

## Part 1

### Personal Development Plan

| No                                            | Improvement and Development Goals                                                                                                                                                                      | Success Criteria<br>(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<br>(3 monthly review) |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Be more confident when talking to staff.   | I will know I have improved when I feel comfortable speaking in meetings, sharing my ideas and asking questions. I want to feel that my opinions are useful and that I can communicate professionally. | I will try to speak more during meetings instead of staying quiet. I will ask questions when I am unsure and learn from how other staff communicate.                                | 3 months                                    | This will help me feel more confident and comfortable in my role as a Teaching Assistant.           | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |
| 2. Improve my knowledge of child development. | I will have a better understanding of how children develop and how this can affect their learning, behaviour and individual needs.                                                                     | I will complete my university reading, carry out my own research and learn from experienced staff in school. I will think about how what I learn links to the children I work with. | 6 months                                    | This will help me understand children better and give them more appropriate support.                | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |
| 3. Improve my observation skills.             | I will be able to complete clear observations and use them to understand a child's progress, interests and areas where they may need support.                                                          | I will watch how experienced practitioners complete observations and practise writing my own. I will ask for feedback so I can improve.                                             | 3 months                                    | This will help me understand children's progress and become better at supporting their development. | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |
| 4. Become more confident planner              | I will feel confident helping to plan activities that are suitable for the children's ages, abilities and interests.                                                                                   | I will take part in planning activities, ask colleagues for advice and reflect on how well activities worked. I will use children's interests when thinking of activities.          | 6 months                                    | This will help me become more independent and confident as a practitioner.                          | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |

| No                                              | Improvement and Development Goals                                                                                                              | Success Criteria<br>(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<br>(3 monthly review) |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ing activities.                                 |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                             |                                                                                                        |                                    |                                    |
| 5. Improve my organisation and time management. | I will keep on top of my university work, work responsibilities and deadlines without leaving things until the last minute.                    | I will use a weekly planner, make a list of things I need to complete and prioritise important work. I will check my deadlines regularly.                                             | 3 months                                    | This will help me manage work and university more easily and reduce stress.                            | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |
| 6. Improve my confidence and resilience.        | I will feel more comfortable trying new things, taking on responsibilities and accepting feedback without being worried about making mistakes. | I will take opportunities to try new tasks and think about what I have learned from each experience. I will use feedback from colleagues to improve rather than taking it negatively. | 6 months                                    | This will help me become more confident personally and professionally and deal with challenges better. | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |
| 7. Plan for my future career.                   | I will have a clearer idea of what I would like to achieve in my future career and what qualifications or experience I may need.               | I will research different career options in early years and education and look at possible further qualifications. I will also speak to experienced staff about their roles.          | 12 months                                   | This will help me make decisions about my future and give me goals to work towards.                    | Review after 3 months.             |                                    |

### Part 3

## Part3

## **ntroduction**

Professional practice means doing your job responsibly and using your knowledge and skills to support others. In school, this includes helping children learn, keeping them safe, following policies and treating them fairly. It also means knowing when to ask for help and respecting confidentiality.

As a Teaching Assistant working with Year 3 and 4 children, I see that children have different strengths and needs. Some need extra help with reading or writing, while others may struggle with behaviour, emotions or friendships. I need to be aware of these differences and adapt my support so children can take part. This essay looks at communication, safeguarding, partnership working, observation and planning, and children's rights.

## **Communication and relationships**

Communication is important because it helps us understand what children need and explain learning in a way they can follow. Children in the same class may understand instructions differently, so I sometimes need to explain something again or break it into smaller steps.

For example, if a child finds writing difficult, I might talk through the task, give them a starting sentence or remind them of one step at a time. This can make the work feel more manageable. If a child does not understand what to do, they may become frustrated or stop trying, so the way I explain something can make a difference.

Listening is just as important. If a child is upset or having friendship problems, I should not assume they are simply being difficult. There may be something worrying them that they cannot explain straight away. Giving them time to speak can help me understand what is happening and decide how best to support them.

Positive relationships help children feel safe enough to ask for help. Being patient, fair and consistent builds trust, while professional boundaries ensure children are treated appropriately. Communication with teachers and parents is also important because sharing relevant information helps everyone understand how a child is getting on. This must be done respectfully and confidentially.

## **Professional knowledge and safeguarding**

Understanding child development helps practitioners recognise that children do not all learn or behave in the same way. A child who struggles to concentrate may manage better with shorter tasks and clear instructions. A child who finds change difficult may feel more settled if they are warned before an activity ends. Knowing the child helps staff choose support that is useful rather than expecting everyone to do things in the same way.

