

The Professional Practitioner Portfolio

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AI Declaration

I acknowledge the use of Google Scholar and Canva AI generated images.

Component 1: Professional Development Plan

Personal Development Plan (PDP)	
Employer: Cardiff Council	Employee: Emily Downs
Place of Employment: St Monica's CIW Primary School, Cardiff	Current Position: Teaching Assistant
<i>Personal Reflection (539 words)</i> To plan my professional development for the purposes of this PDP I have engaged in reflective practice, as recommended by Cottrell, (2021). I have reflected on my role as a teaching assistant which I have been doing for two years. Prior to working in this role, I hadn't worked with children or in an educational setting before and had no relevant qualifications for this post. A reflective discussion with the Head Teacher following my interview highlighted a range of transferable skills from my previous roles. After some time, I was able to see how these skills translate into working with children, for example, organisational, creative and communication skills. However, I can also recognise areas of personal and professional development which I would like to develop. Professionally, I would like to gain confidence in my Welsh language skills as this a school target identified during the last ESTYN inspection. This will help me in my role when modelling language learning for the children I assist and add to the cultural life of the school. A second area of professional development I would like to improve is my knowledge and understanding of supporting young learners with mental health needs. I feel I already have a good awareness of mental health conditions but would like to learn more about evidence-based methods to support young people in practice. A lot of my role involves supporting individual students with additional learning needs who also have mental health diagnoses, and I have reflected on how these can act as a barrier to inclusive experiences at school. On a personal level, I enjoy utilising my creative skills which I gained during previous employment and explored in personal hobbies, in producing individualised learning resources to	

support the children I work with. I have found that creative teaching methods can make learning more relatable and accessible for individuals however I have had no training in this area which means I sometimes lack confidence in whether what I create is in line with best practice. I have identified this as a personal development goal as I find this area particularly fulfilling.

Lastly, I would benefit personally from having more knowledge and resources about health and wellbeing. I find my role as a teaching assistant physically, mentally and emotionally challenging at times. During my time in this role, I have been diagnosed with long-covid which makes it additionally challenging to be resilient. In recent months, there is now more demand on my time as a full-time student. All these things together mean that dedicating some time to thinking about my wellbeing is a personal priority.

The table below details four different courses which I have identified to cover these areas of professional and personal development. I have had to consider a range of factors of which I have utilised the SMART goals approach to ensure that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound (Lawlor, 2012). For example, I wanted to find a course to specifically related to confidence as is something I struggle with, but there was nothing available that was achievable within my available time and budget. I tried to ensure that courses were overlapping or requiring too much time or financial commitment around my other responsibilities.

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Cottrell, S. (2021) <i>Skills for success: personal development and employability</i> . 4th edn. London: Red Globe Press				
Learning Objective:	Completion Date:	How does this relate to my scope of practice and why is this learning outcome important?	How will I achieve this objective and what resources will I need?	How will I know and assess that I have successfully completed the learning objective?
To develop Welsh language skills (<i>professional</i>)	18/06/2025	A focus in developing Welsh language skills at current place of work. Will support my knowledge and confidence of using Welsh language in my role.	Attend online classes over a twenty-week period (08/1/2025 – 18/06/2025, Wednesday evening 6 – 9pm). Course provided by Dysgu Cymraeg Caerdydd. Link available at: https://learnwels.h.cymru/learnin/g/course/7137d1bb-277b-ef11-	Complete full attendance of course and all required learning and/or assessments. Being able to use Welsh confidently in the workplace

