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With this assessment I have submitted the following:

Component 1: Reflective personal development plan (PDP)

Component 2: Briefing Paper

Component 3: Written Essay

AI Statement

For this assignment portfolio, I did not use any type of Generative AI support. This includes research support, structure support, writing/proofreading support, and creative support. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm that 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 1

What do I know already: Early education is too important to be left to chance. A high-quality early education benefits all children, so every child gets off to the best start in life.

What have I learnt so far: I have developed confidence in digital competency and learned and recognized the importance of academic reading, writing, and referencing.

What do I want to develop: Understanding how children develop and learn, how can I create the right environment for children in which they can express themselves fully. They can plan the next steps in their learning.

Objective	Actions (How will I achieve this objective/ what needs to be done?)	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?)
Learning new skills and getting an approved qualification to help develop my knowledge and progress my career in early years and childcare. I need to start working with children as a volunteer to	By continuing my studies, attending classes and completing my Early Years and Education degree course. I registered on the local council web site as a volunteer and applied and will be applying for	University and volunteer work.	Working in the early years has a unique role. To carry out this role effectively, it's important to receive appropriate training. I wish to finish my degree by time with success. July 2027.	Awarding my BA diploma. I will get feedback from people and schools about my development.

learn new skills and gain experience.	volunteer work. I applied as a play volunteer and Heritage learning support volunteer.		During my course, I feel I have combined my learning with my practice. Until I can extend my volunteer work during different levels of children care. July 2026.	
Nutrition for early years course to help young children eat well and establish healthy eating habits for life.	Participate an online Nutrition for Early years course provided by The British Nutrition Foundation exists to promote health and wellbeing.	I need spare time and budget to enroll in this course.	2025 December	Awarding my certificate.

Complete Emergency Paediatric first aid qualification. With this qualification I will cover all the emergency basics and more, ensuring I am confident to act in the event of an accident.	Complete twelve hours total two days Level 3 Paediatric First Aid qualification course.	There is a course located in Cardiff, practical and dynamic first aid courses I can join. First Aid Cardiff sets a high standard for first aid training in the UK, with a team of highly qualified trainers.	2026 End of July	Achieving nationally recognized Level 3 certificates.
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PART 2

Executive Summary

Professional development and provision of quality education, in the highly dynamic field of Early Years (EY), is based on reflective practice. This briefing paper focuses on explaining the importance of critical self-assessment in the EY environment, analyzing the underlying theories of reflection, and offering a discussion of the organized models based on which professional operation is formalized. The constant practice of reflections is not only an expected requirement of the profession but a condition to being able to guarantee the ongoing quality improvement, adherence to regulations and the welfare of the educator workforce.

Definition of Reflection and Reflective Practice

Reflection is the most basic mental process where one consciously analyses previous experiences, thoughts, emotions, actions, and responses that are essential and feelings to obtain better comprehension and clarity. (Loughran, 2002). It is the subjective, internal act of thinking over something.

This internal process is systematically and professionally applied as Reflective Practice (RP). It works as a pathology, turning subjective experiences into knowledge and learning that is objective and professional (Cigala, Venturelli and Bassetti, 2019). In the case of Early Years educators, RP is the tool through which their pedagogical decisions are critically examined as valid to best practice standards.

The difference is important: reflection is critical thinking, whereas reflective practice is the intentional practice to make that critical thinking formal and put it into professional competence. This is required in continuous professional development (CPD) and accountability. Reflective practice also enhances a sense of competence in the teachers in identifying solutions and directions for a possible improvement in work practices. Assists teachers in explaining the reasons why they did

something, thus being able to find the points of improvement and make sure that their practices are always purposeful and grounded in evidence.

Why Reflective Practice is Important in Early Years Practice

In the case of early years educators, reflective practice is an essential mechanism of connecting daily practices with best standards and positive child outcomes. Reflecting practice is important as a tool to self-improve and develop. Three pillars are important in their significance:

Quality Assurance and Standards: The regulatory standards, including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS), have a clear requirement for continuous reflection as an improvement requirement. RP makes the teaching approach undergo a critical evaluation based on predefined standards, which encourages responsibility and attentiveness.

Improvement in Pedagogy: Reflection permits teachers to go beyond observing something and knowing its cause and consequences. Studies show that reflection is an important tool in recognizing changing pedagogical practices (Chi, 2010; Hutton & Smith, 1994). Through questioning their technical expertise, practical plans, and key biases, educators can determine the gaps in their knowledge and take active steps to change their pedagogy to meet the needs of various children (Chen, 2023).

Teacher Well-being: Structured RP has been found to enhance teacher well-being. It can be applied as a type of professional help, which helps to overcome stress and increase the sense of self-efficacy because it gives a structured environment to process challenging experiences and formulate problems (Cigala, Venturelli and Bassetti, 2019).

