

The Professional Practitioner

Portfolio

- Part 1. Reflective Personal Development Plan (PDP)**
- Part 2. Briefing Paper: The Importance of Reflection Practice**
- Part 3. Written Essay**

I have not used generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in this work.

Part 1. Reflective Personal Development Plan (PDP)

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN		2417935 ECEY4009/C 500 words
		Start date: 30/09/2024
		End date: 30/09/2027
Objectives: What do I want to learn and become?	I want to develop my communication skills, deepen my understanding of childhood development, and enhance my abilities to support children in the early years effectively. Based on these goals, I aim to become a reflective practitioner, constantly seeking ways to improve my teaching through professional development. Additionally, I aspire to become a qualified teacher in an early years setting.	
Actions: What do I have to do to get there?	To achieve this, I will implement the following strategies: I will seek feedback from colleagues every two months to identify areas for improvement in my communication. I will observe children's developmental milestones and reflect on how these observations align with developmental theories. I will focus on nurturing emotional intelligence by helping children recognize and express their feelings. I will implement strategies that foster a supportive and emotionally rich environment for the children in my care. I will conduct weekly self-evaluations, reviewing my teaching methods and setting new objectives to improve areas that did not work well. I aim to complete my degree in Early Years Education and Care within three years while gaining practical teaching experience to apply my skills effectively in an early years setting.	
Criteria: How will I know I've achieved it?	I will know I have achieved this goal if I receive positive feedback regarding my communication skills. I will gather feedback from children and families related to their development and the support I provide. I will consistently maintain my weekly reflections to identify areas for improvement. Lastly, I will complete my degree with satisfactory grades and receive positive evaluations.	
Resources: What resources will I access?	I will access educational materials, such as those available at the university library, related to childhood development and communication strategies. I will also utilize assessment tasks provided during the course to deepen my understanding and apply my knowledge.	
Obstacles: What might get in the way to achieved this?	Family responsibilities and personal commitments may limit the time and energy available for my studies and professional development. Additionally, the emotional and mental fatigue from work could significantly hinder my ability to engage effectively in deep reflection and pursue meaningful professional growth.	
Support: What support will I have?	I will have access to comprehensive academic support services provided by the university, including tutoring and library resources, which will greatly assist me with my studies and research. Additionally, my family and friends can offer constant encouragement and provide emotional support during challenging times.	
Review: How did I do it?	I achieved my goals through a combination of strategic planning and consistent effort. I prioritized my time by dedicating specific hours each week to studying and researching. By regularly assessing my progress and adapting my strategies, I was able to stay focused and motivated throughout the process.	
Personal Reflection:	Reflecting on my Personal Development Plan has helped me recognize the progress I have made by accessing educational resources, starting my degree in Early Years Education, and seeking feedback from colleagues to improve my communication skills. Balancing family responsibilities and work with my studies has been challenging, but the support from my family, tutor, and university resources, along with my focus on becoming a qualified teacher, has kept me motivated. Moving forward, I will continue seeking feedback, prioritize weekly reflections, and stay focused on my goal.	

Part 2. Briefing Paper: The Importance of Reflection Practice

IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN EARLY YEARS

2417935
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1014 words count

Reflection requires you to think deeply about your experiences, become more aware of your beliefs, values, and behaviors. It helps you identify what worked well and what did not, fostering a mindset of continuous growth and development. Reflection is a way to analyze past events, evaluate your actions, and determine how to deal with comparable experiences next time, putting these insights into practice to ensure ongoing improvement in both personal and professional capacities. Reflection can be challenging, especially if it is not done regularly. Keeping a reflective journal is recommended, as it will enhance your reflection skills, maintain a record of your thoughts, and help generate new ideas for addressing challenges.

Similarly, reflective practice is a crucial process encouraged in professional environments to enhance learning, foster personal growth, and support informed decision-making, thereby contributing to the overall improvement of the learning environment. It involves critically examining various situations, including successes, challenges, and areas for improvement. The purpose of reflective thinking is to gain deeper insights into one's actions, decisions, and their impacts, enabling practitioners to apply these insights in practice. Reflective practice should be continuous, promoting ongoing development in personal and professional capacities.

