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What do I want to develop: I want to develop my understanding of neurodivergence in young children, achieve my paediatric first aid certificate and improve my engagement with the children in my care.				
Objective	Actions (How will I achieve this objective/ what needs to be done?)	Resources (What support and resources are needed to achieve this objective?)	Target Date for achieving objective.	Success criteria (How will I know I have achieved this goal; how will I review this?)
Achieve paediatric first aid certification	I plan to engage in independent study regarding the subject as this will enable me to explore topics of interest more deeply, which will in turn increase my overall understanding of first aid in a general sense. I also plan to undertake a minimum of a six-hour paediatric first aid course, this will benefit myself and my practice because I will be more confident in my abilities to handle any incident requiring first aid that occurs at work.	The first proposed action will require access to reputable information on the topic of paediatric first aid, for example through the library or the free journal access afforded to students of UWTSD. The second step will require enrolment on a paediatric first aid course provided by an accredited organisation and successful completion of said course.	April 2025	I will know that I have achieved this upon successful acquisition of a paediatric first aid certificate.
Increase understanding of neurodivergence in the early years	In order to achieve this objective, I intend to independently study the topic in order to gain a general understanding of how neurodivergence typically presents in young children and how it is accommodated in early years settings. This ought to give me a firm foundation on which I can expand, allowing me to engage more deeply with the topic. Following this, I intend to reach out to those who have	Firstly, in order to achieve this objective, I will need access to information on how neurodivergence presents and is handled in young children. I am hopeful I will be able to find this information through a combination of written material, online courses and lectures. Secondly, I will need to find and engage with people who have a clearer and more nuanced understanding than is present in the introductory material previously mentioned. I am in contact with	October 2025	I will review my progress with this longterm objective by completing several assessments before commencing study on the topic, to establish a baseline of my understanding and complete the same assessments in October of 2025.

	previously undertaken academic study in the area. It is my hope that this course of action will allow me to better support children with these additional needs.	several people who have undertaken degree level study on the matter and intend to reach out to them for guidance on the matter.		
Improve my engagement with the children	I plan to improve my engagement with the children by spending more time interacting with them at their level. This will improve my practice because it will reduce the feelings of disconnect between myself and the child while also reducing any intimidation that the child may feel due to our size difference. I also intend to speak with more senior and established nursery practitioners about this issue. I hope this will allow me to draw on their expertise to devise strategies by which I can increase my confidence and the child's comfort.	The main resource required for a successful outcome for this objective is experience. Both my own and that of those around me. I will need to increase my focus on interacting with the children in meaningful ways, in order to learn from them. Additionally reaching out to the more senior staff members in my setting will enable me to take full advantage of their experience and knowledge, which will provide me with the information necessary to feel more confident and comfortable experimenting with my own strategies for engaging with the children.	January 2025	I will review my progress with this objective by evaluating the comments made during my performance reviews at my setting and by keeping a practice journal rating each day's work and reflecting on what was successful and what I can improve moving forwards.

Reflective Practice – A Briefing Paper

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection is the process of questioning one's assumptions and actions, in order to gain further insight and understanding (Brookfield, 1995), this allows us to consider the reasons for a specific outcome, whether positive or negative. Brookfield emphasises also the importance of considering these things from other perspectives, not just our own. Reflection is often used in educational and professional contexts in order to assess learning and development, through the use of learning journals or reflective portfolios (Brock, 2015, p.7-8). Reflective practice proposes to take this a step further by including it as part of a cyclical process whereby a professional applies this reflective process to their practice. It aims to use observation, critical reflection and planning to improve outcomes moving forward (University of Exeter, 2024).

Why is reflective practice important to early years practice?

Reflective practice is especially important to early years practice for three key reasons. Firstly, the landscape of early years practice is constantly evolving with new legislation and policy requiring that practitioners adapt their behaviours and thinking to align with the new guidance. The early years education sector is more likely than most others to find their work and practice significantly impacted by changes to national policy and legislation. Secondly, early years practitioners are expected to consistently improve their practice as it has a significant impact on the quality of life and education for the children in their care. The interplay between early years practitioners and parents, outside services and agencies, as well as the larger educational system significantly affects educational, personal and, potentially, legal outcomes for the children in their care. Finally, it is essential to consider the outcome of the quick, complex decision making required of those working in any caring profession, especially those relating to the care of vulnerable people. Children are among the most vulnerable in our society and early years practitioners are in a unique position to impact them, even as a result of seemingly trivial choices (Hallet, 2013, p.24-28).

