

A Personal Development Plan is a useful way of reflecting on your existing skills, and identifying skills that you wish to develop further.

I have many years of experience of working in the Early Years in various settings. I currently work as a Higher Level Teaching Assistant, but would like to become an Early Years Teacher, requiring me to complete a degree. In my setting, as part of our Continuing Professional Development, we have been reading 'When the adult changes everything changes' (Dix, 2017), which I have found particularly inspiring, and has led to me questioning my own practice.

Objective	How will I achieve this objective?	What will be required to achieve this objective?	Target date for achieving this objective	Success criteria
Consider my own interactions within my setting, and their potential impact on children's behaviour.	To allow me to fully consider my own impact on children's behaviour, I will need to reflect on my own values, beliefs and bias, and how these influence my interactions with the children that I work with.	I will reread the book; 'When the adults change, everything changes', Paul Dix (2017) and reflect on my own practice, and consider why I choose specific words, phrases, and actions in my interactions with children in my setting.	December 2023	I intend to have initially considered my own practice by December 2023, but as "Personal Development Planning is an ongoing process rather than a one-off event" (Cottrell, 2021, p6), I believe that it will be necessary to continually review my own interactions and consider the impact of them.
Complete the BA Early Years Education and Care Degree.	To complete the BA Early Years Education and Care Degree, I will ensure that I attend every University session, and fully engage with the content. I will also ensure that I complete every assignment on time, and to the best of my ability.	To complete the BA Early Years Education and Care Degree, I will require support from Lecturers, in addition to the various course materials available on Moodle and a vast quantity of reading material available on the online library.	Summer 2025	I will have achieved my goal of completing the BA Early Years Education and Care Degree if I pass every assessment.
Use my recent Makaton training to embed Makaton in my setting and support colleagues with learning Makaton.	To support my colleagues with learning Makaton, I will lead an after school CPD session. To start to embed Makaton in my setting, I will support staff to use Makaton within the setting and produce Makaton symbols for 'toilet', 'wash hands' and 'drink' to display in the setting and start to refer to.	To support colleagues, I will need to refer to the handbooks I received when I completed Makaton training. To produce resources with Makaton symbols, I will require the InPrint software.	Staff CPD 7/11/23. Resources displayed in setting from 8/11/23. Review January 2024.	After half a term of using Makaton, I will review how this is going with our Early Years lead. If the initial 3 signs are being used consistently, we hope to introduce further signs and consider a Makaton session for parents.

Part 2 Reflective practice within the early years

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection is when you critically evaluate your practice. Reflective practice is when you adapt your practice based on your reflections, thus improving your future practice, which you will then reflect upon again, and the cycle will continue, causing your practice to continually evolve, based on your reflections.

Hanson (2012) states how “Reflective practice is an active engagement in continual review...”

Reflection can be collaborative, when practitioners reflect together.

Why is reflective practice important to Early Years Practice?

Reflective practice is essential for early years practitioners, to enable them to critically evaluate their skills and knowledge, and recognise their strengths and weaknesses, to allow them to undertake future development that will best support them in their role. Reflective practice also enables practitioners to reflect upon their interactions with children, families and colleagues, and to consider their impact and how they might improve future interactions. Furthermore, reflective practice is a useful tool to use to evaluate the curriculum and the environment. The Department for Education (2023) talks about “enabling environments”. Reflective practice can support practitioners to ensure that their environment is the best possible environment to support children in their learning.

The theory of reflective practice

John Dewey was the first person to write about reflective practice, making the link between experience and reflection on it. Dewey recognised that experience alone might not necessarily lead to learning, if reflection of the experience is not undertaken. Dewey identified two types of action; routine action and reflective action. Routine actions are unlikely to change, as they are guided by traditions or set requirements. Reflective actions are more flexible, and open to change through constant evaluation.

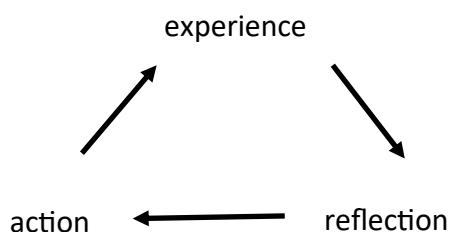
Dewey observed the inherent capacity of children to learn and championed the active role of children in their own education, stating that “growth is not something done to them; it is something they do” (Dewey, 1916).

Donald Schon, built on the work of Dewey, and identified reflection on action, where practitioners reflect after the event and consider how to make improvements, and reflection in action, where practitioners reflect as something happens, and take immediate action to make improvements.