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To develop further understanding and knowledge of causes of mental health problems within children and young people <i>(professional)</i>	12/12/2024	Support children from traumatic backgrounds awaiting placements for specialist settings. This course will give me a better understanding of the science behind mental health problems and what strategies can be used to help children and young people recover from these problems	Complete online two-hour training module on 12/12/2024. Course provided by the Centre for Child Mental Health (CCMH). Link available at: https://www.childmentalhealthcentre.org/online-courses/c-a-mental-health-forums/product/178-module-a-causes-of-mental-health-problems-helping-children-and-young-people-heal	Complete full attendance of course and all required learning and/or assessments. Use any recommended methods in practice and undertake reflective feedback with colleagues. Seeing the impact of my learning on the children I work with.
To develop artistic and creative skills	30 days from booking. I	As a personal goal it will fulfil my interest the	Access on-demand virtual learning, one	Complete full attendance of course and all required

in supporting children in the school environment (personal)	will time this to avoid clashes with other courses	creative aspects of my role whilst supporting children with diverse learning needs. This is important for being more inclusive	month access to complete 1.52-hour course. Course provided by CCMH (The Centre for Child Mental Health) Link available at: https://www.childmentalhealthcentre.org/webinars/webinars-single-viewers/product/91-using-arts-and-imagery-to-help-children-and-teenagers-talk-about-their-lives	learning and/or assessments. Use any recommended methods in practice and undertake reflective feedback with colleagues. Reflecting on the impact of using new methods and my personal fulfilment.
To help my wellbeing and resilience as teaching assistant and	14 days from booking. I will time this to avoid clashes with	This will support my personal health and wellbeing and managing the demands of my	Access on-demand virtual learning, two-week access with 3 hours study per week	Complete full attendance of course and all required learning and/or assessments.

full-time student (<i>personal</i>)	other courses	employed work, personal life and additional studies.	(6 hours total), on-demand virtual course. Course provided by Future Learn Link available at: https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/wellbeing-and-resilience-at-work-sc	Personal observation of health and wellbeing and levels of resilience.
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Component 2: Briefing Paper (1097 words)

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Introductory Briefing Paper: For those working in and/or studying Early Years Education & Care

November 2024



Summary and Aims:

This paper aims to explore some of the definitions and values associated with reflective practice, as well as analysing the appropriateness of traditional reflective theories when applied to the practice of early years professionals today.

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection in relation to human thinking was first defined in the Oxford English Dictionary circa 1398 as *“the action or process of thinking carefully or deeply about a particular subject, typically involving influence from one's past life and experiences”* (Stevenson, 2011).

The Open University (2024) explains the importance of self reflection in contemporary professional practice as a method for assessing performance, learning from experience, and considering how to improve and become more effective. Matsuo et al. (2020) highlight a link between successful employee reflection in the workplace and its impact on better performance, productivity and organisation. Therefore, it can be suggested that businesses of all natures will consider reflective practice as an important asset for success and growth.

Despite the intended benefits of self reflection, Hallet (2013) outlines the potential adverse outcomes of critical reflection if undertaken in a negative way, and how this cause emotional challenges. Therefore, various models have been developed to help people learn how to practice reflecting in a helpful way.

What might this look like in the workplace?

Professionals are given opportunities to reflect by completing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plans

Organisations can provide training for professionals on how to facilitate reflective practice

Reflective practice or ‘reflective thinking’ can happen subconsciously

Reflection can take place by communicating with others

It can take place as an individual or habitual event



Reflective practice can be both self-directed and/or led by others

Professionals can plan reflective activities in advance e.g. setting goals and reflecting on these when completed

Reflective practice can take place in appraisals, supervisions, interviews and performance management sessions

It can be completed individually or as part of a group



Why is reflective practice important for Early Years Professionals? What might this look like, and what are the possible barriers?