The theory of reflective practice

The theory of reflective practice is widely considered to have begun with the work of American pragmatist James Dewey, who found fault with the current approach to behaviour and education at the time. The prevailing opinion at the time that experience, an oft cited best teacher, was something that happened to a passive participant who in turn actively reacted to it was antithetical to Dewey's belief that they were actively experienced at all points. Stating that if such experiences were indeed actively occurring, as is now accepted, then they were open to critical examination and, if habitually reoccurring, subject to improvement (Hildebrand, 2024). Donald Schön (1992, p.267-287) further developed this theory by suggesting that it was most effective when applied in a two-step process; reflection-in-action, reflection that take place in the moment in order to aid in problem solving and reflection-on-action, reflection that takes place after the moment has ended. Both of these theorists encouraged their proponents to consider multiple aspects when reflecting upon an experience, for example to consider the social, political and cultural experiences of those involved and how that might have influenced the outcome of a particular situation (Bauer, 1991).

Gibbs and ERA models

Gibbs Model

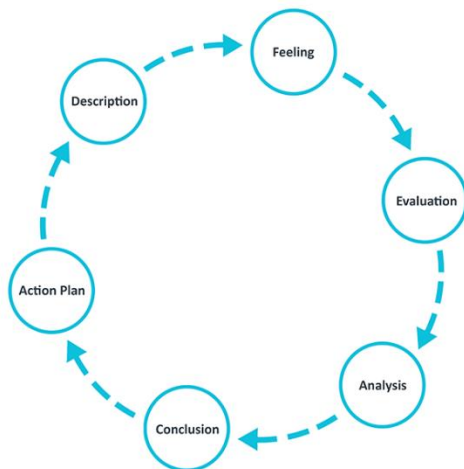


Figure 1: Gibbs Model (University of Edinburgh, 2020)

ERA Model

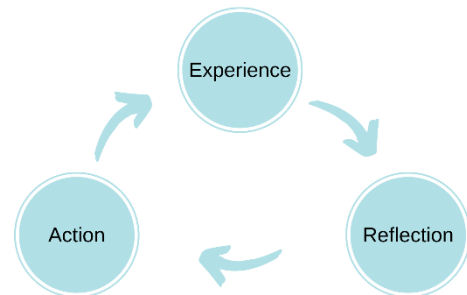


Figure 2: ERA Model (University of Exeter, 2023)

The Gibbs model (figure 1) consists of six steps:

1. Describing the experience
2. Considering how one feels about the experience.
3. Evaluating the experience
4. Analysing the experience
5. Concluding what one has learnt.
6. Creating an action plan to implement moving forward

The ERA model (figure 2) consists of three steps:

1. Considering the experience
2. Reflecting upon the experience
3. Taking action to improve the outcome

Analysis of Gibbs and ERA models of reflection

Both the Gibbs and ERA model of reflection are typically displayed in a cyclical fashion, this is to emphasize the importance of viewing the reflective process as a continuous learning journey. They were both created initially with a view to aiding healthcare workers in their pursuit of improved practice though have since been adapted for use in other sectors, academic assessment and professional development training, even in fields where reflective practice is not the norm. The Gibbs model, consisting of six steps, is focused primarily on looking back at an experience after it has occurred and encourages its users to consider the experience in depth. The model takes a holistic approach to reflection with mention made, within the model, to the various aspects that must be considered in order to engage in meaningful reflection (McLeod, 2024). This makes the Gibbs model more suited for what Schön would call on-action-reflection, after the moment considerations when one has more time to delve deeply into all aspects of a situation and to academic applications, where a more in-depth understanding is imperative. On the other hand, the ERA model, with its more simplified and concise approach, is easier to apply to in the moment decision-making and problem-solving. It is additionally easier for those beginning their reflective journey to apply, whether in the moment or when considering experiences which have since past (Bassot, 2024, p.44-45).

Conclusion

The use of reflective thinking and reflective practice has become standard in both academic and professional contexts, as it is effective as a self-observation and self-assessment tool. It also allows learners to consider the more subtle and nuanced considerations that might affect the outcome of a situation, leading to more in-depth and applicable learning. It is of particular importance to early years practitioners as the nature of their work puts them at the forefront of the provision of quality care and education for young children, where complex problem-solving and shifting expectations are the norm.

The Importance of Professional Practice in the Early Years

A professional practitioner broadly speaking, is a practitioner who shows a continual commitment to learning, self-assessment and improvement. It would be expected that they would undertake regular professional development training, engage with experiential learning techniques and be open to receiving constructive criticism from more senior colleagues or educators. This, in other fields, may suffice as a definitive professional practitioner, however this is only one of many aspects expected of a professional early years practitioner. It is also required that an early years practitioner be aware of all current legislation, familiar with modern research into child development and early years education and capable of working within a multiagency setup amongst other things (Reed & Walker, 2015, p.257-259).

