

Student number: 2518138
Word count – 3,051
Module Code: ECEY4009

The Professional Practitioner Portfolio

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Component 1 – Personal Development Plan
Component 2 – Briefing Paper
Component 3 – Written Essay

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Part 1 – Personal Development Plan

What do I know already - I have over 12 years of experience working as a Teaching Assistant in a primary school, supporting children from ages 2.5 to 11 years old. In this role, I have been a key part of the classroom environment, building trusting relationships with children and supporting their learning, wellbeing, and personal development.

What have I learnt so far – I have learnt that children's play is essential to a child's development as it supports them to develop key skills. That I provide opportunities for children to engage in play-based learning. In my professional learning, I have understood that reflection is a key skill required to continuously improve my teaching and support.

What do I want to develop – I want to learn more about early years education so I can better understand how young children grow and learn. This will help me support them in the best way and improve how I work with them every day. Through reflection, I want to be able to understand my mistakes and find ways to improve for next time.

Objective	Actions	Resources	Target Date for achieving objective	Success criteria
To complete my degree in Early Years Education and care.	To understand the course requirements To attend all lectures To complete all assignments	I will do this by carefully reading all the information provided by my lecturers, including module handbooks, assignment briefs, and learning outcomes. This will ensure I am clear about what is expected of me. I will seek support from my lecturers and keep track on assignment deadlines.	This objective is a long-term goal and will need to be completed Summer 2027.	Feedback and results of assignments Passing all required modules Meeting the required number of credits of the course
To improve my time management and organisation in balancing my university work and lifestyle.	Create a study timetable. Use a planner. Set mini deadlines Review my weekly progress.	Using a combination of planning tools and time management techniques to create a weekly study timetable Using digital calendars and breaking up big tasks into little tasks throughout the week. I will reflect on what's working and what isn't	End of the autumn term.	Assignments completed and submitted on time Workload is controlled, allocated time is being used to study. I have a good balance on university work and lifestyle. Following reflection, I will

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		using a journal and planner.		set myself new targets for the following week.
To develop my knowledge and understanding of safeguarding.	To understand the importance of safeguarding. Understanding the different levels of safeguarding. Learning about the types of abuse related to safeguarding. Familiarise myself with safeguarding policies.	Research around safeguarding online, journals and books. Read through school policies. Attend relevant safeguarding training. To complete a level 1 basic awareness online course.	General safeguarding – ongoing as policy is always being updated.	Certificate of safeguarding training.

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Part 2 – Briefing paper

What is reflection and reflective practise?

Reflection is a process of thinking critically about your experiences, actions and decisions to understand in depth and improve future outcomes. It involves asking yourself:

- What happened?
- What did I learn?
- What could I do differently next time?

Reflection involves stepping back from one's everyday actions to consider and evaluate them, thereby gaining insight into how one thinks, feels, and acts in professional situations (Hallet, 2012)

Reflection is an important way people learn by thinking about their experiences, understand what happened, link new ideas to what they already know, and change their thinking as needed. It enables continuous personal and professional growth, improves skills and decision- making over time. (Brock, 2015)

Reflective practice is the continuous habit of thinking about your actions and experiences to help you grow personally and professionally. This involves:

- Regularly reviewing your work or behaviour.
- Learning from what went well and what didn't.
- Using what you've learned to improve.

Why is reflective practise important to EY practise?

Reflective practise is essential to deliver the quality and effectiveness of Early Years provision. It allows practitioners to critically evaluate their work, continuous professional development and improving outcomes for children.

When Early Years practitioners think carefully about how they interact with children, the methods they use, and how they respond to each child's needs; they can identify what's working well and what could be done better. This regular reflection helps make sure that the care and learning they provide is focused on the child, welcoming to all, and fits where each child is in their development.

The Early Years Reflective Practice Handbook by Avril Brock says it helps early years practitioners to keep up with continuous changes. grow and understand their job, use what they learn in real life and help children and families better by continually improving and reflecting on their teaching. (Brock, 2015)

Reflective practice helps practitioners make good choices and give better care and education to children.

