ECEY4009C
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I have not used any AI in this assignment.

The professional practitioner portfolio ECEY4009

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1.

No	Improvement and Development Goals	Success Criteria (How I will know when I have made this change)	The actions I will take to achieve the goal	Timeline	What will this help me to achieve?	Achievements (3 monthly review)
1	**Become more confident using the Welsh language in my role as Teaching Assistant and to further my knowledge.**	I will feel able to communicate with the children effectively in Welsh and be able to use the language everyday confidently.	I will join the 'Criw Cymraeg' at school. This is a collaborative group that support and celebrate others who use the language. I will also attend any courses that will allow me to learn more of the Welsh language.	Ongoing	Being able to speak Welsh correctly and be able to support the children using Welsh phrases. Also, to become more employable and contribute to a bilingual workforce.	December 2025
2	**To become more confident with my ICT skills.**	I will be able to complete assignments and submit them feeling confident in my abilities. I will be able to use the different software for each task more easily.	I will spend time exploring software such as, PowerPoint, word and the university Hwb. I will take part in ICT skills workshops at school.	Ongoing	To be able to complete an assignment using ICT skills. Also, having a better knowledge of ICT and use my knowledge more in everyday learning.	December 2025
3	**To achieve my BA Hons degree in Education and Care.**	I will have successfully completed the degree and be qualified. I will also have my graduation.	I will need to attend lectures. I will need to spend time researching, reading and completing my assignments on time. I will need to commit myself to the learning experience.	2 Years	I will go on to have a career with children and be an exceptional practitioner. I will be able to enrich children's lives with my knowledge gained from my degree., with the hopes of becoming a valuable colleague.	December 2025
4	**To take care of my own wellbeing.**	I will feel relaxed and ready to learn. I will feel happy, content and fulfilled and be ready to take on new challenges.	I will set aside time to make sure I am taking care of myself mentally, emotionally and physically. I will need to have regular breaks and give myself time to relax.	ongoing	I will be ready to achieve my goals and will be able to apply myself more effectively. I will the best I can be and will reach higher levels of achievement in all aspects of my life.	December 2025

I am currently working as a Teaching assistant in a primary school. I have a flair for helping develop children's lives and am excited to achieve my degree in Education and Care. I am aiming to work more in the care sector, providing wellbeing support for children and their families with the local council or police force.

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What is reflection and reflective practice?

- Reflection is a way to learn from real life experiences, it is having the ability to use and process that experience to learn or improve.
- Paige-Smith (2011) explains, reflective practice is a continuous process of constructing theories, testing these theories through talking and listening, then changing those theories in practice. It is important to remember that reflection can be listening to oneself or involving others and listening to them and their views.
- According to Hull University (2024) reflection is an important skill that allows us to look back at an experience. We can look at what went well, what did not and see if we could improve for the future.
- Hanson and Appleby (2015) suggest that reflective practice is continually evolving. Therefore, it is essential that as practitioners we ensure that we are engaged in our theory of action.
- Pacey (2016) explains reflective practice is a process of thinking. It allows us to change and modify the way we practice.
- Brock (2014) explains that refection and reflective practice are the core values for professionals and are very important in professional training.

Why is reflective practice important to early years practice?

- Through reflection and experience a practitioner can become an expert in Early Years.
- Hallett (2013) explains that reflective practice provides better quality experiences for both the children and their families when used in an early year setting.
- Reflective practice in Early years is an important aspect of growth, this is because we need to make sure we are continuously moving forward, all the while making sure that our practice is up to date.
- Collaborative reflection proves to be significant when being critical. Reflection in groups throughout early years means coming together to plan, observe and evaluate. (Durham University, no date)
- Birth to 5 matters (2021) tells us how important reflection is to help support high levels of practice in early year education. It is important to review all aspects of ourselves by thinking about what we do, why we do it and how we could improve? This reflective practice will develop increased confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding for the practitioner. This wealth of knowledge will help enrich the children's learning experience and improve the quality of care and education.

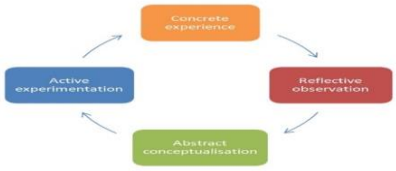
The theory of reflective practice

A theory is a belief that is reinforced by evidence. Any theory must be able to stand up to critique, be recognised and be robust. The two main theories of reflective practice are by John Dewey and Donald Schon. Dewey's work identifies two types of action, these are routine action and reflective action. Dewey talks about routine action and how it is guided by habit. He talks about how this action is more stable and is less likely to change. However, reflective action is asking questions such as why we do something a certain way, can we do it better? Have we always done it this way? if so, why? It is about asking those questions to solve problems before they arise and not becoming complacent and deal with situations as they arise. It is about bring proactive and making sure that every interaction with a child is meaningful. Dewey (1933) talks about how reflection is a deliberate and an active process. He explains that experiences shape us and how when reflective practice through learning promotes growth and change. However, Schon's theory of reflective practice talks about reflection in action and reflection on action. Here he described reflecting in action as acting immediately, where the practitioner would act as something is happening. However, reflecting on action is reflecting after something has happened. This is where the practitioner would ask those questions during the reflective process. Schon (2016) suggests that competent practitioners will usually have a more tacit knowledge, where they may find it difficult to explain something.

