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AI cover sheet

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Part 1: Personal development plan.

What do I know already?

I currently hold the Introduction to Safeguarding and the 6-hour First Aid certificates. I am also aware of my poor time management and desire to 'do it all by myself.'

What do I want to develop?

I want to develop healthier habits in my personal life that help support my commitment to my professional development in the areas outlined below.

Objective	Actions (How will I achieve this objective/ what needs to be done?)	Resources (What support and resources are needed to achieve this objective?)	Target Date for achieving objective	Success criteria (How will I know I have achieved this goal, how will I review this?)
Gain Group B safeguarding qualification to ensure compliance with the Welsh Governments National Minimum Safeguarding Standards (2023).	I will attend a two-day fully funded training course with the Rhondda Cynon Taff Childcare Team. https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ChildrensServices/HelpandSupportforFamilies/Informationforfamilies/Childcare/Childcare.aspx	Resource hand-outs during the course. I will also do online research to help gain an understanding of the changes being made prior to attending the course.	7 December 2024	The knowledge gained will help me better support and safeguard our children within the setting. I will also receive a certificate to show completion of training.
Complete 12-hour paediatric first aid training.	Again, this is a two day fully funded training course provided by the Rhondda Cynon Taff Childcare team. https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/	As above, I will utilise all resources handed out during the course and use my knowledge gained from the 6-hour course as a foundation block to build on.	14 December 2024	Certificate to show completion of training and proper knowledge to put into practice.

	ChildrensServices/ HelpandSupportforFamilies/ Informationforfamilies/ Childcare/Childcare.aspx			
Improve time management and willingness to allow others to help when needed.	I will find ways to help support my time management in a way that helps myself and my family. I will prioritise the most important tasks first that can only be carried out by myself and try and delegate the more mundane tasks to other household members.	I will use a daily and weekly to-do list to help me keep track of any deadlines and appointments. I will also use those around me for support.	Ongoing.	Along with a Better understanding of time, tasks, and deadlines, I am also confident that less pressure on myself will create a more harmonious household.
Gain Early Years Practitioner Status to be able to take on a more senior role in current workplace.	I will attend all lectures, submit all assignments on time, and ensure I gain the relevant placement hours.	I will utilise the support I have from peers, employers, and module staff.	July 2026	Completing the BA Early Years Education and Care: Early Years Practitioner Status degree with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and being promoted to setting manager at work. Early Years Education and Care: Early Years Practitioner Status (2 Years) University of Wales Trinity Saint David (uwtsd.ac.uk)

Spend more time walking outdoors, achieving a minimum of 15,000 steps daily. This is to help support mental health, anxiety, and feelings of fatigue, as suggested by the Nation Health Service (2022).	By ensuring I am actively trying to achieve objective number 3, I should be able to find the time to get outside and complete a daily walk. I will prioritise this goal above all other aims, as I believe this to be most important in helping to support me in achieving my long-term goals.	By following objective number 3, I am hopeful I can manage myself effectively to ensure I have time available to get outdoors. I will also encourage my children to walk with me, leading to more desire to want to get outside.	Ongoing.	Feeling healthier and more energetic. I am also hopeful it will help manage feelings of anxiety.
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Part 2: Briefing paper

Reflective practice within the Early Years settings.

What is reflection and reflective practise?	Why is reflective practise important to EY practise?
Reflection is something we do daily, whether it be something as simple as reflecting on how our sleep went or a recent interaction we have had. The University of Cambridge (no date) suggest that this is exactly what reflection is; and that it does not need to be a formal, documented reflection for it to offer value to our reflective self. There is a slight difference in reflection and reflective practice. Schon (2007, cited in Hallet, 2013, p.29) describes the notion of reflective practice as how professionals think about their work. This is done through two distinct reflection processes: reflection <i>in</i> practice and reflection <i>on</i> practice. Reflection in practice involves thinking about what you are doing while you are doing it instead of reflecting on your work after the fact; this is considered reflection on practice. For example, a practitioner adapting an activity mid-way through would be an in-action reflection instead of thinking of the activity afterwards and changing it for the next time it is used; this would be the reflection on action. Reflecting in each of these processes gives the practitioner the skills and knowledge needed to further develop, alter and change the provision for the children (Hallet, 2013). However, In contrast to Schon, Zwozdiak-Myers (2023) suggests that instead of reflecting on your practice, you reflect on yourself as a person and that if you engage in critical self-reflection, this can have a positive impact on your own professional	Reflective practice can have many meanings within different sectors, but within early years, it is said to provide children and their families with higher-quality experiences (Hallet, 2013). According to The Welsh Governments Early Childhood play, learning and care: reflective practice toolkit, the importance of reflective practice is essential in supporting our Children's care and development. They go on to say that it helps support our knowledge and understanding, finds any gaps within our provision and allows us to share our professional expertise with others. Thompson (2021) believes critical reflection may help us question previously held beliefs and aid us in unpicking the how and why of how we do things the way that we do them. It is a valuable developmental tool that could help us manage and change our responses to situations that happen within our settings. However, Thompson and Thompson (2023) argue that reflective practice involves more than just pausing for thought. Instead, they believe that connections ought to be made between the thinking and the doing, to understand what we are doing and the outcome we would like from doing it differently. This deeper level of reflection can not only help enhance our understanding but could also lead to more meaningful changes within our provision. As well as the professional development that reflection offers, it can also help