When we think about reflective practice in the early years, it is important to start by seeing the world from children's perspectives. Being a reflective practitioner is a characteristic of a person behavior rather than an intellectual activity (Moom, 2006). It is crucial to develop reflective practice in early years settings because it enhances the quality of care, emotional and social support for children, improves communication between practitioners, families, and children, increases accountability for actions, and helps solve problems by applying developmental theories.

Critical reflection in early years is an important aspect of understanding how theory supports practice.

The benefits of being a reflective practitioner include improved critical understanding and the development of essential skills to support the best outcomes in children's development, learning, and progress. Staying up to date with the latest developments in early years education is vital, and reflective practice supports this by helping practitioners assess and adjust their approaches in line with new research, policies, and best practices. Additionally, it is one of the best ways to support children and their families.

Reflective practice is supported by several theories that provide a framework for understanding and improving the reflection process.

Theory is consistently present in professional practice and can be observed in early years settings, particularly through children's play or by applying child development theories. Several theories help in understanding reflection and its link to reflective practice. Many writers have focused on how reflection can be applied and how best to use it in present circumstances to improve learning or achieve other desired outcomes. Without testing theory, there has been a tendency towards the solidification of ideas, meaning that certain reflective concepts in literature have become widely accepted. Examples include those of Donald Schön and John Dewey.

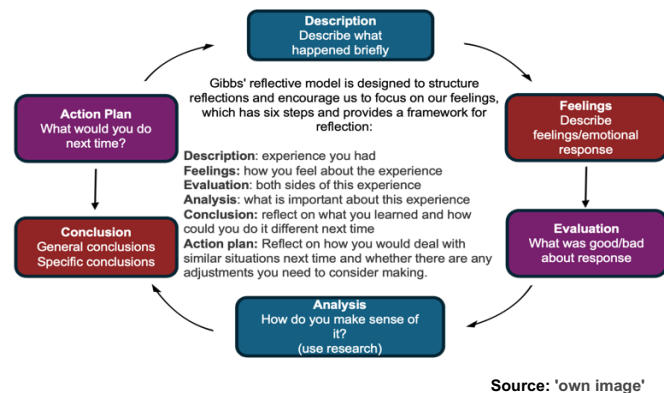
Schön's reflective model consists of two processes:

- Reflection-in-action, which involves reflecting during professional activities by considering what is happening in the moment, and
- Reflection-on-action, which involves looking back on professional experiences and connecting them to relevant theories.

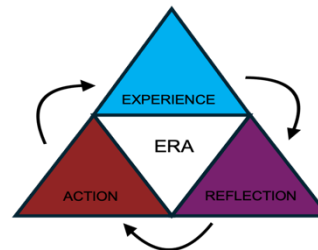
John Dewey, in his work on reflective practice, distinguishes between two types of actions:

- Routine actions, which are automatic and not professionally active, and
- Reflective actions, which involve purposefully changing routine actions into thoughtful, intentional moments of learning and improvement.

Reflective methods support learning by identifying significant experiences. Writing reflections is also recommended when facing challenging situations, as it helps identify connections between personal experiences and professional values. Among the various reflective methods, two notable models are Gibbs Reflective Cycle and ERA Reflective Cycle.



The most recent reflective model is the ERA reflective cycle, created by Jasper (2013). This simple model of reflection helps us improve our understanding from experience and contains only three steps:



Experience: the experience you had

Reflection: describes a basic record of an experience using key questions such as Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How

Action: thinking about how you will respond to the same or different situations in the future.

Source: 'own image'

Some facts to consider regarding these two models are that the structure of Gibbs' reflective model encourages a reflection process that includes six steps based on feelings and analytical components, while the ERA model has only three steps, making it easy to follow. Gibbs' model focuses on emotional awareness and critical analysis, while the ERA model emphasizes experience and taking action. Two key advantages of Gibbs' model are that it encourages emotional awareness and provides deep details in the reflection process. However, its complexity can overwhelm beginners with too many steps. In contrast, the ERA reflective model is a simple cycle that is easy to remember and allows for quick reflections for learning. However, it may lack emotional analysis and provide less detailed reflections on experiences.

