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I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot <https://copilot.microsoft.com> to find research for my assignment. I used the prompts:

1. Find me credited pdf articles with DOI numbers that include reflective models and what is reflective practice.
2. Information regarding safeguarding legislation and guidance that links to practice and early years practitioners in Wales. Include websites with articles.
3. Credited PDF articles with DOI numbers that compare Gibbs to Schon.

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly <https://www.grammarly.com/> on 24 October 2026. For grammatical and syntactical mistakes only.

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 one

No	Improvement and Development Goals	Success Criteria (How I will know when I have made this change)	The actions I will take to achieve the goal	Timelines	What will this help me to achieve?	Achievements (3 monthly review)
1	Complete degree in Early Years Education and Care.	When I can confidently apply my practice and theory in the setting, become ready for growth employment and I have completed all modules and NOS required.	Keeping to my study timetable for accountability, by attending lectures, reflecting on feedback, uploading work on time and to continue with academic support and placement requirements.	Two years.	I will gain a recognized qualification that supports my career progression. It will help me with my knowledge of child development and early learning and improve academic skills.	At 3 months I will be attending all lectures, gaining knowledge of assignments and improving academic skills with research and critical thinking. Six months I will have completed level 4, improved academic skills, continued with placement and continued with feedback reflection. At 9 months I will have achieved a portion of my placement, gaining more knowledge, improving placement logs, reflections and receiving positive feedback from assignments. 12 months I will finish my first year and gained confidence in academic skills and the ability to link theory to practice. 15months I start year 2 with confidence, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the curriculum, planning, assessments and child development, continuing to reflect in practice and lecture feedback. At 18 months, placement would be completed or significant hours logged, I would be demonstrated a stronger professional practice

No	Improvement and Development Goals	Success Criteria (How I will know when I have made this change)	The actions I will take to achieve the goal	Timelines	What will this help me to achieve?	Achievements (3 monthly review)
						and build confidence with communicating with colleagues, superiors, children and their families. 21 months I will have completed my year 2 of university, my last assignment submitted, and I will be demonstrating advanced academic skills, critical thinking, linking theory to practice, reflective writing and a readiness for professional development.
2	Develop my safeguarding knowledge.	I will confidently explain safeguarding principles and procedures, engage in safeguarding updates and reflective practice within my role. I will feel confident to make concerns and clearly justify my decisions to the safeguarding officer. Feedback from my team leader confirming I respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns and to have completed all appropriate training.	I will complete accredited safeguarding training and set aside study time. I will make myself aware of safeguarding procedures and policies within my setting. Reflect on safeguarding scenarios practicing recognizing, responding, recording and reporting concerns. Attend safeguarding updates or	Six months.	Build confidence and competence in reporting and recording safeguarding concerns. Strengthen my professional role and show readiness for increased responsibility. Improve safety outcomes within the setting.	The first 3 months I would have enrolled myself on safeguarding training, made myself aware of setting policies and safeguarding procedures in more detail and produced one safeguarding reflection and discussed goal with team leader. At 6 months I will have completed safeguarding training, practiced safeguarding decision making, strengthened documentation and have achieved full confidence in all safeguarding procedures.

No	Improvement and Development Goals	Success Criteria (How I will know when I have made this change)	The actions I will take to achieve the goal	Timelines	What will this help me to achieve?	Achievements (3 monthly review)
			briefing and engage in reflective practice.			

Understanding Reflective Practice in Early Years

Reflection is considered crucial for practitioners in an early year setting and for those in a teaching field (Clara, 2015). When reflecting the individual should consider what happened, what worked well, what could have been improved and what could be done differently next time. Being reflective allows practitioners to develop understanding of their practice and consider how their action have influenced the children's learning.

Reflective practice helps practitioners link theoretical knowledge with experiences gained in practice (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). It involves practitioners considering their experience and using what they have learned to better future decisions and actions. Within early years this involves reflection on interactions with children, activities, relationships with families and the learning environment. The Welsh Governments Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Reflective Practice Toolkit highlights reflection as an important part of the provision, supporting the practitioner to identify areas for improvement and make changes to improve the experiences and development of children (Welsh Government, 2023).