The ability to communicate is essential to professional early years practice, as practitioners are expected to work within a multi-agency approach as well as to work co-operatively and collaboratively with their colleagues for the best possible outcome for the children. This means that a professional practitioner within the early years is expected to communicate clearly, with all necessary detail, in both verbal and written communication. Failure to communicate effectively, as detailed previously, can lead to catastrophic consequences for the children within their care. Improperly completed paperwork, absent-minded forgetfulness when informing someone verbally and withholding information can and has, caused damage that is unable to be rectified (Laming, 2003).

It is therefore imperative that early years practitioners are able to work as part of an effective multiagency approach, being as it is likely that at some point during their career, they will be required to in order to achieve the best possible outcome for a child in their care. The multiagency approach encourages open communication between practitioners and outside agencies such as social services or law enforcement, which makes it significantly less likely that pertinent information is lost. This is imperative as it has been proven that this failure to communicate between parties invested in the child's best interests impedes the provision of necessary interventions and resources (TrainingExpress, 2023).

Additionally, it is essential that practitioners are able to communicate with the parents and guardians of the children, not only with other professionals. This is because

parents and guardians are the fore-most authority on their children, having the best understanding of the child's development, preferences and personalities. A practitioner is able to perform at their best only when they are informed on the child's culture, language and home-environment, information best acquired from the child's parents or guardians. This type of communication is likely to be more informal, primarily occurring at drop-off and collection; nevertheless, it ought to be complete, factual and clear (Kreider, Mayer & Vaughan 1999).

The observation and planning, or reflective, process is a key aspect of professional practice for early years provision. It is a method of self-assessment that allows practitioners to cyclically consider the whys of an outcome, encourages mindful observations and endorses applying the knowledge gained from this process to one's actions moving forward. This allows practitioners to more effectively meet the needs of the children in their care, as they are undertaking a continual learning journey. In addition to the benefits for the children, engaging in reflective practice can help improve the practitioner's confidence in and understanding of their unique practice (Paige-Smith, 2011, p.23).

It is important, as previously stated, that early years practitioners are in possession of a good knowledge base, theoretical and practical understanding as well as materials for further development. The field of early years education is a constantly shifting and evolving sector, as such it is considered basic professional practice to remain abreast of contemporary research and legislation. Without such a commitment to continuous learning and understanding, it is not the practitioner who suffers but the children within their care. Failure to consider and apply the latest information means that practitioners will potentially act on outdated or, potentially, outright incorrect information, which is unlikely to support the provision of quality care and education for the children they care for in the course of their practice (Department for Education, 2024).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child [hereafter UNCRC] is the most comprehensive, legally binding, document detailing the rights of children in any country where it is ratified. It consists of fifty-four articles which cover the provisions and experiences that every child has a right to, as well as guidance for practitioners and professionals who are in a position of power over any child. It covers not only

the basic human necessities such as adequate food, water, shelter and rest but also rights which are specific to children (UNICEF, 2024). It gives legal standing to the need for play, relaxation, safety and freedom from discrimination that had not been available prior. The UNCRC is underpinned by values of solidarity, equality, freedom and diversity, values which are considered to be essential for any early years practitioners.

It is a vitally important aspect of professional practice within the early years to hold a steadfast dedication to upholding values, one's own and those of the country in which they practice. This is vital because one's values play a significant role in determining one's actions. For example, holding a value of inclusion and diversity, which is upheld through practice, would encourage practitioners to consider not only the cultural differences that may exist within their classroom but also the impact that a specific activity may have because of those differences, thereby improving the experience of children within their classroom. Conversely, if one held a value of racial superiority, then as a practitioner they would be unlikely to encourage this level of consideration or inclusion. As we can see, the different values held by these two hypothetical practitioners will have vastly different outcomes for the children in their care (Welsh Government, 2022 & 2023). Additionally, one must consider that children will adopt the values of those that they spend a large amount of time in the company of. This means that not only would these values affect the experience of the children under their care but also may well become the values that the next generation holds dear. As a result, it is imperative that one carefully considers the values they hold and how they might impact others as we move forward and strive to uphold values that coincide with the best good for the most people, such as continuous education, inclusion, diversity, empathy and equality (Scholz-Kuhn *et al.*, 2023).

In conclusion, there are many aspects of professional practice in the early years, and it is not simply a matter of being able to achieve a specific qualification or set amount of time working in the field. To be considered a professional practitioner within an early years setting, one must demonstrate a commitment to ongoing learning, upholding positive values, respecting a child's rights, effective communication and partnership with other concerned bodies.

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