The theory of reflective practise:

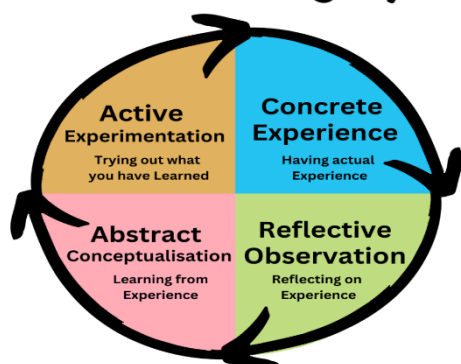
The theory of reflective practise explains how people learn and improve by thinking carefully about their experiences. It helps them understand what happened, why it happened and how this can be improved in the future. Key theorists like John Dewey, Donald Schon and David Kolb have all contributed to the understanding of reflection. Dewey describes reflection as turning experiences into meaningful learning (Dewey 1933). Schon introduced the idea of reflecting both during and after actions, helping professionals improve their decision-making. Kolb included reflection as part of a learning cycle, showing how people learn through doing and thinking. Overall, reflection theory provides the foundation for many reflective models and supports personal and professional growth.

Gibbs' Reflective cycle created in 1988 by Graham Gibbs is a model based around a step-by-step approach to help individuals learn from experience by evaluating their actions. This model consists of six stages: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action Plan (Hallet, 2012). This model allows the individual to describe their experience, how they felt it went, evaluate whether it went well or not, analysis what went wrong, conclude the experience and finally create an action plan to improve for next time.

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory explains learning as a cyclical process involving four key stages. It begins with Concrete Experience, where individuals actively engage in a new situation. This is followed by Reflective Observation, in which they thoughtfully review and reflect on the experience. Next comes Abstract Conceptualization, where learners develop ideas or theories based on their reflections. Finally, in Active Experimentation, individuals apply what they have learned to new situations to test their understanding. Kolb's theory highlights the importance of combining experience with reflection and experimentation, making it a valuable framework for promoting continuous learning and professional development

Kolb's model

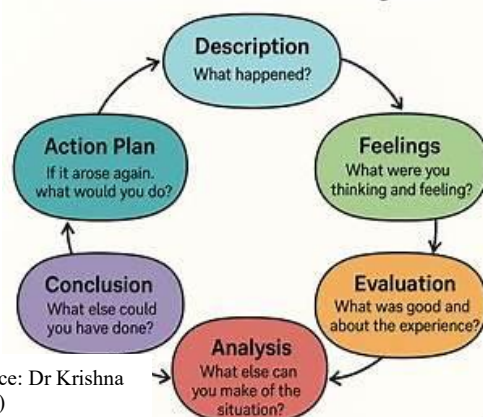
Kolb's Learning Cycle



(Source: Early Years)

Gibbs' model

Gibbs Reflective Cycle



(Source: Dr Krishna Athal)

Analysis of models – compare/contrast/pros/cons:

Both Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) and Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) are popular models that help people learn by thinking about their experiences. They both believe that reflection is important for learning and growing professionally, especially in areas like education, healthcare, and social care.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Gibbs' Reflective Cycle are both useful tools for reflective practice. They share a similar cycle, showing that learning is a continuous process where experience leads to reflection and then action (Kolb, 1984; Gibbs, 1988). Both models start with a real experience and encourage learners to think deeply about what happened. They focus on improving by reflecting on past actions to gain understanding and make better choices in the future.

Both models help people learn through reflection, but they have different focuses. Kolb's model has four steps; Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract

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Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation (Kolb, 1984), this is more theoretical, used mostly in academic settings to understand how people learn. Gibbs' model is easier to use, especially for beginners, with six steps: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. It includes emotions, which makes it useful in caring professions like healthcare and education (Brock, 2013). Kolb's model helps explain learning, while Gibbs' model gives a clear, practical way to reflect and improve.