Why?	How?	Possible Barriers?
Reflective practice ensures professionals demonstrate best practice by satisfying performance standards and competences (Colwell et al., 2015).	Completing relevant training and qualifications	Training opportunities not inclusive to diverse learning needs, misinterpretation of information
Improves standards in the quality of education and care of children (Brock, 2015; Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011).	Reviewing and evoking change in provision if needed. Effective reflective practice needs to be purposeful and meaningful	Lack of clearly defined aims and goals Organisational cultures which are not open to new ideas
Improves working culture, self-awareness and wellbeing by aiming to meet the inclusive needs of both the practitioner and children (Pollard et al. 2019).	Regular and effective communication and problem solving with children, colleagues, care givers, and multi-agency teams	Cultural and language barriers impacting clear communication (



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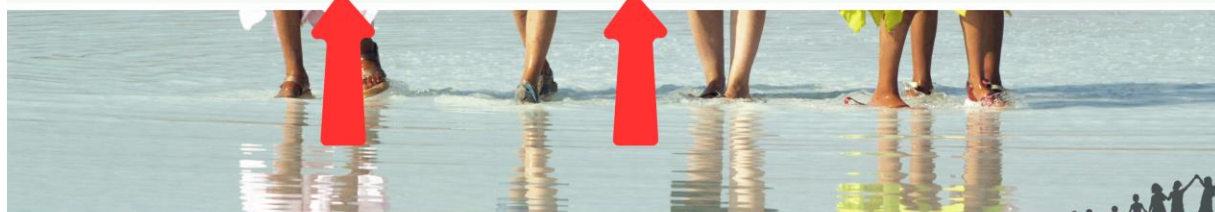
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Theories of reflective practice have developed over time

Timeline of theorists noted works :

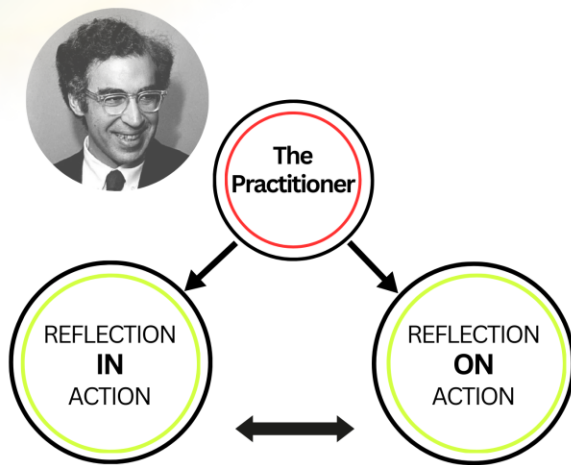
Borton 1970	Argyris 1976	Kolb 1984	Eraut 1994	Johns 1994	Brookfield 1995	Jasper 2003	Nguyen 2014
Dewey 1933	Schön 1983	Gibbs 1988	Driscoll 1994	Fry 1995	Fook & Gardener 2006		



Two models of reflective practice

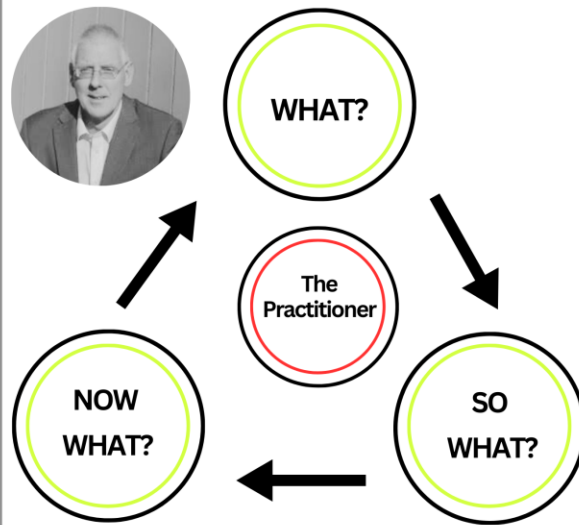
Schön

Schön is recognised for creating theories which explore aspects of organisational behaviour including professionalism, learning and reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Schön uses a two-sided approach to professional reflection:



Driscoll

Driscoll created a reflective theory originally intended for use within a clinical setting but adapted for use within other sectors including education (Driscoll, 2006). Driscoll's theory is based on a three-pronged view of reflection, as detailed below:



What do Schön and Driscoll's models mean?

Schön

Reflection-in-action is when a person will actively reflect on their actions as they are doing them.

Reflection-on-action is the process of reflection a person will undertake after completing a task.

