

What do I know already / What have I learnt so far?

BTEC National Diploma in Early Years. Higher Level Teaching Assistant Status. Language and Play training. Elklan Lets Talk with Under 5s Training. Foundation Learning Leaders Training.

What do I want to develop?

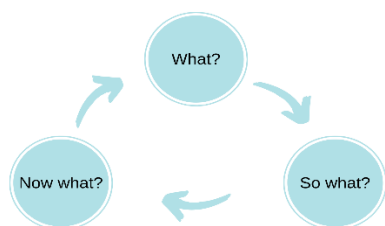
I would like to develop my digital skills to help with my progression in the degree. I would also like to develop my interaction skills with parents as this would help me to deliver the Language and Play programme more effectively. I would also like to develop my knowledge of the Welsh language to enable me to help children develop their Welsh vocabulary.

Objective	Actions	Resources	Target Date	Success criteria
To improve my digital skills and become more confident in using a device.	I have applied for the digital bursary to enable me to have a suitable device to complete the degree. Once I have received it, I will practice using the device and if I feel that I need more help, I will then contact digiskills.uwtsd.ac.uk to arrange a study skills session to help me gain more knowledge and a better understanding. I have already gained some digital advice from my ICT coordinator at work.	I will need the financial support via the digital bursary to purchase the device. I will then need a new device and the appropriate software required for the degree. Once this has been achieved and I have determined whether I need more help to gain more confidence and skills, I will then need to book the digital skills training session if required.	Before the beginning of the next half term. (6 th November 2023)	I will feel more confident in using a device and the software that is needed and this will allow me to progress with less digital challenges in my degree. If ever I recognise that I am still having difficulty with my digital competencies or a different issue arises, that I am not confident in, I will ensure to book in another session with the digital skills advisors.
To plan and deliver six, one-hour sessions of the Language and Play programme with nursery children and their parents, covering the importance of talk, talking and playing in everyday situations, out and about, everyday routines, songs and rhymes and early writing.	I will plan the sessions during my own time, ensuring that I include activities that are fun and engaging for both children and their parents. I will gather all the resources needed during this time. I will liaise with my line manager to agree on a time to deliver the programme that suits all members of staff included.	I will gain support from the nursery teacher and my line manager to ensure all activities I plan are suitable and accessible to the children and their parents. I will ensure that there is a classroom free at the desired time to enable a space for the programme to be delivered. I will try to use resources that are readily available at school to ensure that there is as little cost to the school as possible.	End of spring term 2023. (31 st March 2023)	I will ask parents to fill out an evaluation form of the six sessions delivered to gain an understanding of how the programme impacted them and their children. This will enable me to recognise if it was successful or not. I will then review the forms to decide if there are any amendments or alterations I need to make before the next time I deliver the programme.

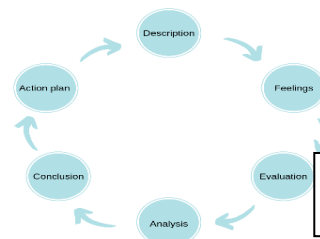
What is reflection and reflective practice? According to Brock (2015) reflection and reflective practice are main principles of professionals and are extremely important to professional training. It is particularly important in education and has become a requirement within professional practice. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) say that reflection is important for ensuring that a person has a better insight and allows a more extensive knowledge that then leads to better personal and professional development. Social Care Wales (2018) explain that reflection on one's professional practice is important for their continuing professional development. They believe that it should be an on-going development of one's professional knowledge and skills that continues throughout a person's working life. They also suggest that people should use daily experiences as learning opportunities and be committed to update their knowledge and skills and strive to achieve professionalism in all that they do. To progress with training and keep knowledge and skills up to date, Social Care Wales (2018) claim that it is essential to record any continuing professional development. This could be done using a personal development plan that would state what knowledge and skills a person already has, what they would like to achieve, support they might need, target dates and how they would know that the outcome has been achieved. The goals on a personal development plan should be "SMART", S for specific, M for measurable, A for achievable, R for realistic and relevant and T for timely. (Martinelli 2017).

Why is reflective practice so important to Early Years practice? Brock (2015) believes that being a reflective practitioner is important to early years practice so that one can improve on their own teaching or planning to ensure that their provision is appropriate, accessible and enjoyable to all children in their care. She argues that reflective practice "should be continual and on-going, a real part of life and not just an abstract or temporal exercise". Social Care Wales (2018) argue that it is extremely important to ensure that a person can stay up to date with training and learning that is offered to enable them to provide the best care, support and education possible to the children that they care for. Van Braak *et al.* (2022) suggests that collaborative reflection is also a very important part of reflective practice in Early Years practice. It allows a person to gain skills, knowledge and attitudes from other practitioners whilst gaining a deeper reflection. They say that practitioners from all levels can learn from each other. To enable reflection upon practice one must have the ability to reason, the ability to problem solve, be able to evaluate issues that arise and accept constructive feedback from other practitioners. A person should also enable themselves to consider the views and opinions of others and think reflectively to ensure they are able to improve provision and practice. (Hallet 2012).