growth and development, thus helping you have a more considered response to happenings within your practice. This could be particularly useful for the sometimes-high-stress scenarios that practitioners can find themselves amidst. This could be particularly useful for the sometimes-high stress scenarios that practitioners can find themselves amidst.	build relationships with parents/carers, helping bridge the gap between home and school. In turn, this offers the opportunity to build a much more supportive learning environment (McKay and Macomber, 2023).
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The theory of reflective practise:

The theory of reflective practice was first introduced in 1933 by John Dewey, who said “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience”, Dewey (1933, quoted in Reflective Practice in Early Years Education, 2022, p.33). He thought that our experiences help mould us and when we reflect on those experiences, we start the process of development. Dewey (1933) also believed the prospect of reflection became available when we found ourselves feeling confused or worried about events that had happened. The scenarios gave us opportunity to persistently contemplate and apply reasoned thinking to alter the outcome and overcome any issues identified from said reflection. His understanding of the purpose of reflection was to support and develop the knowledge and ability needed for teaching.

Later, more theorists would use Dewey's original theory as the first building block for their own research. Like, Schon who as previously mentioned, believed in the reflection on and in practice and the likes of Gibbs (1988), who offers a six-step cycle of framework that can be used to reflect upon repeated experiences (University of Edinburgh, 2020). This method could be particularly useful within an Early year setting, as often a routine is followed.

Another well-known theorist on reflection is David Kolb who said, “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). He suggested that in order to gain inspiration for new developments, we first need to have experience in which we can reflect upon (McLeod, 2024).

Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988)

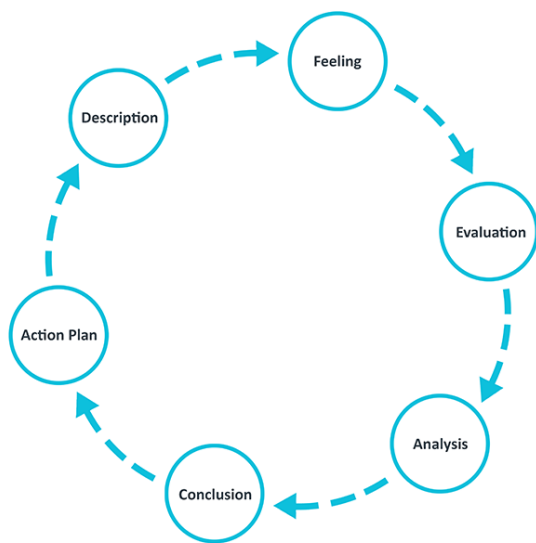


Figure 1: Gibbs Reflective Cycle. Taken from The University of Edinburgh (2020).

The ERA Cycle (2013)

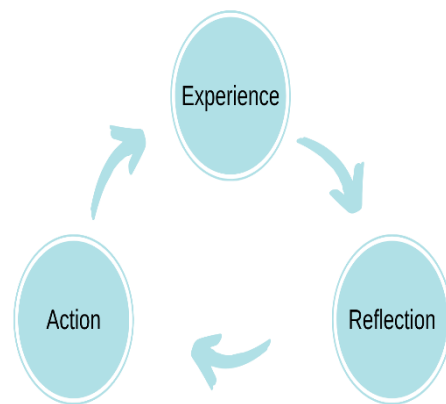


Figure 2: The ERA Cycle. Taken from The University of Cambridge (2019).

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

The Gibbs Reflective Cycle, first introduced in 1988, consists of a 6-stage framework and widely encourages the user to make a comprehensive exploration of a particular experience. The primary purpose of Gibbs' cycle is to reflect on an event, gather insights, learn from the mistakes and use what is learned to improve future actions (The University of Edinburgh, 2020). It is a very in-depth process that requires deep thought.