Reflective models help practitioners record and understand their observations and develop their professional judgement to enhance practice and improve education for children (Early Years TV, n.d.). Two reflective models that can be beneficial in early years are the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) and Schön's concepts of Reflection-in-Action and Reflection-on-Action (1983). Both models support reflective thinking and contain different structures.

Gibbs's Reflection Cycle can be considered a complex model of reflection, as it requires more stages for the practitioners to apply to the observation or experience. (Cambridge University Libraries, n.d.). Gibbs' cycle contains six stages – description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. The stages provide confidence to practitioner to engage in their critical thinking. The model's strength comes from its focus on emotional responses, which is important in early years settings where attachment, interactions and emotional readiness are important to practice, so the children feel safe around adults. The model also promotes evaluation and professional development that leads practitioner to link theory to practice and alternative perspectives and growth needed in other areas (Gibbs, 1988).

(Schön, 1983) introduces two types of reflection within the model. Reflection-in-action occurs while the experience is happening and requires immediate assessment and action. It enables quick actions to take within the experience, supporting one's own pedagogy, problem solving and inclusivity. Reflection-on-action is the method of reflecting after the experience has ended. This method allows the practitioner to understand the experience and look at the outcomes of what had been learned and what areas have room for future action to improve practice.

However, both models do have subjective imperfections. Gibbs's cycle needs honesty and the practitioner to be self-critical, this may be a struggle to reflect on for practitioners. The cycle is retrospective; therefore, the model does not allow for the practitioner to reflect within the moment but within six stages. This method can become time consuming and may be difficult to sustain in a busy setting with lots of children. Schön's model could also consider being challenging to record and assess, as the reflection method happens within the experience itself. Unlike Gibbs's cycle Schön's cycle does not include aspects for exploring emotions, as it explores learning and adapting professional practice instead.

Although Gibbs and Schön have different models with different structures to reflection, they both contribute to reflective practice in Early Years. Gibbs' structure and emotionally informed cycle support the practitioner in producing written reflections, which is valuable when analysing development, safeguarding concerns or emotional experiences with children. While Schön emphasises the real-time thinking and judgement required during everyday practice, helping the practitioner adapt to the children's needs and behaviours in real time sometimes becoming one step ahead of behaviours. Together the two models highlight that effective early year's reflection requires both structured analysis after the event and adaptive decision making during the event, enabling practitioners to deepen their understanding, improve responsiveness and better the quality of care and education for the children.



Gibbs' Reflective Cycle consists of six stages that guide reflection on experiences (Gibbs, 1988).

Reflective practice is essential in early years because it is the mechanism thorough which practitioners develop the knowledge, skill and attributes that their role demands. (Lindon & Trodd, 2016) To strengthen their knowledge and understanding, practitioners reflect on what they know and what they need to develop. This can be done with professional develop plans and reflecting on themselves through appraisals. Reflective practice benefits children's development, for example – a practitioner that is a supporting a child with speech, language or communication needs may reflect on how well their interactions are extending the child's needs and identify that they need to develop their knowledge of communication strategies. Reflective practice is also central to inclusive provision. Article 3 of the UNCRC states that adults must act in the best interest of the child, and reflecting on practice ensures practitioners continually evaluates and improve their professional development, therefore every child receives high-quality care and learning opportunities (United Nations, 1989)

Reflection practice builds the attribute, like openness to feedback and a willingness to acknowledge when practice is not working. Outside agencies like speech and language therapists, review how effectively a child's individual support plan is meeting their needs, communicate with practitioner's feedback, reflect on what is working, and adapt their approach accordingly. This depends on honestly and self-awareness as well as knowledge. By evaluating what works well and identifying areas for further development, practitioners improve the quality of support they offer to children. Furthermore, Reflective practice supports professional development as it enables practitioners to reflect on their own skills and to share ideas with their team. Taken together, this promotes child-centred practice, professional growth and a high-quality provision across the setting (Welsh Government (2023).