Driscoll

What? The stage in which a person describes the event or action after it has happened. During this stage the person may consider how they felt during the event, examine what happened, look at who was involved and assess their involvement more closely.

So What? This part allows the person to explore the significance of the action or event by analysing the reasons for their actions both at the time and after the event. This allows the person to consider the opinions of both themselves and the others who were involved, as well as past events which may have influenced these experiences.

Now What? The final stage allows the reflector to examine the information they have learnt in the first two stages to inform how they move forward. Consideration of the learning outcomes will allow for preventative methods to be identified and implemented in future. It allows the reflector to better prepare themselves for future tasks by assessing both the positive and negative outcomes of the task or action.



What might these models look like in an Early Years setting?

Example: A newly qualified reception class teacher takes a reception class to the local park to complete outdoor work for an upcoming autumn project. Stormy weather arrives unexpectedly and nobody is dressed appropriately...

Possible outcomes using Schön's theory:

The teacher actively reflects on the situation as it is happening and decides that the weather is too bad to complete the outdoor tasks so takes the class back to the school building. The teacher then adapts the task so that the children can complete some computer-based research for the project back in the building. The outdoor trip is planned again for the following day with better weather prospects.

Possible outcomes using Driscoll's theory:

A newly qualified teacher looks back on a difficult day. The pupils, teacher and support staff were disappointed they hadn't completed the tasks for the day. Lots of time was wasted during the following session as they needed to change clothing which made it difficult for the teacher to catch up. That evening, the teacher reflected on the day and planned for weather considerations during outdoor activities more carefully the next time!



Analysis of these models: pros, cons, and further considerations

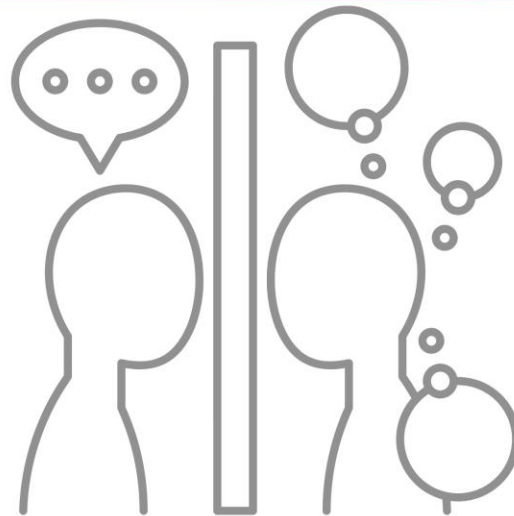
Each of these models have strengths and benefits for people working in early years settings. However, they have different focuses and ways of approaching reflective practice might be more or less beneficial in different situations. These models might have been shaped by the perspectives from which they were written, and will be influenced by their context, knowledge at the time they were written, and their intended audience. For example, Driscoll's model has been applied in healthcare settings and both models were written in the late twentieth century which means that they might not have been able to incorporate more modern knowledge such as how reflective practice might differ for neurodivergent people and other diverse groups.

An advantage of Schön's model is its simplicity which might make it more useful in demanding environments such as early years settings (Lindon and Trodd, 2016). The focus on reflection-in-action gives a practical tool which can be used in the moment to improve how professionals respond to changing situations. Driscoll, on the other hand, uses a model which is more detailed. There is more of a focus on reflecting on feelings, and the approach can be used for reflection after the event rather than in the present moment. Driscoll's model also focuses on the implications and the future learnings from reflection. There is also a bit more detail in the model which could be useful for more complex situations.

Concluding reflections

In conclusion, both models have strengths to offer practitioners in their reflective practice. Deciding which model to use for the maximum benefit will depend on several factors, such as the practitioner's preferences, their reflective style, the circumstances they are dealing with the amount of time available, and what they want to achieve.

This demonstrates how important reflective practice is in becoming a more effective professional practitioner.