Safeguarding is a central part of professional practice. Staff need to know how to respond if they are worried about a child's safety or wellbeing. Welsh Government guidance, *\*Keeping Learners Safe\**, explains safeguarding responsibilities in education settings (Welsh Government, 2022).

If a child tells me something that causes concern, I should listen calmly, avoid leading questions and report it to the designated safeguarding person. I should not promise to keep it secret, and I need to record the information in line with school procedures. Confidentiality does not mean keeping a safeguarding concern to myself. Information should be shared with the appropriate people so the child can be protected. Following procedures matters because failing to pass on a concern could leave a child at risk.

## **Partnership and multi-agency working**

Children may need support from several people, so staff need to work together. This can include Teaching Assistants, teachers, parents and carers, as well as professionals such as speech and language therapists, educational psychologists or social workers.

For example, if I notice that a child is struggling to communicate, I can share what I have observed with the class teacher. The teacher may discuss it with the family and consider whether further advice would help. Sharing information can help adults use similar strategies and avoid the child receiving mixed messages.

Parents and carers know their children outside school and may know what helps them feel calm, confident or included. Listening to them gives staff a fuller picture. In Wales, the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales provides guidance on identifying and supporting learners with additional learning needs and involving families (Welsh Government, 2021). Practitioners should respect families' views and understand the limits of their own role. When adults communicate well, concerns are less likely to be missed and support can be more consistent.

## **Observation, planning and reflective practice**

Observation helps staff notice what children can do, what interests them and where they may need support. The observation and planning cycle involves noticing something, thinking about what it means, planning an approach, trying it and reviewing whether it worked.

For example, I might notice that a child shares ideas confidently during discussion but struggles to write them down. I can tell the teacher and help put support in place, such as sentence starters, visual prompts or extra time. The purpose is to help the child access the learning and develop their skills, not simply to lower expectations.

Afterwards, staff should consider whether the support helped. If the child is still struggling, the approach may need to change. If they are becoming more confident, they may be ready for a little more challenge. This is why observation should inform planning rather than being done just to record what happened.

Reflection is also important. Brock (2014), Hayes et al. (2024) and Thompson (2022) discuss reflective practice and professional development. Dewey (1933) distinguishes between routine action and reflective action. Put simply, routine action is doing something because it is familiar, while reflective action means thinking about why we do it and whether it is working.

If a child becomes frustrated during writing, I can reflect on whether my instructions were clear, whether the task was suitable and whether more support was needed. Feedback from colleagues and evidence of progress can help me decide what to try next time. Chadha (2026) discusses the Johari Window model in relation to reflection and evidence, which also highlights the value of self-awareness and feedback. Reflecting helps practitioners learn from experience instead of repeating an approach that has not worked.

## **The UNCRC and professional practice**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out rights that apply to all children. These rights are relevant to everyday school practice because they focus on children's safety, wellbeing, views and access to education (UNICEF UK, n.d.).

Article 2 is about non-discrimination. In practice, this means children should not be excluded because of their abilities or circumstances. A child who finds writing difficult may need adapted resources or extra help to take part. Article 3 says that children's best interests should be a primary consideration when decisions are made about them. Article 12 says children have the right to express their views and have them taken seriously. If a child says that an activity is difficult or makes them uncomfortable, staff should listen and consider what can be changed.

Article 19 concerns protection from violence, abuse and neglect, which links to safeguarding. Article 28 recognises the right to education, and Article 31 recognises the right to rest, leisure and play (UNICEF UK, n.d.). These rights remind staff that children need more than academic help: they should also feel safe, respected and included. Inclusion is not just about being in the classroom; it is about having a real chance to participate and make progress.

## Conclusion

Professional practice involves using knowledge, communication and good judgement to support children's learning and wellbeing. Positive relationships help staff understand children, safeguarding procedures help protect them, and partnership working brings together the people who can provide support. Observation, planning and reflection help practitioners adjust their approach, while the UNCRC reminds them to respect children's rights and listen to their views.

In my role as a Teaching Assistant, I need to remember that one approach will not work for every child. By listening, working with others and being willing to change what I do, I can help children feel safe, included and able to make progress.

## References

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# The Importance of Reflective Practice in Early Years

## 1. Introduction

Reflective practice is an important part of working in Early Years because it helps practitioners think about what they do, why they do it and how they can improve. By looking back at different experiences, practitioners can learn from them and make changes to give children the best support for their learning, development and wellbeing. There are different reflective models that can help with this, including Schön, Kolb and Gibbs. Each model works in a different way and can be useful in different situations.

