. You will note that Kolb's model has only four stages, whilst Gibbs' example has six. Despite this, both methods focus on the experience, the evaluation and the conclusion. If you are new to reflective practice, you may find it easier to start with the four-step method, until you have refined your reflective skills. Whilst it appears more complicated, Gibbs' model does, however, provide you with smaller, more detailed steps to reach the outcome. It will all depend on your style of learning and what suits your purpose. Depending on your outlook and whether you are reflecting alone or in a group, the fact that Gibbs brings feelings into

consideration could be a good or bad thing. Occasionally, when feelings come into play, the whole reflective process can become more laborious. However, taking time to consider people's feelings will lend itself to better working relationships with both adults and children.

For a speedier outcome, it may be that Kolb's model proves more effective, simply concentrating on what, why, what if and so. Despite the many practice models available, you will find your own style of reflection by trial and error. You could also choose to mix and match elements of different models, to suit your purpose, or to fit in with the needs of your group.

Conclusion

The process of reflection is something we all do, every day, often subconsciously. You may have used a new shower product and reflected on how it smelled, was it expensive and how did it perform? You could have tried a new sandwich filling – did you like it, would you buy it again, could it be improved? Reflective practice in Early Years is simply an extension to this, paying more attention to how your decisions will affect others around you, be that adults, children, or families. Reflecting does not necessarily mean anything needs improving. You might conclude that everything has gone well and that the correct decisions were made. It is vital, however, to constantly reflect, in case the situation changes in the future. For example, would a difference in the learning ability of your next group affect the way you do things? Do you know of anything involved in your activity that might upset a particular child and require adaptation? Whichever way you decide to reflect, it will enable you to become a more confident practitioner (**Early Education, Birth to 5 Matters 2021**).

Professional Practice

The term 'professional practice' broadly covers the way people conduct themselves and how they work, in a certain profession. It means different things to different people, depending on their chosen profession, experiences and values **Nova Scotia College of Nursing (2023)**

Some of the elements of professional practice include 'being accountable, collaborating effectively, upholding standards, leadership skills, recognition and professional development' **Western Health (2016)**. As stated by **U.S. Department of Labor (2020)**, 'professionalism is not one skill but the blending and integration of a variety of skills.'

A professional is someone whose main occupation is based around their specific area of expertise and knowledge. They will ideally be educated to a higher standard in their chosen area.

As with most of the population, the professional practitioner will hold their own set of values, by which they abide. These may include reliability, honesty, integrity, responsibility, loyalty, and adaptability, alongside many others. Having these values helps professionals behave appropriately, display a professional image and work to expected standards. Having strong values assists the professional in making ethical decisions and can encourage them to reflect on the impact those decisions have on their community. On a business level, having professional values provides a positive image of the company or organisation and can also help build a respectful work environment, giving greater job satisfaction to employees (**have.hku.kh**). If an organisation publicly shares its values and ethics, this can provide a mutual understanding of what is acceptable and give greater transparency to clients.

In addition to communicating the values of an organisation, other types of communication and relationship building are equally important in professional practice. In an educational setting, it is necessary to communicate with all manner of individuals, for example, children, parents/carers, colleagues, external agencies such as Social Workers, Speech and Language Therapists, school inspectors and many others. It often requires input from several of these people and agencies to successfully meet the needs of a child. Communicating with such a diverse set of people involves being aware of your audience and their level of understanding, together with the use of appropriate terminology. For example, a parent may not necessarily be aware of some abbreviations used daily by teachers, such as 'OT' for Occupational Therapist. Likewise, a child may not understand certain words, depending on their age or life experience. A practitioner with good knowledge of the children in their care will automatically adjust their communication methods without a second thought. However, when meeting with people they do not see daily, more preparation and forethought is required. It must also be remembered that communication does not have to be verbal. It can be a facial expression, an action, or a hand gesture. It is common to have children or families with an EAL background in schools nowadays and this can present its own challenges. Solutions to this could include utilising any staff members that know or speak the required language, using electronic translation tools or simply printing off a school newsletter in different languages.

To have good knowledge of the children in their care and their background, better equips the professional practitioner to deal with their needs. An in-depth knowledge of policies and procedures also makes a more effective practitioner, as it shows they are engaging with the principles and ethos of the workplace. No-one can be expected to remember every detail of every policy, but a good general understanding will enable practitioners to talk about most issues that may arise. If in doubt, it is always best to take note of any query raised, point out that you need to revisit the relevant policy and advise that you will come back with a response when you have the correct information. This method shows that you have taken on board what has been said and have committed to giving an accurate, informed response.