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Component 3: Written Essay

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

The nature of working with children involves understanding their diverse and individual needs (Brodie and Savage, 2015). Making sure all children have equal opportunities which uphold their rights requires an inclusive approach to professional practice. This essay will examine some of the fundamental attributes of professional practice using relevant examples and critical analysis to demonstrate their importance, with specific reference to the Welsh context and wider rights-based frameworks.

Prior to analysing these attributes further, it is important to consider the meaning of '*professionalism*', as well as understanding the possible interpretations of this competency and the implications this could have on the quality and appropriability of practice offered to children in this sector. Grigg (2022) discusses the origins of the word 'professional' with specific reference to its interpretation post 1930, where sociologists defined its meaning to include certain traits such as practicing in an ethical manner and being suitably qualified. Burnett, C. and Cremin, T. (2018) agree with the idea of a professional having expertise, as does Grigg (2022), who emphasises the need for professionals to have attained certification. Gasper (2015), writing in relation to the early years sector specifically, offers a differing and more contemporary view in suggesting that the attributes of professionalism are more determined by the qualities and values the practitioner demonstrates in practice, rather than being measured by the obtainment of formal qualifications.

With Gasper's (2015) point of view in mind, it is important to understand the role of values in professional practice and how they can support the development of children in their early years. Conn and Murphy (2022) consider values as being key in meeting the inclusive needs of children, not just for professionals individually but for the

organisations they work in. Organisational values are shaped by a range of frameworks, legislation and guidance relevant to their location. For example, the EYFS, issued by UK Government (2024) provides frameworks for settings including childminding and school-based providers specific to England. However, the Welsh Government follows the Early Years Outcomes Framework (2015), alongside the guidance for workers from Social Care Wales regarding the All Wales Induction framework for early years and childcare (Social Care Wales, 2024). These frameworks are explicitly based on values showing the importance of values in influencing outcomes.

However, professional practice requires an understanding of how values might change across different settings and can be shaped by factors including cultural differences, religious beliefs and societal change over time. Therefore, it is important that organisations are implementing current guidelines and practitioners adhere to them.

Another important aspect of professional practice is communication. The UK Department for Education (2021) has created resources for professionals which highlight the significance of effective communication for early years settings as it not only facilitates a positive working environment amongst colleagues, but also improves relationships with children, families and outside professionals, and offers suggestions as how best carry out effective communication such as eye contact, body language and listening skills. Not only does effective communication play a crucial role in meeting the needs of children, but it also sets a good example of communication standards to children, but also to the wider community.

However, it is important to assess the challenges that might be involved in communicating in inclusive ways. For example, some people might lack access to technological means of communication that may be related to financial barriers. Other possible barriers might include language and cultural differences, varying norms and expectations around communication, and factors such as disability or neurodivergent conditions. For example, autistic children with social and communication differences may need a tailored approach to communication (Frederickson and Cline, 2015). Each

of these factors can be considered from the point of view of the child and the individual professional and how communication standards are set within organisations.

Effective communication is necessary for multi-agency working, which is another aspect of professional practice. Gasper (2015) describes multi-agency working as *“the most efficient and effective way of providing support for young children, their families and their communities”* (Gasper, 2015, p.254). The importance of this is further substantiated by the Welsh Government’s Early Years Outcomes Framework which suggests better outcomes will be achieved by the *“combined efforts of everyone across the sector”* (Welsh Government, 2015, p.2). This reflects how early years settings are increasingly expected to work in partnership with several outside agencies as well as maintaining key relationships with families and caregivers, including; a range of healthcare professionals, social workers, specialist intervention professionals, extracurricular club personnel, peripatetic teachers, temporary or support staff, placement students, religious leaders, inspectors, charitable organisations such as PACEY, funding providers, and governors. Maintaining constructive relationships with multiple agencies is a key factor in meeting the individual and inclusive needs of children as they develop and increase their engagement with wider society, as outlined by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of child development (Knowles, 2018).