Conclusion

To conclude, reflective practice is a vital part of professional development, particularly in fields like early years education and health care where it encourages professionals to think critically about their experiences, helping them to improve decision making and understanding and grow in their roles. Both Kolb's and Gibbs' cycle provide valuable framework for reflection. Kolb's offer a theoretical view of how people learn through experience while Gibbs model gives a more practical step to step approach that includes emotional reflection. each model has its strengths and choosing the right one depends on the professional needs. In early years practice, reflection supports practitioners in reviewing and improving their work with children and families, helping to ensure high-quality, child-centred care.

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Part 3 – Written Essay

Recognise and analyse the significance of different aspects of professional practise and why these are important in meeting the individual and inclusive needs of children.

Professional practice embraces the knowledge, values, behaviours, and strategies that guide practitioners working with children in education and care settings. It is vital not only delivering the best quality experiences but also for recognising and responding to the diverse needs of children no matter what background, ability or circumstance. This essay will analyse various aspects of professional practice, including reflective practice, safeguarding, inclusive approaches, collaboration with families, and ongoing professional development, and discuss how these elements contribute to meeting children's individual and inclusive needs. Perez (2019) identifies that the idea of 'professionalism' is underpinned by values which guide the skills, knowledge and ethical standards required to execute a job role.

A professional is someone who has knowledge in a role that involves using skills and training to do a specific job well. In their role they must follow rules, laws and guidelines to make sure they are working safely and respectfully. Professional practice is a way a person carries out their job using the correct skills and right knowledge to carry out the role. To make sure they are showing respect, being honest and always trying to improve in their role. This will ensure that they are building trust and ensuring people get the best care and support. According to Pears and Shields (2022), professional practice is about working responsibly and following the standards expected in the role.

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Our core values ensure people are at the heart of everything we do and aspire to be the best of their ability. Some key values that are crucial in the education profession are caring, fair, integrity, respect and being professional. Caring is very important especially in early years education as the young children need to feel they have a bond and a relationship where they can feel they are safe. This value encourages the practitioner to be compassionate and approachable for the children. Being fair is a strong value that children notice therefore it is essential that practitioners are always consistent with their behaviour and ensuring that they are always inclusive of all the different needs of children. Practitioners must be honest in how they act, build a strong relationship with the children and family and gain the trust of the young children. Being professional is classed as someone who is skilled, knowledgeable and innovative in their field who is always looking to find new ways to improve and help children develop. Finally, respect is a key value which delivers effective communication in how we listen, engage and value people. these values are significant in early years as this helps us develop our professional identity and 'way of being' as education professionals and help us to know and develop the whole child through addressing their individual needs (The General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021)

Communication and relationships are essential in professional educational practice because they have a direct impact on a child's development, learning, and overall well-being. Effective communication helps build trust between practitioners and children, making them feel safe, supported, and more confident to thrive in their development.

When children feel listened to, they are more likely to express their feelings, needs, and ideas which are an important part of their emotional and cognitive growth. Good communication also supports learning by helping children develop language skills and by making them feel valued and heard. Practitioners who take time to get to know each child's individual needs, interests, and experiences can offer more responsive and meaningful support, which is essential for holistic development (Nutbrown et al., 2013)

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In a professional role, practitioners also work closely with colleagues and other professionals. Sharing accurate and relevant information about a child ensures consistency in care and helps meet each child's individual needs effectively. Strong communication and relationships within a team support better outcomes for children and promote a positive, collaborative working environment. In addition, communication between staff and families ensures that important information is shared, such as a child's routines, health needs, progress, or any concerns. This enables professionals to provide personalised support and maintain consistency between home and the care setting.

In professional practice, strong relationships with children allow practitioners to better understand each child's personality, interests, and developmental stage. This understanding enables practitioners to tailor activities, support learning, and respond effectively. The Early Years Foundation Stage framework highlights that children learn and develop well in enabling environments where there are strong partnerships between practitioners and children (Department for Education, 2024).

