

ECEY4009 Professional Practitioner

Part 1:

Professionalism in any role relies heavily on effective communication skills. Clear and precise communication not only enhances productivity but also ensures that tasks are understood and carried out accurately. In a childcare setting, this is particularly important, as it guarantees that all staff members are fully aware of children's needs, any concerns that arise, and the appropriate actions to take. Honest and transparent communication is essential to prevent misunderstandings or the spread of misinformation, fostering trust and credibility among colleagues. Demonstrating integrity in professional interactions also models positive behaviour for children, helping them understand the importance of honesty and ethical conduct. Professional practice also requires establishing clear boundaries between staff and children. Boundaries provide a safe and respectful environment, ensuring both staff and children feel secure while promoting effective learning. Additionally, professionalism involves possessing the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to fulfil the role competently. Experience allows practitioners to understand expectations, adapt to challenges, and support children's development effectively. Commitment and genuine interest in working with children are equally important, as they influence children's engagement, sense of responsibility, and ownership of their learning. Overall, professionalism combines effective communication, ethical behaviour, competence, and dedication to create a supportive and productive learning environment for all.

As a professional, I aim to enhance my confidence in addressing problems with colleagues or voicing my disagreement on certain matters. At times, I find it challenging or uncomfortable to mention something I've heard that feels inappropriate or wrong to discuss in school. When I have concerns regarding a child, I report them immediately without hesitation; however, for minor issues that still seem worth reporting, I become anxious about sharing that information with the headteacher, as I feel like an informant. I become concerned that it could result in a conflict with a staff member when that is not my intention. I also intend to improve my referencing abilities; I possess a fundamental grasp of referencing and the Harvard referencing system, yet I require a deeper comprehension of citations and referencing to reference correctly without referring to the guidebook.

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?)
Complete my PGCE	- Complete my degree and graduate - Work hard and develop time management skills	- A degree - Level 4 childcare	2028	- I will have a degree - I will graduate - Placements

Develop my Welsh language skills	- Attend a day time skills course - Practice basic welsh sentences - Use incidental welsh phrases to the children - Attend a welsh language professional session or online course	- Start duolingo or another language app - Practice welsh I already know and make it more natural to use - Attend Cymraeg Gwaith or SaySomethingInWelsh	2028	- I will have an expanded welsh vocabulary - I will use welsh confidently and naturally in the classroom - I demonstrate a confident and accurate pronunciation - Evidence my progress through self-reflection logs
Supporting self-regulation (Co-regulation)	- Attend a course - Research strategies and information	- A course - Research reliable websites	As soon as possible	- I will use the strategies I have learnt from the course I attended - I will use information from my research - I will try out different strategies and see how the child responds and see if there is anything I need to change

Part 2: (971 words)

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection in education means thinking carefully about teaching experiences to understand what worked, what didn't, and why. Dewey (1933) described reflection as an active and thoughtful process that helps learners and teachers make sense of their experiences. Schön (1983) developed this idea through the concept of reflective practice, explaining how professionals reflect both during an activity (reflection-in-action) and afterwards (reflection-on-action). In schools, reflective practice helps teachers recognise patterns in classroom behaviour, adapt strategies, and improve pupil learning. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle supports this process by showing how experience, reflection, and experimentation link together to create professional growth. Pollard (2019) also argues that reflection transforms everyday teaching into intentional, evidence-informed practice. Reflective practice is an essential part of professional development and aligns closely with the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021), which expect teachers to evaluate and improve their teaching continuously. Overall, reflection and reflective practice allow teachers to connect theory to real classroom experiences and become more effective practitioners.

Why is reflective practice important in early years practice?