In comparison, The ERA Cycle introduced more recently in 2013, is a considerably simpler tool for reflection because it only consists of three stages. It simply asks us to reflect on a particular event and act, prompting us think about what we will do differently because of that reflection (The University of Cambridge, n.d). Although more streamlined than Gibbs, it emphasises a more ongoing cycle of learning and improvement.

There are clear distinctions between the two reflective models. Gibbs is a more detailed process, breaking down an event into smaller, specific stages - giving a

much more thorough analysis, as opposed to the ERA cycle which is more concise and the quicker of the two. Whilst Gibbs helps promote a more emotional insight, it is also more time consuming and complex.

Although dissimilar in many aspects, the main aim of both cycles is to enable higher-quality experiences through the act of reflection. They both force us to think through a process, thus encouraging and improving critical thinking, in the hopes of improving our future selves.

Both models could be tailored for Early Years Practitioners. They both present for and against arguments and it would be beneficial for the individual practitioner to decide as to which model best supports their learning and/or teaching. Do they need in-depth, thoroughness of Gibbs' model, or would the simplistic quickness of the ERA cycle be more beneficial?

Conclusion

Lastly, it is clear to see the importance of reflection on ourselves and within our practices. Thanks to Dewey paving the way for the likes of Schon and Gibbs, we have been provided with an abundance of resources to help facilitate us in being better. We reflect continuously in our day-to-day lives, without a second thought but, with an explicit application of these models to a specific event, we can make better assumptions and make appropriate changes.

Part 3: Written essay.

Professional practice for childhood inclusion within the Early Years sector.

This essay aims to recognise the importance of various aspects of professional practice and explore why they are significant when meeting the individual and inclusive needs of a child.

The concept of professionalism within the early years sector has always had blurred parameters, and different people have varied opinions of what it means to be a professional in the early years workplace. Yeo, (2012) suggests professionalism is a 'state of mind', and that it is an attitude that one adorns for their role. However, according to Wilkinson, (2012) professionalism consists of a series of fundamental elements: integrity, honesty and respect, to name just a few.

Unlike those who practice medicine or law, the early childhood profession has not always been considered as a professional sector. Dyer, (2018) explored the changes being made to the professionalisation of the early year's workforce. Changes imposed such as a differing policy that ensures all early year's practitioners could have access to degree-level qualifications, thus, becoming what is considered 'more professional'. But according to Chalke (2013, cited in Dyer, 2018, p. 350) it is emotional engagement that is the key aspect of practice for the early year's practitioners. Although, this is argued against by Taggart, (2014, Dyer, 2018, p. 353) who says rather than practitioners being viewed as just a 'step-in' parent, they should be conveying care as part of their core ethical attitudes.

However, professionalism within the early years is worthless unless supported by practitioners who hold strong values. Although, this could be particularly difficult given the fact that everyone has different values that they hold at various levels of importance and the inconsistencies in these values may cause some challenges within the early years practice. The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, (2024) suggests practitioners should be respectful, have integrity and

honesty and, provide positive relationships in an enabling environment that's supports equality and inclusivity.

Bronfenbrenner, (1977) theorised that children have five stages that impact their development and that teachers and the classroom are part of the first stage known as the microsystem. This could be especially important when considering the values of the practitioners, as it is the practitioners, and their values could contribute to shaping a child. For example, if a practitioner models respect and honesty, this will have a positive impact on help building an honest and respectful child. However, issues arise when the individuals within the microsystem have different values; one practitioner could be an advocate for inclusivity, wanting all children regardless of ability, ethnicity or background to have equal opportunities as others. However, if a fellow practitioner has a different standpoint on this, it could cause problems within the setting regarding the continuity of care.

When we think about the continuity of care a child receives and reflect on the number of people a child interacts with daily to receive this care, the list is vast. This could be why Peyton, (2017) suggests that children flourish when everyone who attends to their needs does so with a consistent approach, whether that be providing a healthy diet, respecting their boundaries, demonstrating healthy values or teaching them their colours. Nonetheless, it can be somewhat challenging to support consistent methods between home and the child's learning setting, but with effective communication with those involved with the child, it can be achievable. The Department for Education, (2024) supports this by explaining that involving parents and carers in their children's learning is the most crucial element in facilitating children, regardless of their upbringing, to do better. Not only this, but regular collaboration with parents and carers is also a focal point within the early year's foundation stage. This could explain why, recently, many settings are utilising digital sharing platforms to aid communications with the child's caregiver; this can be an effective way to ensure messages are received and understood, helping support the continuity of care. However, this approach does have its limitations and is not entirely inclusive. For example, a caregiver who is blind, cannot read or does not have access to the Internet, would find it almost impossible to obtain that information. Instead, in-person talks between the child's key person and caregiver could help support those who meet the communication barriers that could come from

the digital platforms. Other barriers to communication can arise within a school. According to Ozmen *et al.*, (2016) these include the children's families and environmental factors but can also be a byproduct of the schools' lack of resources and the practitioners' own levels of professional development.