The Theory of Reflection (Dewey and Schön)

John Dewey and Donald Schon are the main sources where the idea of reflective practice is conceptualized.

Reflection was seen by John Dewey as a process of thought, consisting of five stages, which start with a state of perplexity or doubt (Chen, 2023). To Dewey, reflection is a problem-solving process that can be supported by the deliberate process of developing an informed conclusion based on the first confusion.

Donald Schon effectively applied the ideas of Dewey to the field of professional activity and came up with two types of reflections that are critical (Bauer, 1991).

Reflection-in-Action: Thinking during action. It is the automatic, instinctive modification of the actions as they are acted out. In the case of an EY educator, this can be an immediate adjustment of a play activity once a child becomes uninterested.

Reflection-on-Action: The reflective process, which involves thinking about an action that has already been done. This is an involved process of analysis, usually in model form, to find out why an event occurred in the way it did, and what modifications will be required in the future. This is the prevalent type of RP in professional growth.

Analysis of Different Reflective Models: Comparison of Gibbs and Kolb

Reflective models offer a scaffolding structure to practitioners to organize their thoughts and enable deep analysis. The comparison between Gibbs' Reflective Cycle and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle points to the differences between the two approaches to RP:

Feature	Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Adeani, Febriani and Syafradin, 2020)	Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (McLeod, 2025)
Structure	Six sequential, distinct stages, forming a cycle.	Four linked stages, forming a continuous cycle.
Focus	Critical evaluation of specific, usually challenging, events.	The integration of concrete experience with abstract conceptualization to generate future action.
Stages	Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, Action Plan.	Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, Active Experimentation.
Pros	Highly structured and accessible, making it excellent for beginners. Strong emphasis on processing feelings is important.	Focuses on learning styles and links of experience directly to theory and planned future action. Dynamic and holistic.

Cons	I can feel rigid and prescriptive. Often focuses heavily on past events without a strong link to future <i>theory</i> .	Less explicitly focus on the emotional dimension of the experience. The conceptualization stage can be challenging for non-academic practitioners.
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The two models are useful in the EY sector. Gibbs is more appropriate in structured post-incident debriefs, which are characterized by emotional and evaluative aspects of one event. A more effective framework of the long-term Action Research projects and curriculum development is provided by Kolb since it is the one that inherently links the experience to theory and new trial (Roberts, 2016).

Conclusion

Reflective practice is an essential part of professional identity among the educators of early years. Combining the theoretical frameworks of Dewey and Schoen with structured frameworks such as those suggested by Gibbs and Kolb helps the practitioner to turn the day-to-day experiences into purposeful, evidence-based learning. The adherence to RP would mean that the EY sector will constantly advance the practice, leading to improved academic performance of children and enhanced professional competency and health of teachers.

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PART 3

Introduction

Early years (EY) education is professionally practiced, defined as the logical use of professional knowledge, skills and ethics by children to assist their development and wellbeing. A professional is a person who is competent, accountable, and dedicated to continuous improvement, and controlled by regulations and supported by evidence. Professionalism in EY settings is not limited to technical skills, but also values, relationships, and collaboration, whereby individual and inclusive needs are achieved. This essay examines major areas such as values, communication, knowledge (including safeguarding), partnerships, the observation cycle and the UNCRC principles, and their importance in promoting equitable and child-centered care.

Values Important for a Professional Practitioner and Their Importance to Professional Practice

The values of respect, empathy, integrity, and equality are core values of EY professionals. Respect is that which recognizes the individuality of every child, and empathy is that which makes practitioners recognize a variety of emotional needs, including those of a child with autism (Gasper, 2015). Integrity provides ethical decision-making, such as the ability to keep

things confidential, and equality results in inclusive practices, which are in line with the National Minimum Standards of Regulated Childcare in the Welsh Government (2023).

Such values are essential as they determine the conduct and relations of the practitioners, and they constitute the ethical core of the professional practice. As an example, a value-based approach would provide equity to the allocation of resources and address the needs of disadvantaged children (Social Care Wales, 2017). Values also promote trust among families and co-workers, and this increases the bond of the team. The practice will become inconsistent without a proper value system, which can easily disenfranchise vulnerable children (Miller, 2008). In the dynamic EY contexts, as McMahon and Dyer (2018) argue, value-oriented professionals can be more flexible and adaptable.

Communication and Relationships in Professional Practice and Meeting the Needs of Children

The importance of EY practice is largely influenced by good communications and relationships. Communication, which includes verbal, non-verbal, and written communication, can guarantee clarity in conveying the developmental observations to the parent or the peers (Gasper, 2015). Through trust and reliability, relationships ensure safe attachments to children, which is the foundation of emotional development according to the attachment theory (McGillivray, 2008).