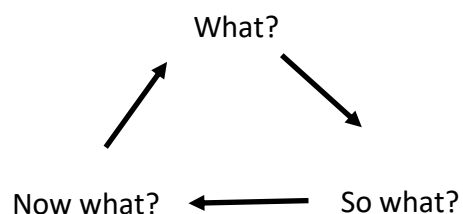
Models of Reflection

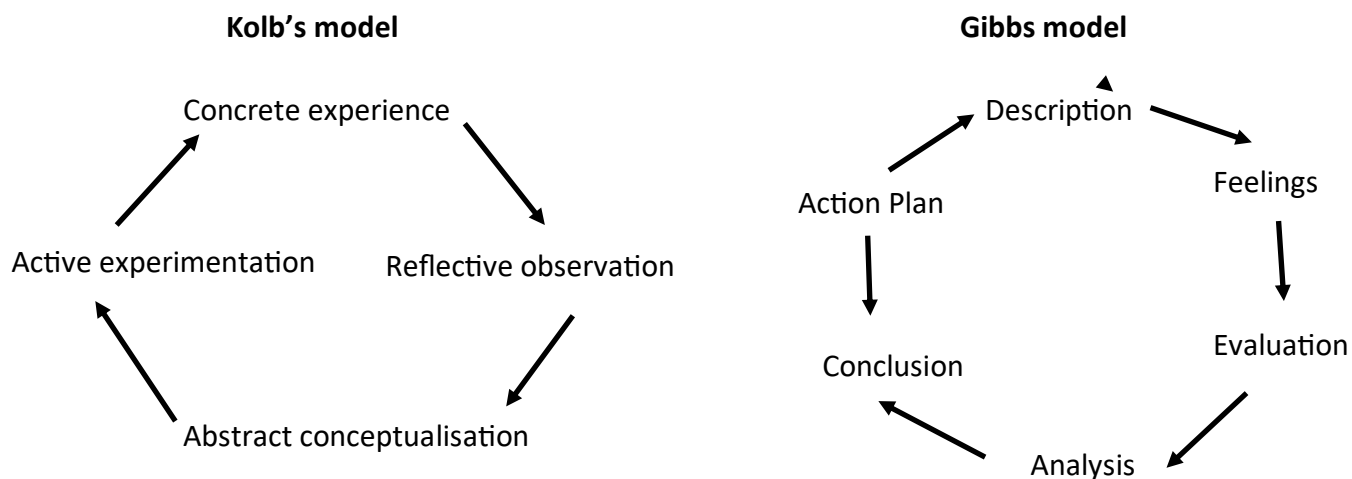
There are several models of reflection to assist practitioners with the process of being reflective. Each model, although similar, vary in the number of steps and details required.

The ERA model



Driscoll's model





Analysis of models of reflection

The ERA model and Driscoll's model are similar in that they only have three stages, making them simple to follow. Kolb's model has an additional stage, and Gibbs' model has two additional stages.

Both the ERA and Driscoll models will take less time to work through, but they will generate less information. The additional information generated by the additional stages in Gibbs' model, may be useful, but it may be time consuming, more complicated to follow, and all the stages may not be applicable. Gibbs' model is the only model to refer to feelings, consequently feelings are not examined in the other models.

Hanson and Appleby (2015) are sceptical about models like that of Kolb, that do "...not support a deeply critical, holistic and multi-perspective approach to informed decision making and improvement in practice". Bergsteiner et al. (2010) agree that Kolb's model is flawed, discussing the "highly muddled typology of what constitutes concrete and abstract learning"

All four models provide a useful structure to aid reflection, but they could be restrictive, as they imply that each stage must be completed chronologically.

There are other methods for undertaking reflection, such as reflecting in a diary, or learning journal, or peer reflection, where practitioners reflect together.

Conclusion

Reflective practice is an essential skill for the early years practitioner, to enable their practice to continually evolve, based on their reflections. Practitioners who are able to continually improve their practice, are the most effective practitioners.

There are several models of reflection for practitioners to use to reflect on their practice. Gibbs' reflective model is the most detailed model. Its design lends itself to a continuous cycle of reflection, in addition to acknowledging the importance of feelings in reflection, unlike other models. The additional stage of action planning also adds to the comprehensiveness of the model, through prompting practitioners to plan for potential obstacles.

Part 3 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.