Having an in-depth knowledge and understanding is essential to professional practice because it allows practitioners to recognise individual needs, plan meaningful activities and create inclusive environments where every child can reach their full potential. Dyer (2018) emphasises that deep knowledge and understanding are critical to meaningful professional practice in the early years sector. She explains that being a true professional is not just about having qualifications or following routines, but about using deep knowledge to make good decisions, work independently, and take responsibility in practice.

In terms of safeguarding, a strong knowledge base ensures that practitioners can identify signs of abuse or neglect, follow correct procedures, and act immediately to protect children from harm. Without this level of professional knowledge, there is a risk of failing to meet legal requirements and compromising children's safety. Therefore, continuous professional development and reflective practice are crucial in maintaining high standards and upholding the values of early years professionalism. (HM Government, 2018)

It is important for people who work with young children to understand the early years outcomes. This helps them know how each child is growing and learning, so they can plan the right activities. It also helps them notice if a child needs extra help (Department for Education, 2021). It's important that they know the expectations of the early years framework so they can talk to parents and other professionals about how the child is doing. This makes sure every child gets the best support (Tickell, 2011).

It is important to have a depth knowledge and understanding in the key frameworks such as CIW, Estyn, the Curriculum for Wales, and the National Minimum Standards. CIW checks that childcare settings are safe and well-run, so staff need to follow the rules (CIW, 2023). Estyn looks at how well children are learning, so understanding their inspection helps settings improve (Estyn, 2023). The Curriculum for Wales helps staff plan fun, meaningful learning that supports children's development (Welsh Government, 2022). The National Minimum Standards explain what all childcare settings must do to keep children safe and happy (Welsh Government, 2021). Knowing all these things helps staff do their jobs well and give children the best start in life.

Partnership and multi-agency working are key aspects of professional practise especially in early years because they help meet the different needs of young children. They work closely with others such as health visitors, speech and language therapists and social workers that all make sure they give the right support for the child. It is important when working together to share information which may spot any issues or concerns early and can take action quickly. Strong partnerships with families lead better outcomes and help give every child the best start in life. Walker (2012) explains that it's not possible for one person to meet all child's need and by sharing information and working as a team, professionals can spot problems early and get the right help more quickly. This will lead to better outcomes for children and keeping them safe.

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Observation is when you watch children in play and listen in their daily routines. It is a method to assess how a child is developing. It helps them review on the child's outcomes and adapt their learning differently. This cycle is on going and it informs the practitioner to track developmental progress, support early identification of needs or delays. The observation and planning cycle help practitioners reflect on what they observe and respond by adapting plans to ensure to meet each child's needs including those with SEN, EAL and different learning styles. Bruce (2020) emphasises that observation is far more than simply watching children it's about listening, reflecting and interpreting what children do in their everyday life.

The UNCRC stands for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is an agreement made in 1989 that lists the rights every child under 18 should have, no matter where they are from or who they are. In professional practice the principles of the UNCRC help guide practitioners by making sure the children's rights are respected in all aspects of care and education. It is important to follow the principles of the UNCRC as it helps practitioners put children at the centre of their work, ensuring they are kept safe, treated fairly and given a voice. According to Article 3 (1989) says that the best interests of the child must come first, so practitioners must always make decisions that protect and support the child's well-being. By following the UNCRC, practitioners create a safe, respectful and inclusive environment where all children can grow, learn, and feel valued.

In Summary, this has recognised and analysed key aspects of professional practice, including safeguarding, communication, values, and working with others, and shown how each contributes to meeting the individual and inclusive needs of children. Through understanding core frameworks, legal responsibilities like the UNCRC, and using strategies such as observation and planning, practitioners are better able to provide safe, respectful, and inclusive care. Practitioners ensure that all children are supported to reach their full potential. Therefore, maintaining high standard of professional practice is vital in promoting the rights, development and wellbeing of every child.

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