These are crucial to fulfilling personal needs, like the need to help a child overcome his/her anxiety through comforting conversations or providing support to a child who does not talk verbally. Inclusive needs are addressed by ensuring that a collaborative relationship is established with various families, ensuring that cultural sensitivities are considered (Welsh Government, 2017). According to Miller (2008), poor communication may result in misunderstanding, including the interpretation of the behavioral signals of a child, and weak relationships may interfere with trust, which will impact the sense of safety among a child. Data presented by CMAJ (2018) point to the fact that relational competence enhances the results, and children placed in favorable conditions demonstrate social competencies 30 times more effectively (Perez, 2019).

Professional practice requires in-depth knowledge of child development, pedagogy, and legal frameworks. To develop effective interventions, practitioners need to be aware of milestones, learning theories (such as scaffolding of Vygotsky), and curriculum goals (McMahon and Dyer 2018). Child protection legislation and risk assessment are essential elements of knowledge protection, and one must be aware of child abuse or neglect indicators (Welsh Government, 2023).

This knowledge will help meet the needs of an individual, like modifying activities for a child diagnosed with dyspraxia, and protection will provide the safety of every child. According to estimates by Social Care Wales (2017), trained practitioners had decreased safeguarding incidences by 25 per cent due to proactive monitoring. In the absence of such knowledge, practice is more of a response than a proactive measure, with the risk of neglecting the so-called subtle signs of abuse, such as withdrawal (Dyer, 2018). This competency can be maintained through continuous professional development (CPD), which is required by the Welsh Government (2017), and through which practitioners can keep up with changes of interest.

Partnership and Multi-Agency Working in Professional Practice

The cooperation with parents and health visitors, as well as social services, along with multi-agency collaboration, assists in EY practice as it promotes the incorporation of expertise in various fields. Parents can give information on the home life of a child, whereas agencies such as speech therapists can offer special assistance in delays in communication (Gasper, 2015). The workforce plan for Early Years released by the Welsh Government (2017) puts a focus on this strategy of collaboration, holistically addressing complex needs.

This is of paramount importance to inclusivity, where a child with a disability is provided with coordinated care, or a multilingual child enjoys the help of language support. Other common features of multi-agency work include the sharing of resources, and these minimize shortfalls in service delivery (McMahon and Dyer, 2018).

This cycle makes it inclusive because it makes sure that all children are monitored, including those with special educational needs (SEN), and accommodates the different learning styles. According to Social Care Wales (2017), it removes the achievement gaps by 15 per cent using customized plans. Otherwise, in the absence of this process, practice runs the risk of generic approaches, not registering individual progress or regression signs, including the disengagement of a child (Gasper, 2015). It promotes responsibility, which is in line with the standards of the EYFS, and it serves the purpose of CPD through reflecting effectiveness (Welsh Government, 2023).

Principles of the UNCRC in Informing Professional Practice and Their Importance

Survival, development, protection, and participation of rights are listed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified in 1989 and embedded in the EY policy. Such principles as non-discrimination (Article 2), best interest of the child (Article 3) and the right to express views (Article 12) are included and, in such a manner, provide equal access to the education system, protection against harm, and a possibility to participate (Welsh Government, 2023). Such values involve a practitioner to create conditions where every child, regardless of their background, disability and circumstances, would be respected and supported.

This puts emphasis on the need to include the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the practice of those professionals working with children. It demonstrates how such inclusive initiatives as providing children with disabilities with an opportunity to engage in play or using culturally sensitive storytelling as a way of helping refugee children to overcome their trauma enable children to be more assertive in their choices and build their self-esteem (Perez, 2019). These rights are important not only in legitimating the needs of children, but also in disciplining practitioners to international levels, so that no child would be left unattended, or under the impacts of systemic prejudices. The UNCRC principles focus on protection, educating professionals in identifying and addressing indications of abuse or neglect, which avoids major legal outcomes and creates conditions of healthy development (McMahon and Dyer, 2018).

Atmospheres that follow the principles of UNCRC have demonstrated a 35% rise in the well-being of children, which leads to the positive results of emotional and social outcomes (Perez, 2019). Moreover, these principles will encourage inclusivity, where the needs of the various groups, including ethnically marginalized children or those in low-income families, should be supported by using personalized interventions (Welsh Government, 2023). Overall, adherence to the framework enhances not only individual child outcomes but also fosters a culture of equity and respect within early years (EY) professionalism.

Conclusion

The practice of EY is a complex task; it needs such values as empathy and integrity to manage trust, good communication and relations to address emotional needs, and profound knowledge, such as safeguarding, to protect safety and growth. The multi-agency work and partnership approach meets the needs that are complex, and the observation cycle facilitates the customised planning, and the UNCRC principles promote rights-based care. Combined, these factors will see the individual and inclusive needs addressed, which will lead to fair results. To maintain this impact, practitioners need to adopt CPD and policy alignment that will align with changes in the future that will include digital integration, thereby supporting the responsibility of the profession to all children.

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