One area where in-depth knowledge is crucial is safeguarding. The policies on safeguarding are regularly revised and updated to deal with new safeguarding issues that arise, and it is for this reason that schools deliver compulsory safeguarding training on a yearly basis, together with notification of updates throughout the year. Familiarity with such policies shows that you are committed to providing the best care and attention to all parties involved and that you do not take your safeguarding responsibilities lightly. According to **Department for Education 2018 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018** 'All children and young people have a right to be safeguarded and protected from harm'.

To provide children with the support they need or to protect them from harm, it is often necessary to participate in multi-agency work. **Advanced Work-based Practice in the Early Years (2019)**, refers to some information provided by the **Social Care Institute for Excellence (2020)**. According to SCIE, it is important that any case requiring multi-agency work is carried out in a coordinated way, is purposeful and child-centred. It is important to record any concerns, low level or otherwise in chronological order, with good descriptive language, to paint a clear picture of the situation. If any details are left unrecorded or not shared with relevant parties, this can lead to situations being overlooked and opportunities to help or safeguard being missed. There may be instances when a practitioner is not satisfied with the action taken. As someone who sees the child daily and has good familial and community knowledge, teaching practitioners are often better placed to understand the challenges faced by families and children. It is therefore important to be confident in challenging decisions that you believe are inadequate or inappropriate, rather than just questioning them. When a practitioner becomes familiar with relevant policies and the escalation procedures used by different agencies, this can provide them with more leverage to push for a better outcome. Throughout all actions however, it is essential to keep the child and their safety as the focus.

Observation is a key skill in the role of a professional practitioner. A huge amount can be learned about a child, purely by watching and noting how they interact with the world around them. Observing how much a child can complete of a particular activity can inform the next steps needed to progress their learning. Also observing how a child interacts with others can give an indication of interpersonal skills they may be missing, or not have had the opportunity to practice. It is important to regularly revisit past observations and repeat activities to gauge whether a child has moved on in their learning. If not, why not? Where there is no apparent reason, could this be an indication of underlying learning difficulties, or is it just a case that the child is not yet at that stage of development? A practitioner who uses observation skills effectively will be able to discuss a child's current stage of development and the next steps planned for them.

According to the Ofsted document, '**A Passion to be outstanding**' (Sept 2009), when observing and planning, it is important to respond to the interests of the children and to take the opportunity to talk to parents/carers about the child's abilities, likes and dislikes and their cultural and family background. Practitioners should establish starting points for development and plan activities to challenge children, whilst also giving them a chance to achieve. Planning should be flexible, responding to the children's changing interests and day-to-day events. It is also good practice for staff to discuss what they have observed, so that everyone is aware of the developmental stage the child is at. When clear systems are used to record observations, it becomes easier to plan future activities and assess whether targets have been met.

To ensure qualitative observations, it is good practice to observe a child in different environments e.g., outdoors, indoors, with peers or alone. Their performance or actions may also be affected by the time of day they are observed. How will they react towards the end of the day, when they are tired, for example, compared with in the morning? Observations should be detailed and contain only what you see, not your opinion or assumptions. What you have observed can then be used to inform planning, providing opportunities for the children to build on what they already know, whilst making links with their past experiences. This links closely with article 29 of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** which states that children are entitled to 'an education which helps them develop their personality, talents, mental and physical abilities,' When observations are accurate and detailed, they can help you to plan future activities to help children build and develop their skills, rather than just repeating the same learning over again. Also, by providing varied learning opportunities and the chance for children to work alongside their peers, the children will learn to respect the environment and the cultures of themselves and others, as mentioned in the UNCRC.

Practitioners should always keep in mind article three of the UNCRC, which states that when adults make decisions affecting children, they should always bear in mind what is best for the child. It can be easy to lose sight of this when planning activities, especially for a larger group. However, through careful differentiation and personalisation, it is possible to tailor activities to meet individual children's needs.

In conclusion, the elements of professional practice discussed above are all equally important in meeting the needs of children, both individually and inclusively. All parties working with children or in child-related fields, have a responsibility to adhere to their organisations' policies and procedures and to abide by the values that govern their professional practice. The need to consider what is best for the child should always be at the heart of every decision made and any deviation from this should be questioned and challenged whenever possible. Whilst this level of responsibility can be daunting, the reward of seeing a child benefit and thrive from the decisions made is a joy beyond compare.

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