Reflective practice is fundamental to effective Early Years education because it enables practitioners to critically evaluate their interactions, planning, and learning environments to support young children's development. According to Schön (1983), reflective practice allows professionals to analyse both immediate actions and experiences after the event, promoting continual professional growth. In the early years context, reflecting on teaching strategies and child responses helps practitioners understand individual needs and adapt activities to support cognitive, social, and emotional development (Dewey, 1933; Pollard, 2019). Nutbrown (2018) highlights that reflection fosters responsive pedagogy, ensuring that learning experiences are tailored and inclusive, while also encouraging practitioners to consider how their own beliefs, assumptions, and behaviour influence children's learning. Additionally, reflective practice supports adherence to statutory frameworks, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which emphasises observation, assessment, and evaluation to enhance educational outcomes (Department for Education, 2021). By engaging in reflective practice, early years practitioners become more self-aware and flexible enabling them to provide high-quality learning experiences and to continually improve their professional practice.

The theory of reflective practice

The theory of reflective practice is central to teaching because it helps educators think carefully about their experiences and improve their professional skills. Schön (1983) described reflective practice as a process that happens both during teaching, called reflection-in-action, and afterwards, called reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action allows teachers to make immediate adjustments in the classroom, while reflection-on-action gives time to analyse what worked, what didn't, and why. This approach builds on Dewey's (1933) idea that reflection is an active, thoughtful process linking experience to learning. In practice, reflective theory encourages teachers and Early Years practitioners to consider how their own decisions, beliefs, and interactions influence children's learning and engagement (Pollard, 2019). Kolb's

(1984) experiential learning cycle complements this theory by showing how experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation form a continuous loop of professional growth. By using reflective practice, educators can plan lessons more effectively, respond sensitively to children's needs, and adapt their strategies to improve learning outcomes. Overall, the theory provides a structured way for practitioners to learn from experience, ensuring that teaching becomes increasingly informed, intentional, and responsive.

Analysis of models

Reflective practice is essential in Early Years education, helping practitioners evaluate their teaching and improve outcomes for young children. Several models provide structured approaches, each with advantages and limitations. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) is widely used in early years settings because it offers a clear six stage process: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. This structure supports trainees in systematically reflecting on lessons, observations, and interactions with children, ensuring both personal responses and objective evaluation are considered. Its clarity and step-by-step approach make it particularly accessible for less experienced practitioners. However, some critics note that it can feel formulaic, potentially restricting deeper critical thinking (Moon, 2004).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) emphasises a continuous loop of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. In early years practice, this model helps practitioners link theory to practice, enabling them to adapt activities based on observations of children's learning. Its flexibility supports ongoing professional development, yet it may be less intuitive for beginners who are still developing reflective skills.

Schön's model (1983) introduces reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, encouraging practitioners to reflect both during and after activities. This is particularly valuable in early years classrooms, where practitioners must make quick, responsive decisions to support children's engagement and well-being. While highly effective for fostering professional judgment, Schön's approach is less structured, which can be challenging for new trainees needing guidance.

In comparison, Gibbs offers a structured approach suitable for beginners, Kolb supports learning through cycles linking theory and practice, and Schön prioritises real-time adaptability. Each model has strengths and limitations, and early years practitioners often benefit from combining these approaches. For example, using Gibbs to structure reflection after a lesson, Kolb to connect observations to learning theory, and Schön to adapt strategies in the moment, ensures reflective practice is both systematic and responsive, supporting high quality teaching and positive outcomes for young children (Pollard, 2019; Nutbrown, 2018).

Conclusion

In summary, each reflective model offers unique strengths and challenges for Early Years practice. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle provides a clear, structured framework ideal for beginners, ensuring reflection is systematic and actionable. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle emphasises the connection between experience and theory, supporting ongoing professional growth, but may be less intuitive for beginners. Schön's reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action encourages adaptability and professional judgment in dynamic classroom settings, though it offers limited

structure for those still developing reflective skills. Therefore, effective reflective practice in early years education often involves combining elements from these models: using structured approaches for clarity, cycles for theory-informed learning, and real time reflection for responsive practice. By integrating these models, practitioners can reflect more deeply, make informed decisions, and continuously enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Part 3: (1579 words)