The theory of reflective practice. Schon (2016) suggests that a reflective practitioner will find a situation that is uncertain and then by reflecting on it and trying to understand, they can generate a new understanding which can then develop the progression and make a change in the situation. The theory of Donald Schons reflective practice suggests that there are two types of reflection. They are reflection in action and reflection on action. He says that reflecting in action is reflecting as something is happening and that a person should think about what has happened, decide what they are going to do about the situation and then act accordingly, immediately. He points out that reflecting on action is reflecting later, after something has happened and that a person should then rethink about what had happened and then consider what would need to change in future. For example, if a child was playing with a toy that broke and it proved to be dangerous, the reflection in action would be to remove the toy immediately to ensure that nobody got hurt. The reflection on action would consist of the practitioner gaining an understanding of how and why the toy broke, finding a way to fix or replace the broken toy and then inventing a way to ensure that it was very unlikely that the accident would happen again. The theory of John Dewey's reflective practice suggests that there are two types of action when considering reflection. He believes that they are routine action and reflective action. He says that routine action is something one must do, for example, follow a law, follow the guidance or follow the curriculum. He says that reflective action is questioning what has been done and why, using reflective questioning or completing an appraisal.



Source: Driscoll's What model (1990) University of Cambridge.



Source: Gibbs's Reflective Cycle (1998) University of Cambridge.

Analysis of models. Driscoll's What model is one of the simpler models of reflection that consists of three different stages. These are all what questions based on the questions Terry Borton asked in the 1970s, What? So What? and Now What? Whereas the Gibbs reflective cycle is a more complex method of reflection containing six different stages. These are known as, description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. (University of Cambridge libraries, no date). Gibbs reflective model offers a deep reflection for practitioners and allows them to develop actions using the strengths and weaknesses established using this model. (Aneeis Hashim et al 2023). University of Cambridge (no date) points out that the Gibbs model encourages one to focus on the thinking and the feeling whilst using the reflective model. Whereas Driscoll's What model asks practitioners to simply describe what happened, think about what they experienced and what they learnt and then lastly, come up with something that they will take from completing the model of reflection. As Driscoll's method only consists of 3 stages this could be seen as a quick and easy method of reflection to use that also provides a useful starting point, whilst Gibbs reflective cycle might take up more time and could be looked at as being too complicated. A benefit from using any model of reflection may be that it keeps the practitioner focused and can provide structure for reflection. (University of Cambridge, no date).

Conclusion. In conclusion, reflective practice is extremely important in the early years sector as it can have a detrimental effect on the learning outcomes of an activity or provision. This also concludes that reflective practice should be an on-going continuum and that a person should aim to progress with the reflection they undertake to ensure that they always improve, whether it be personally or professionally. But one should not forget that they need to find a method of reflection that works best for them and that there may not always be a need for change after reflection.

To be a professional usually means that a person will have certain qualifications or expertise in a specific subject but to be an early years professional it is also the attitudes, values and qualities one holds and demonstrates in practice that can be as great of an importance than a professional with just formal qualifications alone. It is therefore shown that if a practitioner can recognise the needs of a child and understands that a child's development can be linked to some theoretical knowledge, this would optimise the professionalism resulting in best practise for an early years practitioner. (Gasper 2015) and (Perez 2009). Dyer, M.A. (2018) suggests that by politicians introducing more funding for early years practitioners, to allow greater opportunities for them to gain qualifications at degree level and the changes made to the curriculum framework, this could help to improve children's learning outcomes as these skills help to make practitioners more professional. To be a professional practitioner, Miller, L (2008) agrees that one should have a good knowledge and understanding of the setting, children and their families, whilst be able to communicate effectively with them and other multi agency groups. She says that practitioners need to be aware of policies and procedures that are set in place and have a professional knowledge base while being adaptable and ready for any other demands that occur, including being available, accessible and approachable.

Values are what a person thinks are important. Values are at the forefront of one's actions and decisions and underpin all that they do. Different people have different values in life as everybody comes from different backgrounds, and all have different beliefs and needs. (Mindtools 2014). As a professional practitioner it is important that one has core values such as respect, be able to work as part of a team, be able to build positive relationships with children and families, whilst continuing to be a positive role model. (Early Education 2011). Welsh Government (2015) points out that children should be, and should feel safe, that practitioners ensure that all children are cared for, valued and supported in any way that they need to be and that children should be encouraged to become resilient and capable learners. They also agree that children should be healthy and be able to develop in their learning whilst also having the opportunity to not be disadvantaged by or live in poverty. All these values are important to early years practice to ensure that the children are gaining the most from being at the early years setting, whether it be social, emotional or physical needs. This will ensure that practitioners are providing structure and routine to children's lives whilst in their care. (Gasper 2015).