In conclusion, reflection and reflective practice are essential values that play a crucial role in early years settings. By analyzing prior experiences, practitioners can improve their understanding of problem-solving processes, allowing them to make well-informed decisions in the future. Both models are designed to help practitioners reflect on past events, analyze them, and implement that learning to develop their teaching and interactions with children. The choice of model will depend on the practitioner's personal preference, the distinct framework of the early years environment, and the depth of reflection required. Additionally, reflective practice will increase confidence and motivation, enhancing professional growth and improving outcomes for the children in their care.

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Part 3. Written Essay

The Impact of Various Aspects of Professional Practice in Early Years Education

It is often said that, recognizing the function of professionals in early years education involves specifying their responsibilities. In early childhood settings, a professional is an individual who is not only properly qualified and responsible but also adheres to a set of ethical standards. Professionals should demonstrate ethical conduct, focus on the well-being and development of children, and ensure transparency and integrity in all aspects of their work.

Moreover, professional practice in the early years setting is guided by educational theories, knowledge, behaviours, and responsibilities demonstrated by practitioners. Reflection is integral in this context, as practitioners are expected to reflect on past experiences and embody core values and key priorities. Consequently, practitioners must prioritize their growth through continuous professional development, as the best practices involve ongoing reflection and skill enhancement.

Transitioning from theory to practice, working in an early years setting encompasses more than simply guiding children.

Practitioners must continually develop their skills, deepen their understanding, and enhance their competencies. Therefore, it is essential that they focus on improving their Continuing Professional Development (CPD), which is a vital aspect of professional growth. The importance of CPD lies in enhancing educators' understanding of pedagogy related to children. It provides high-quality learning experiences and encourages practitioners to reflect on their previous experiences to build confidence. This development can be achieved through training courses, online learning, workshops, and feedback, which help practitioners identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Understanding governing frameworks is crucial for quality assurance, along with ethics and core values. The Early Years Learning Framework Planning Cycle supports and enhances children's learning through four key stages: Observation, which helps practitioners identify a child's developmental stage through daily observations; Assessment, where strengths and capacities are evaluated in relation to achievement targets; Planning, which utilizes observations and assessments to promote the child's holistic development; Implementation, where children are encouraged to explore planned activities and learn through hands-on experiences; and Reflection, the final stage, where practitioners review the child's responses and progress, informing necessary adjustments for the next cycle.

To ensure the effectiveness of the Early Years Learning Framework Planning Cycle and meet the children's needs, practitioners should consistently review detailed records that document evidence of children's progress and growth. This practice enables them to set realistic goals and adapt strategies to effectively support holistic development.

Ethics is an essential aspect that must be clearly defined within early childhood environments, as it guides practitioners in making decisions focused on the well-being of children, families, and colleagues. Being an ethical professional involves showing empathy and respecting emotions, which aligns closely with core values that inform practitioners' practices. Values such as respect, honesty, integrity, accountability, and personal development guide decision-making and interactions. Additionally, childhood experiences and professional training inform how these values are applied in practice. It is essential to respect and include each child, considering their unique needs. Building

trust through good communication fosters strong relationships and being accountable for actions is vital in maintaining these connections.

Efficient communication and relationships between parents, caregivers, and practitioners are important in early childhood education. Communication in professional practice plays a vital role in developing strategies that can improve children's transition to school, as it builds trust and confidence, and is linked to relevant theories. It is essential that practitioners receive information from parents or caregivers about a child's development, abilities, physical or emotional needs, and targets, as this will support them in organizing activities to address the child's needs, given that parents have knowledge about their child's development. On the other hand, practitioners should provide information about their planned lessons, interests, and activities, ensuring that they support all children's needs. Positive relationships and communication are crucial for understanding and supporting a child's growth and development, as well as for assisting families during their transition to school.