When exploring the professional development of practitioners, there are certain aspects of their development that are of utmost importance. One of these is their knowledge of safeguarding. Wales safeguarding procedures, (2021) state that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and being aware of the signs of neglect and abuse are vital in ensuring child protection. Practitioners need to be aware to what constitutes as signs of abuse or neglect. Some possible signs of abuse include, but not limited to changes in behaviours and eating habits, self-harming, bruising in places you would not expect someone to bruise, or even running away from home The NSPCC, (2020). Practitioners must be fully aware of the safeguarding policies and procedures, if they are not aware of this, it would be impossible for them to appropriately safeguard a child.

Safeguarding is just one area, because without right understanding and knowledge of all corners of the role, it is possible children would not reach their full potential. For example, according to NAEYC, (2020), having in-depth knowledge of child development will help support a practitioner in delivering age-appropriate activities to further support their learning. It will also give them the knowledge needed to recognise any developmental milestones that may not be being met. Another area of understanding that is dominant in the Early Years workforce is the ability to 'think on your feet', this is like Schons, (2007) 'reflection in practice' theory. Early years settings can be stressful and sometimes hit crisis, this could be due issues arising with staff or children, but it is how the practitioner deals with these challenges and manages the risk, that is important. Birth to 5 matters, (2020) suggests that practitioners be able to recognise emotions of the child, make no snap judgments and respond calmly. Again, it could be argued that this would not be possible without any background knowledge and or training.

Nonetheless, when working in a setting, practitioners are a small cog as part of a more extensive multi-agency community. Partnerships help form comprehensive care plans for the children. According to Gasper, (2010) 'joined-up-thinking' is

relevant in ensuring all perspectives of the agencies involved with a child come together to create a more cohesive, appropriate and relevant delivery of service, thus achieving more beneficial outcomes. Multiple agencies are involved with children, ranging from teachers, health visitors, child protection and services like speech and language and education psychologists, amongst others. If all these agencies were to deliver their services without consulting one another, it could result in providing services that have no benefit for the child due to conflicting advice. Gasper, (2010) goes on to suggest that working in partnership is fundamental in addressing a child's needs in a unified manner. It also helps the distribution of funding. When many agencies come together to discuss, plan and execute their expertise and professional viewpoint, it helps reduce the number of agencies visiting different sites, potentially offering advice of a similar nature. But, done together all this could be avoided.

However, the consequences can be dire when multi-agency working is done ineffectively. Gasper, (2010) points out the tragic cases of the loss of life of vulnerable children because of agencies within the Early Years Education and Child Care sector working in isolation. Partnership working is only beneficial if everyone involved with the child, including the child's family, are working as equals with a shared vision and clear lines of communication.

Another vital aspect of the Early Years sector is the observation and planning cycle implemented within the setting. The Welsh Assembly Government (2008), outline the seven core aims for young children developed from the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of Children, (1989). Among these aims are the right for children to have a 'flying start' in life and the right to access various educational and learning opportunities. The observation and planning cycle allows these aims to be implemented, with the observations giving opportunity not only to praise the child's strengths, but to also highlight the child's development and areas of learning that may require attention. Practitioners can spot and track problem areas, as well as assess and determine the efficiency of the curriculum. It is through these observations that practitioners can then ensure they are building a nurturing environment, that promotes the best development and learning outcomes possible (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008).

The UNCRC (1989), highlights principles that are fundamental of professional practice, ensuring each practice is encouraging a healthy environment that respects and promotes the rights of children. These rights help to contribute to children's general wellbeing and development, ensuring they grow into informed, empowered Individual's. Article 3 'best interests of the child' of the UNCRC serves as illustration of this; by ensuring decisions made by caregivers prioritises the child's well-being and development.

To conclude, if all the aspects of the system work together, ensuring they are following and applying policy, respecting children as individuals and listening to the views of peers, children have the best opportunity to grow into confident, healthy and authentic individuals.

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