Professional practice in education refers to the behaviours, values, and standards that guide teachers in providing high quality learning experiences. A professional is someone who demonstrates specialised knowledge, ethical conduct, and commitment to continual development within their field (Eraut, 1994). In teaching, professionalism extends beyond subject expertise; it includes reflective practice, collaboration, and adherence to ethical and statutory frameworks that safeguard and promote children's learning and well-being (Day, 2000). According to Sachs (2001), being a professional involves balancing accountability to standards with autonomy and moral responsibility. The Department for Education (DfE, 2021) defines professional practice through the Teachers' Standards, which require educators to uphold high expectations, manage behaviour effectively, and engage in professional development. Pollard (2019) argues that professionalism in education is dynamic, evolving through experience and reflection rather than being a fixed state. Therefore, professional practice encompasses both what teachers do and how they think about and improve their work. This essay will explore the meaning of professional practice, the qualities that define a professional, and how reflective practice underpins professional growth in early years education.

Values are the guiding principles that shape how professionals think, act, and make decisions. In education, they underpin ethical and effective practice, influencing how practitioners build relationships, promote inclusion, and support children's development. According to the Department for Education (DfE, 2021), professional practitioners are expected to demonstrate integrity, respect, care, and commitment to promoting the welfare of all learners. These values ensure that professional actions are consistent with both moral and statutory expectations. Pollard (2019) suggests that values act as a compass for professional judgment, helping teachers navigate complex classroom situations where there may not be a single correct answer. Similarly, Campbell (2003) argues that professional values such as fairness, honesty, and empathy are essential for ethical decision making and the creation of a positive learning environment. In early years practice, values like respect, compassion, and inclusivity are central to fostering secure, nurturing relationships and supporting holistic development (Nutbrown, 2018). Reflective practice allows professionals to examine how their personal values align with professional standards, promoting self-awareness and ethical consistency (Day, 2000). Ultimately, values are important to professional practice because they build trust, guide behaviour, and ensure that practitioners act in the best interests of the children and families they serve.

Effective communication and positive relationships are central to professional practice and essential for meeting the diverse needs of children. According to Roffey (2015), strong relationships between adults and children form the foundation for

emotional security, trust, and engagement in learning. In early years settings, communication is not only verbal but also includes tone, body language, and active listening, all of which help practitioners understand children's emotions and intentions (Nutbrown, 2018). The Department for Education (DfE, 2021) highlights that clear communication and collaboration with colleagues, parents, and carers are key aspects of professional responsibility and safeguarding. Building effective relationships supports inclusion and ensures that practitioners respond to each child's individual needs, helping them feel valued and understood (Tassoni, 2014). Positive interactions also model respectful communication, supporting children's social and emotional development. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory emphasises that a child's development is shaped by the quality of relationships within and beyond the immediate environment. For practitioners, maintaining open, respectful communication strengthens partnerships with families and other professionals, ensuring consistency in care and learning. Therefore, communication and relationships are not just interpersonal skills but professional tools that underpin reflective, ethical, and child centred practice.

Having in-depth knowledge and understanding is fundamental to professional practice because it enables practitioners to make informed decisions, respond effectively to children's needs, and ensure their safety and well-being. Eraut (1994) emphasises that professional competence relies on a strong knowledge base that integrates theory, practice, and judgment. In education, this includes understanding child development, pedagogy, safeguarding procedures, and relevant legislation. According to the Department for Education (DfE, 2021), professionals must use this knowledge to create safe and supportive environments where all children can thrive. Safeguarding is a particularly critical area where in-depth understanding is essential. Practitioners must recognise signs of abuse, neglect, or harm, and know how to respond appropriately following safeguarding policies. Munro (2011) argues that professional knowledge in safeguarding goes beyond compliance; it requires critical reflection, sound judgment, and awareness of the child's context. Similarly, Nutbrown (2018) highlights that early years professionals must apply their understanding of child development to identify subtle changes in behaviour that might indicate concern. Without this depth of knowledge, practitioners risk failing to protect children or meet their developmental and emotional needs. Therefore, maintaining up to date professional knowledge through training, reflection, and collaboration is vital for effective teaching, ethical decision making, and fulfilling the professional responsibility to safeguard and promote children's welfare.