This focus on fostering communication is consistent with the primary objectives set forth in the Curriculum for Wales. The Curriculum for Wales (CFW) is based on four purposes and supports practitioners in delivering quality education. The first purpose is to develop ambitious, capable learners, enabling children to become independent and cultivate resilience along with a love of learning. The second purpose focuses on cultivating enterprising, creative contributors who learn through taking risks. The third purpose is to develop ethical, informed citizens, emphasizing an understanding of diversity, sustainability, and social justice. The fourth purpose aims to promote healthy, confident individuals, fostering self-confidence and supporting physical and mental well-being. This curriculum addresses both what and why we teach, encouraging collaboration, planning, and learning across different areas.

A fundamental aspect of this approach is recognizing the value of play in children's learning. Play is essential for stimulating creativity, problem-solving abilities, communication, and social interaction, all of which are foundational for development in the first years. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Early Years Outcomes Framework is linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, which helps identify areas where additional support is needed and ensures that all children are well-prepared for their future development.

Additionally, it is important to consider that, in Wales, the National Minimum Standards define the necessary qualifications for childcare and play settings. Likewise, the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) serves an essential role in the early years by improving the safety as well as the well-being of individuals. Based on their values and guiding principles, the objective in early years settings is to enhance and promote innovative approaches to working. Furthermore, Estyn inspects these settings to ensure they comply with educational standards, assessing the evidence and its relevance to offer a transparent, reliable, and precise evaluation of the provider's strengths and areas for enhancement.

Enforcing safeguarding principles creates a safe learning environment. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) establishes safeguarding principles based on the idea that children need to be safe and feel safe to learn and develop well. Children must feel cared for, supported, and valued. Risk-taking, when managed appropriately, helps build resilience. Every child has their own unique way of learning, and to develop independence, they need to form healthy relationships. It is also important to mention that all schools must have a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) accountable for the protection and welfare of children.

Having in-depth knowledge and understanding in professional practice enables practitioners to make informed decisions, address safeguarding concerns, and ensure ethical and collaborative teamwork. This expertise fosters confidence and promotes continuous growth. Professionalism in early years education is particularly important as it ensures children receive appropriate care, protection, and support while upholding their rights and assisting them in reaching key developmental milestones. Ultimately, these elements work together to ensure that children and vulnerable individuals thrive in a safe and supportive environment.

Partnerships contribute significantly to supporting systems for children and families. In Wales, partnership and multi-agency working in early years settings involve practitioners providing support for the education, physical and mental well-being of children, as well as social care for children, families, and the community. Building a strong partnership with families and caregivers is essential in the early years to ensure that families are engaged in their child's development and learning journey such as inviting them to support their child's learning and experiences. Additionally, communities support and empower residents while encouraging active participation. Likewise, multi-agency collaboration helps children and families address and review their additional needs.

Building on safeguarding principles, it is crucial to recognize the role of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in early years settings, which was established in 1989. The UNCRC is an international framework composed of 54 articles that safeguard children from harm and their rights across multiple domains.

Understanding and applying the UNCRC principles is vital, as it promotes a rights-based approach. Practitioners should be familiar with critical articles, such as Article 2 (equal treatment), Article 3 (prioritizing the child), Article 6 (right to existence and growth), and Article 12 (the right to express oneself). These rights should be incorporated into daily activities, using child-friendly tools like videos, images, and age-appropriate language, fostering a respectful, inclusive environment where children feel empowered to express their thoughts and ask questions.

To conclude, the interplay of practice, ethics, and collaboration is vital in early childhood education. Effective workplace practice involves the responsibilities of practitioners, the importance of ongoing professional development, and the significance of ethical standards and communication. The Curriculum for Wales reinforces a holistic, child-centred approach, recognizing the advantage of play in fostering children's imagination, decision-making abilities, and social skills. In addition, comprehending the Early Years Outcomes Framework and National Minimum Standards not only guarantees quality assurance but also effectively identifies areas needing additional support and improvement. Practitioners must prioritize safeguarding principles, as these are not just guidelines but essential requirements for ensuring the safety and protection of children in their care. Adhering to these principles, along with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is vital for creating a safe learning environment. In the end, cultivating solid partnerships with families and communities not only enhances the educational experience but also ensures that children's rights are protected, providing them with the critical support necessary for their growth and learning journey.

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