Part three

This essay will explore how different attributes come together to form a professional practitioner in professional practice. A professional is an individual whose job requires a high level of education, skill and training (Cambridge Dictionary 2026). A professional has knowledge, skills and experience to carry out their job, being a professional practitioners should demonstrate qualities such as good communication, positive relationships, knowledge of children development ,safeguarding skills , be able to make safe informed decisions and know why partnerships with families and professionals is important. Professional practice is how a person applies their knowledge and theory in practice and understands the importance of professional values (Edwards & Daniels 2012). This essay also considers how observations, planning and being reflective helps practitioners meet individual needs, and how the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations,1989) informs practice and emphasis on children's best interest and their rights to be heard.

Constructive communication and positive working relationships in the early years are important to professional practice because they impact children's learning, well-being, safety and development. High-quality interactions with children allow the practitioner to apply reflective methods to better understand the children's needs, likes, dislikes, emotions and interests. (Rodd, 2013) states that relationships between adults and children that are working collaboratively are meeting the rights for that child. Young children often communicate nonverbally and use cues like behaviour, gestures, communication boards or play. An inclusive practitioner with effective communication skills can identify these cues through reflective methods such as Gibbs's reflective cycle, create an action plan, and adapt learning to best support the child's communication needs (Gibbs,1988).

Communication with parents and carers is equally important. Parents and carers hold information that can support the knowledge of child's routines, cultural background and developmental history. Strong relationships also promote children's sense of belonging within the setting. Building secure relationships provides a secure base for children to take age-appropriate risk, develop independence and build on their social skills

(Ainsworth,1989). These experiences shape children's self-esteem and influence how they view themselves as learners.

While communication with children's families and carers are important so are the relationships between outside agencies and professional teams. Communication is of the utmost importance were working with outside agencies, as it is vital for safeguarding, planning and reflective practice and emotional support. Sharing observations, concerns and creating strategies shows consistency, child's best interests are being met and high-quality provision for the child to feel safe and develop their learning to their full potential. On the other hand, poor communication can lead to error and negative outcomes. This includes children's needs not being met, delays in their development, emotional well-being not being support and important safeguarding concerns being missed or overlooked. (Rodd,2013) states that misunderstanding interactions or missed opportunities to support children's development can have negative effect on children and this shows how important and crucial effective communication is to create strong professional relationships.

Practitioners who make strong relationship can make appropriate safe and accurate decisions on children's development skills; practitioners need to have the essential in-depth professional knowledge and strong understanding. A strong understanding of child development helps practitioners identify behaviours and report when something becomes a concern (Nutbrown,2018). This knowledge supports safeguarding, practitioners notice the early signs of harm, responds correctly and follow settings policies and procedures. Without this understanding of how important this is, concerns can be missed or reported incorrectly, and this could potentially put the child at utmost risk of harm, neglect and abuse. (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2011) starts that the sooner early intervention for children happens, it reduces the periods of adverse experience and improves the impact on children.

In-depth knowledge of safeguarding requires untestable clear knowledge of the legal responsibilities required and who to report to, why and when. Practitioners have a responsibility to safeguard children and protect by knowing, how to report concerns, who to report them to, and how to act swiftly to always protect children (Safeguarding Wales, n.d.). In-depth knowledge strengths professional judgement, and ensures decisions

making, with evidence-based information, not assumptions. It supports reflective practice and professional development as enabling practitioners with training, they can evaluate their actions and improve quality and safety to their provisions (Schon,1983)

Partnerships and multiagency working are vital to when working with children and safeguarding, because children needs are often varied and need to be understood fully. By working together with outside agency and partnerships respectfully, important information can be shared, concerns are acknowledged early and support is coordinated appropriately. Practitioners must communicate clearly with other agencies and follow agreed reporting routines to keep children safe (Safeguarding Wales,2026). Peixoto Gomes (2021) found that effective multi-agency working strengthen teamwork and professional judgement and the outcomes for children by making an informed decision that is done by a wider range of expertise rather than someone's own observation and isolated judgement. Welsh guidance highlights that effective collaboration is essential when protecting children and ensuring timely, Appropriate interventions (Welsh Governemnt,2018). Ethical values such as respect, honestly, confidentiality and acting in the best interest of the child underpin this work, practitioner who appreciate their ethical vale share information responsibly and maintain a child-centred approach. Overall partnering ship working ensures children are safe; their rights are met and receives holistic and consistent support.