Early Years Practitioners must be professional practitioners. There has been much debate about what a professional practitioner is. Chalk (2013) believes that it is important to take a pedagogical approach to professional practice, whereas Lloyd and Hallet (2010) favour a more traditional framework, inclusive of the monopolisation of specific skills and knowledge, with restricted access to accreditation to practice, and the solidarity of members. Chalke however, believes that supporting practitioners to critically reflect on their practice, can lead to best practice, irrespective of any qualifications that a practitioner may have. McGillivray (2008) discusses the complex nature of “professional identity”.

There has been a change over recent years to integrate early education with care provision. Chalke (2013) discusses how this change began with the Department for Education’s Childcare Strategy in 1997, and the introduction of universal entitlement for early education for all three and four year olds, as well as the establishment of frameworks to provide guidelines for children’s learning and development. Early education and not just providing care is now the responsibility of all early years practitioners.

Professional practice is concerned with the attitudes and behaviours exhibited professionally. Professional practice includes professional conduct, including how practitioners dress, speak and behave. Practitioners must adhere to a staff code of conduct and adhere to policies and procedures determined by their setting.

There are many values that are essential for early years professional practitioners. They must have respect for themselves and every child, as well as their families, the wider community and other professionals. Professional practitioners must be honest and act with integrity, ensuring that they treat every child fairly, and ensure transparency. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023) sets the standards that all early years practitioners must meet and states that every child is unique and must have their individual needs met. Professional practitioners must be receptive to the needs of all children, using their knowledge of the individual child as well as their knowledge of child development to ensure that they support every child to learn and develop in an enabling environment. The Department for Education (2023) emphasises the role of the ‘key person’ being essential for children’s emotional needs to be met and to enable learning to happen (p.28).

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2023) also states that “children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers” (p.7). It is therefore very important that professional early years practitioners ensure that they develop strong links with home, finding out about the child’s interests and needs, to aid transition and to enable the child to feel secure and have their needs met. Professional practitioners can also support parents and carers to best support their child’s learning at home, as well as signpost support for parents and carers if this is required.

In addition to forging good relationships with parents and carers, the professional practitioner must also work well with other professionals, and know how and when to seek specialist support to best support a child if they have special educational needs or a disability (SEND). Professional practitioners must also adhere to the Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (2015). Effective multi-agency working is essential to ensure that the individual needs of a child are met, and everyone has a moral and legal responsibility to safeguard children. Early Years practitioners have a legal responsibility to have read Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023) and be aware of the signs of abuse and how to safeguard children. Professional practitioners may work alongside a range of professionals, such as social workers, educational psychologists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, family support workers, occupational therapists, as well as various other professionals.

There have been several serious case reviews that have highlighted poor communication between different agencies and professionals, resulting in the inability to prevent children from being harmed. The Laming report (2003), which reflected on the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, resulted in the introduction of the Common Assessment Framework, to be used by all professionals, and the setting up of Local Safeguarding Children Boards. The Bichard Inquiry, which followed the tragic deaths of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, resulted in the introduction of enhanced CRB, then enhanced DBS, checks to ensure the suitability of those professionals working with children.

In order to work effectively with children, their families and other professionals, professional practitioners must be excellent communicators. Dunhill et al. (2009) explore the importance of effective communication with children in early years setting, noting how poor communication can have a detrimental impact on children's progress. Professional practitioners must give due consideration to how they communicate non-verbally as well as the words they use. Brain and Mukherji (2005) found that nonverbal communication can actually contradict verbal messages, leading to confusion. Professional practitioners should ensure that they make eye contact with children when speaking, and they should consider their posture, body positioning and the tone and pitch of their speech. Children who speak English as an additional language should be supported through visual representations and assisted with language acquisition to enable them to communicate their needs.

There have been several studies into effective early years education, including the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project in 2002, which was a major European study, examining the effectiveness of Early education, which was followed by the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (2002) to study more closely twelve of the settings where excellent progress had been made by children. The study found that settings were most effective, if they encouraged sustained shared thinking. Professional practitioners should closely observe the children in their care, noticing their interests, existing knowledge, gaps in their skills or knowledge, and then plan activities or provide resources, or knowledge to assist the child to make progress. There should be a cycle of observation, planning how best to support the child, then evaluation of how this went, followed by planning again how now to best support the child and so on.

The right of all children to have the best possible start in life is not only outlined in the Statutory Framework, it is also outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice, as well as in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, where there are 54 articles, outlining the rights of children.

Professional Practice is essential to ensure that the rights and needs of all children are met. Sensitive, professional practitioners are best placed to support children and their families, but research by The Early Years Alliance (2021) has found that early years professionals are often "underpaid, undervalued and overlooked" (p.3), this is a very serious concern if the needs of all children are to be met, and they are given the opportunity to thrive.

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