Meaningful planning and observation of children is a part of professional practice required in order to meet emotional and educational needs and ensure safety. The Observation and Planning cycle (OAP) detailed in the ‘Birth to Five Matters’ guidance from the Early Years Coalition (2021) is a useful tool in assisting early years professionals, giving them a cyclical structure of observation to inform the planning of educational provision that is based on observed needs. This cycle helps practitioners to be more inclusive by responding to children’s differing learning styles, interests, and motivations, and to adapt through a process of self-reflection. In the Welsh context, becoming a more inclusive and holistic professional practitioner in this way supports the Four Core Purposes of the Welsh Curriculum encouraging children and young people to be *‘confident individuals’* (Purpose Four), who are *‘capable learners’* (Purpose One) (Welsh Government, 2022).

It is important to consider factors which may prevent effective, purposeful, and ethical observation of children. For example, children should be suitably informed and able to give consent prior to observation, because research shows that children may behave differently when they know they are being observed. This was first described as the Hawthorne effect in 1953 (Festinger and Katz, 1953). Additionally, funding constraints within the sector may result in under-staffing, impacting the practitioner's ability to observe children safely. Temporary staffing may impact child observation negatively as both the practitioner and child have not been able to build a relationship, meaning the child's preferred means of communication may be overlooked. This might be especially important for children with additional learning needs, disabilities and language barriers. An example of the importance of careful observation might be how children who have experienced adverse childhood events may need a trauma-informed approach (Bonnett et al., 2024), including consistent staff who are appropriately trained in skills such as active listening (Smidt, 2015).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a treaty based on fifty-four interlinking Articles which outline the basic rights and inclusive needs of every child living within the one hundred and ninety-six abiding nations (UNICEF, 2024). UNCRC articles aim to improve areas such as education (Article 28), health (Article 24) and living standards (Article 27), as well as ensuring that children have a clear comprehension of the rights they are entitled to (Article 42). Wales is a leading nation in relation to promoting the UNCRC objectives, with legislation in 2011 making it a requirement for Welsh Ministers to consider them in all their actions (Welsh Government, 2011). Government policymaking in this area is independently reviewed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021) whose annual reports examine, safeguard and promote children's rights whilst providing recommendations where necessary.

Devarakonda (2021) emphasises the importance of practitioners ensuring that they are non-discriminative in terms of race, culture and religious values. An example of this might be protecting children's rights to learn the Welsh language as an important part of Welsh culture as outlined in the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' Strategy (2024).

At the same time, an inclusive approach to ethnic and cultural diversity is important in an increasingly multicultural society (Keddie, 2014)

Finally, safeguarding is considered a centrally important part of professional practice when working with children, as reflected in Welsh Government policy, which includes detailed guidance on safeguarding procedures (Welsh Government, 2024). These cover a range of safeguarding considerations such as identifying abuse, harm and neglect. The central importance of safeguarding is highlighted by Crow and Watson (2018) who state, *"early years settings have a responsibility to ensure children are protected and ensure their welfare needs are at the heart of practice"* (Crow and Watson, 2018, p.72). Twigg (2018) takes this further, defining safeguarding as more than reacting to harm or preventing it in the first place, but as also an important part of *promoting* welfare, and can even be considered a moral responsibility. Safeguarding needs will evolve in relation to context with influences such as changing culture and advances in technology, too, which reflects how many aspects of professional practice need to be flexible and adaptive to the diverse needs of children, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

In conclusion there are many aspects of professional practice which are important to meeting the needs of children. As has been outlined the needs of children are diverse and can vary according to several factors, meaning that achieving equal outcomes and avoiding discrimination requires an inclusive approach that is supported by the values of both the professional and the organisation they work in. This essay has shown how many areas of professional practice are interrelated and do not operate in isolation. The true professional practitioner brings together all of these areas and is committed to maintaining and improving standards by continuing professional development. Whilst each component is important it could be argued that the safeguarding of the child is the essential requirement on which all of their differing needs depend.

(Word count: 1623)

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