Like ethical values strong professional practice through observations and planning cycles are central to practitioners for them to better understand each child's developmental needs and to plan experiences that meet their individual needs. Ongoing observations, allows practitioners to identify children's interests, strengthens and any areas for support. This reflects the works of Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, where practitioners observe the child by looking at what the child can do independently and then be able to plan an appropriate scaffolding to extend that learning. (Vygotsky,1978). The Curriculum for Wales emphasises that early year's learning should be child-centred, developmentally appropriate and informed by continuous assessment, making observation a key part of high-quality practice (Welsh Government,2022). Observations help practitioners understand how children learn, what motivates them and what support they may need to progress their learning. When

these observations are shared with the team, they build a clear and consistent picture of each child development, allowing practitioners to plan experiences with a child centred approach and create meaningful next steps. This process is strengthened through reflective practice, such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, which encourages practitioners to reflect on observations, evaluate, identify areas for improvement and adapt for further learning (Gibbs',1988). (Bruner,1966) views that children learn best when adults build on their existing interest and thinking through sensitive scaffolding (It also reflects the Curriculum for Wales, which emphasis ongoing assessment, responsive planning and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Welsh Government,2022). Together the observation and planning cycle strengthens professional judgement and ensures practitioner provide holistic and appropriate experience for children to thrive and meet their individual needs.

The principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child inform professional practice by guaranteeing that all children's rights and voices are central to all aspects in early years settings (United Nations, 1989). Article 3 calls for practitioners to act in the best interests of the child, allowing ethical decision making and encouraging professionals to reflect on how their practice promotes, dignity, inclusivity and equality (United Nations,1989). Article 12 is dedicated to children's right to express their views, meaning practitioner must listen attentively, observe children's choices and create environments for them to feel safe , boost their confidence to confidently participate in experiences (United Nations ,1989).Article 29 highlights children's rights to an education that is enriches their personality , talent and abilities with overseeing their overall physical , emotional and education development and wellbeing (United Nations 1989). These articles are consistent with the Curriculum for Wales, which promotes learners having a voice and participating in shaping their own learning experiences. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have influenced and is embedded within the Welsh Government's Seven Core Aims. These aims outline that children should be healthy, have a flying start, be safe, engaged in learning, listened to and supported to be a part of their communities (Welsh Government, 2004). These aims reinforce rights-based practice and child centred approach, which ensure early years settings are consistent with their nation's expectations for children's wellbeing and development. By

embedding these principles ensures that all practitioners and their settings uphold values such as respect and inclusion.

In conclusion, professional practice in the early years is influenced by knowledge, skills, values and reflective approaches that enable practitioners to meet children's needs. This essay has demonstrated that effective communication, positive relationships, safeguarding knowledge and professional judgement are key components of professional practice. Strong partnerships with families, carers and multi-agency professionals ensure that children receive holistic support and that their well-being remains the most top priority in decision-making. Furthermore, observations, using reflective models within reflective practice allow practitioners to identify children's strengths, interests and developmental needs, enabling the practitioner to plan meaningful learning opportunities that promote inclusion and development. The principles of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child and the Curriculum for Wales underpin professional practice by maintaining that children's rights, voices and best interests remain at the heart of all decision-making in the early years. Overall, a professional practitioner is one who combines theoretical knowledge with reflective, ethical and child-centred practice to create safe, inclusive environments in which children can develop their learning and thrive.

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