Good communication is extremely important to professional practitioners as it allows for all information regarding a child to be shared correctly between parents/carers, colleagues and other professionals. Good communication will help a practitioner to get to know the whole child and become aware of any needs, likes or dislikes a child has. A practitioner can then use this knowledge to engage a child and make their learning more enjoyable, allowing for development of the child to take place. Practitioners should help to encourage children to communicate their thoughts, feeling and needs. (Welsh Government 2023). Building strong and meaningful relationships is also important for meeting the needs of children. It is important that the child makes good connections with practitioners and that practitioners make good connections with parents or carers whilst building trust between each other. UK government (no date) suggest that practitioners and parents should work together to help find the best way to support the child by sharing knowledge and the understanding of the child's interests.

Professional practice should be supported by an in-depth knowledge and understanding to ensure practitioners are entirely aware of how children learn and develop so that if there are any individual needs or language barriers, these can be recognised, and any further action can then be put in place. Booth and Ainscow (2011, cited Brodie and Savage 2015, p.94) agree that all children should be viewed and treated equally allowing the support offered to also be equal, without discriminating, whilst at the same time, respecting and celebrating diversity appearing in all children. This will allow for inclusion of all children whether the differences be race, religion, gender, ability or any other theme. It is also important that practitioners have an in-depth understanding of any safeguarding or first aid policies and procedures to ensure awareness of how to keep the children as safe as possible. HM Government (2018) suggest that it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard children. They say that practitioners should all be aware of the safeguarding arrangements that have been published by local partners and that everyone should comply with these to help protect children.

Multi-agency working and partnership is important to professional practice so that a practitioner can support the holistic child. A practitioner needs to be able to collaborate with agencies such as social services, the police, health professionals or any additional learning needs teams. Different professionals work together to ensure each child's individual needs are being met. Payler, J and Georgeson, J. (2013) suggest that interprofessional working consists of practitioners from varying professions working together on shared tasks. It is important to collaborate with multi-agency groups to ensure that practitioners can gain the correct help for children with certain needs or barriers to learning. For example, if there are children in the setting who have English as an additional language, also known as EAL, it would be beneficial to them to have a translator present at times. This would then be ensuring that practitioners are meeting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 30, which states that all children have the right to learn and use their home spoken language. (Unicef, 2016).

Observation is an important skill in early years practice as it allows the practitioner to get to know the child holistically, identify the stages of development of each child and recognise any areas of need. Practitioners can then use the information gained, to assist in their planning to help extend the child's learning and ensure that provision is developmentally appropriate to each child. (Barber and Paul-Smith 2010) and (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). It is important that practitioners use a range of methods of observation and that observations are discussed with other colleagues and the information gathered by each professional throughout observing, can then be used for assessments of children's development, learning and achievements. Observations can be used to recognise what children are interested in and what helps to engage them in their learning. (Welsh Government 2022). This is then a useful tool to refer to when looking at planning for future provision. Welsh Government (2022) suggest that observations can be made throughout the day using indoor and outdoor areas of the setting and should include aspects of solitary play and collaborative play.

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as UNCRC, is a declaration that says children have basic human rights that should be respected and promoted by everyone. It has fifty-four articles that are split into four broad categories, the right to life, the right to develop, the right to be protected and the right to participate. All the rights stated in the declaration should be at the heart of everything that practitioners do with, and for the children and should reflect in all guidance, policies, procedures, and throughout the curriculum. These rights should be promoted in all practice. Throughout practice the children's best interests should be paramount and their voice heard at all times, shown in article three and twelve. (Unicef, 2016). Article 31 of the UNCRC (2016) tells people that children have the right to play and relax and take part in a range of activities. This is to ensure that the well-being and development of the child are always a priority. This is reflected in the Welsh Government seven core aims for children, (Children and Young People: Rights to Action 2004), where Wales agrees that play should be a right for children under the core aim 4, play, sport, leisure and cultural activities. Following these principles in all practice will ensure that the rights of the child will always be met as it has been a law in Wales since 2011.

This essay has discussed the significance of different aspects of professional practice and why they are important in meeting the individual and inclusive needs of children. In conclusion, it is important that practitioners use all aspects of practice discussed, to allow the delivery of provision to meet individual needs of children whilst ensuring that the best interests of the child are always the main goal. It is important that the practitioner is always up to date with any changes to policies, procedures and curriculum and guidance to ensure that this is possible. It is also important that all aspects discussed are an ongoing continuum throughout practice. A consistent message shown through the aspects discussed is that working in partnership, whether it be colleagues, parents and carers or other multi-agency groups, is best for the child as it allows for practitioners of all professions to work together to ensure the child is developing holistically whilst most importantly being kept safe and happy at the environment attended.

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