Partnership and multi-agency working are essential aspects of professional practice because they ensure that children receive holistic support that meets their educational, emotional, and safeguarding needs. No single professional holds all the expertise or information required to fully support a child; therefore, collaboration between educators, health professionals, social workers, and families is crucial (DfE, 2018). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, a child's development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, meaning effective communication between these systems directly impacts well-being and learning. Partnership working allows professionals to share knowledge and coordinate interventions, reducing duplication and ensuring consistent care. Rodd (2013) emphasises that strong partnerships are built on trust, respect, and shared values, which lead to better decision making and outcomes for children. Multi-agency

collaboration is particularly vital in safeguarding, where timely information sharing can prevent harm and protect vulnerable children (Munro, 2011). In early years, partnership also extends to parents and carers, recognising them as children's first educators and key contributors to learning and development (Nutbrown, 2018). Ultimately, effective partnership and multi-agency working strengthen professional practice by promoting collective responsibility, improving communication, and ensuring that every aspect of a child's well-being is considered. Working collaboratively helps practitioners provide more inclusive, informed, and child centred support.

The observation and planning cycle is central to professional practice in early years education, as it enables practitioners to understand each child's development, plan purposeful learning experiences, and evaluate progress. According to the Department for Education (DfE, 2021), effective teaching in the early years Foundation Stage (EYFS) relies on continuous observation, accurate assessment, and responsive planning that reflects children's individual interests and stages of development. Observation allows practitioners to notice how children play, interact, and explore, providing insights into their needs, strengths, and emerging skills (Nutbrown, 2018). Assessment transforms these observations into meaningful information, helping practitioners identify next steps and potential areas for support or extension. Tassoni (2014) emphasises that this process is not merely about recording progress but about interpreting what learning is taking place and how to scaffold it effectively. Planning then builds upon this understanding, ensuring that activities are inclusive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate. Reflection is woven throughout this cycle, encouraging practitioners to adapt their approach, evaluate outcomes, and collaborate with parents and other professionals to ensure consistency of support (Pollard, 2019). By engaging thoughtfully in the observation and planning cycle, practitioners uphold professional standards of responsiveness, inclusivity, and intentional teaching ensuring that every child's needs, voice, and potential are recognised and nurtured.

The principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1989) form a vital foundation for professional practice in education and Early Years settings. The UNCRC outlines the rights of every child to be protected, valued, and heard, promoting inclusion, equality, and respect. Central articles such as Article 3, the child's best interests; Article 12, the right to express views; and Article 28, the right to education provide a moral and legal framework guiding professional behaviour. According to the Department for Education (DfE, 2021), educators have a duty to uphold these principles through inclusive teaching, safeguarding, and respect for children's individuality. Embedding the UNCRC into professional practice encourages practitioners to view children as active participants in their own learning rather than passive recipients (Lansdown, 2010). This perspective supports child-centred approaches and reflective practice, ensuring that decisions are made with the child's voice and rights in mind (Nutbrown, 2018). Furthermore, aligning professional conduct with the UNCRC helps build trusting relationships and promotes equality, empathy, and accountability within educational settings (Pollard, 2019). Understanding and applying these principles is therefore essential for creating safe, inclusive environments where every child can flourish, reinforcing the professional responsibility to protect and promote children's rights and well-being.

In conclusion, professional practice in education is grounded in values, knowledge, and reflective understanding that enable practitioners to provide high-quality, ethical care and education. Professionalism is more than fulfilling a role; it involves upholding integrity, respect, and commitment to children's well-being and learning. Effective communication and strong relationships underpin this work, allowing practitioners to understand and respond to children's individual needs while fostering trust and inclusion. Equally, in-depth professional knowledge particularly in areas such as safeguarding ensures that children are protected and supported within a safe environment. Collaboration through partnership and multi-agency working further enhances professional practice, as shared expertise leads to more holistic support for children and families. Reflection allows practitioners to continuously improve and adapt their practice, integrating theory with experience. Finally, the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) provide the ethical foundation for all professional actions, reminding practitioners that children's voices, rights, and best interests must always come first. Together, these elements form the essence of effective professional practice ensuring education is not only competent, but compassionate, inclusive, and responsive to every child.

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