## 2. What is Reflection and Reflective Practice?

Reflection means thinking back about something that has happened and considering:

- what went well
- what did not go so well
- why it happened
- what could be done differently next time.

Reflective practice is when practitioners use these experiences to learn and improve the way they work with children.

### Example from my practice

When working with a non-verbal child, I noticed they preferred to lead activities rather than have someone tell them what to do. At first, I tried to direct the child, but I realised they were happier when given safe choices and allowed to take the lead. I reflected on my approach and changed the way I supported them. This helped me understand that not every child responds to the same approach, and sometimes practitioners need to change their own approach to meet the child's needs.

## 3. Why is Reflective Practice Important in Early Years?

Reflective practice is important because it helps practitioners:

- understand children's behaviour and individual needs
- adapt activities to support their learning and development
- recognise when they need more knowledge or training
- make better decisions and improve their practice
- support children's emotional wellbeing
- follow safeguarding procedures and keep children safe
- work more effectively with colleagues and families.

Every child is different, so reflection helps practitioners think about what might work best for each individual child.

## 4. The Theories of Reflection

### Donald Schön (1983)

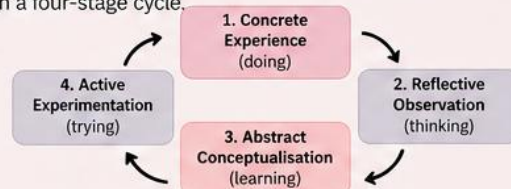
Schön identified two types of reflection:

- Reflection-in-action – thinking and changing your approach while something is happening.
- Reflection-on-action – thinking back afterwards about what went well and what could be improved.

This is useful in Early Years because situations can change quickly and you often need to respond to children's needs in the moment. However, it does not give a clear set of stages to follow, which can make it harder for beginners.

### David Kolb (1984)

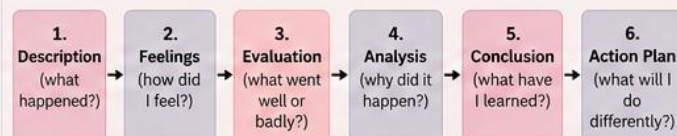
Kolb's model explains how we learn from experience through a four-stage cycle.



This helps practitioners improve their practice by using their experiences to learn and then try a different approach. However, it can take time to work through each stage and practitioners need to make sure they put what they have learned into practice.

### Graham Gibbs (1988)

Gibbs created a structured reflective cycle with six stages.



This is easy to follow because each stage gives you something specific to think about. It can be useful for students and practitioners who are new to reflective practice. However, because there are six stages, it can take longer to complete and may feel less flexible than Schön's approach.

## 5. Comparing the Reflective Models

| Model        | Main focus                                           | Strengths                                                                                                                                                             | Limitations                                                                                                                               | Relevance to Early Years                                                                                                    |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Schön (1983) | Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flexible</li><li>• Useful in the moment</li><li>• Helps with quick decision making.</li></ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No clear structure</li><li>• May be harder for beginners.</li></ul>                               | Useful when a practitioner needs to change their approach quickly, for example if a child becomes upset during an activity. |
| Kolb (1984)  | Learning from experience through a four-stage cycle. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourages learning</li><li>• Links experience to future practice</li><li>• Helps practitioners try new approaches.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can take time to work through</li><li>• Needs commitment to put learning into practice.</li></ul> | Useful for planning and developing practice, for example trying a new activity after reflecting on what children enjoyed.   |
| Gibbs (1988) | A structured six-stage cycle.                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear and easy to follow</li><li>• Helps reflect in detail</li><li>• Useful for students and new practitioners.</li></ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can take longer to complete</li><li>• May feel less flexible than Schön's approach.</li></ul>     | Useful when a practitioner wants to look at a situation in more detail, for example a challenging interaction with a child. |

## 6. Overall Analysis

Schön, Kolb and Gibbs all focus on learning from experience, but they do this in different ways. Schön is more flexible and can be useful when something is happening in the moment or after a situation. Kolb helps practitioners turn experiences into learning and then try something new. Gibbs provides the most structure and can help practitioners look at a situation in detail.

I think all three models can be useful in Early Years, depending on the situation. The most suitable model will depend on what the practitioner wants to learn and what they need to improve. The main thing is that reflection should lead to changes in practice and better support for children.

## 7. Conclusion

Reflective practice is an important part of Early Years because it helps practitioners understand children, recognise their needs and make changes to their practice. Schön, Kolb and Gibbs each have different approaches, strengths and limitations. The most suitable model will depend on the situation and what the practitioner wants to learn. Most importantly, reflection should lead to changes in practice and better support for children.

### References

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