Gibbs' Model

University of Hull (2024)

Kolb's Model



University of Hull (2024)

Both Gibbs and Kolb show their reflective models as a cycle of continuous learning through reflection. The University of Edinburgh (2020) talks about the six stages that will allow the practitioner to learn and plan, thinking about things that went well or did not. An advantage of Gibbs is that the cycle is easy to understand and is broken down in a very clear and concise way. The cycle also gives the practitioner time to explore how they may have felt, this stage of the cycle is essential for personal growth. However, this cycle can be time consuming as there are more steps to think about. Kolb's model is centred on developing understanding through actual experiences. It looks at the four stages starting with concrete experience, then moving through the cycle. This cycle is clear, and the practitioner will know when the process is complete. This cycle is effective but does not allow the practitioner to visit how they may have felt during the experience. Both models of reflection are effective when used correctly. They are an excellent starting point and allow the practitioner to assess all levels of the situation. However, the practitioner does not need to start at the beginning and may choose to jump forward a stage to suit the experience. It is important to remember that not every situation can be applied to these models. University of Cambridge (2024)

We can see that reflection and reflective practice are essential in early years education. To be successful we need to use a mix of Dewey and Schon's theories, along with the reflective models by Gibbs and Kolb. We must reflect on every interaction we have with children to improve our own standards. We must be critical thinkers and be ready to make the best decisions for the children's learning experience. A practitioner must be confident in their own abilities and be able evaluate themselves truthfully. Being critical can be difficult but is essential for growth. If we can adopt all these strategies discussed, we will be exceptional.

3.

Professional practice is how we act and behave in a setting, it is about being aware of the standards that are expected of us, whilst conducting ourselves in the best way possible. Being professional is about the practitioner using technical skills, but not forgetting how important ethical conduct, decision making and interactions with others are. GIS Certification Institute (2023) Being a professional means having a good mix of knowledge from formal qualifications, but also having qualities such as, life experiences and core values.

There are some who think that professionalism is a distinguished and learned person. These people may feel that formal qualifications are more important than skills a practitioner may have gained through many years of working in an early year setting. Chalke, (2013) However, there are those such as Gasper (2015) who would argue that values and quality are far greater attributes for any practitioner working in an early year setting. He talks about value-based principles and how practice grounded in ethics are the fundamentals when working with children and their parents.

Having professional core values in an early year setting is important. Showing respect, being sympathetic, showing diversity and being ethical are all core values. It is the job of the practitioner to support the children in their quest to feel healthy with who they are. Both the EYEC (2021) and the early years alliance, EYA (2021) agree that supporting the holistic development of children within an early year setting is of critical importance. This is because the first five years of a child's life are the most pivotal. The brain develops connections much faster than any other time of their life. Therefore, they will need to feel cared for, supported and safe in their learning environment. Callan, (2015) explains that the ethical practitioner must have basic qualities of empathy and commitment. She goes on to say that to be effective in understanding and interpreting, the professional must be motivated to act with 'decency' in their relationships with others and show commitment to working positively for children, using models of ethical practice.

A practitioner must have excellent communication skills. This professional role means having to communicate effectively with children, colleagues, family members and outside agencies. It is important to build positive relationships to keep the lines of communication open. Dunhill, (2009) suggests, good communication is key when working with young people, children and their families. He explains that effective communication is a fundamental core that involves listening, questioning, understanding and responding.

When we work with children we must be in the moment, allowing ourselves to be fully available. A good practitioner will listen to the child, they will show they listened well by engaging and responding. The practitioner will reflect in action and thus create an excellent and trusted repour with the child. The United Nations convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) article 12 states that every child has the right to be heard. The article explains that all children have the right to express their views and feelings, to have them considered and taken seriously. This should apply to all children in everyday life. UNICEF, (2016)

A practitioner must be aware of how they are communicating. Orey, (2014) explains that communication is using words, body movements and tone of voice. She states that much of how we communicate with others is non verbal. We communicate 7% with words, 55% with body movements and 38% with tone of voice. Using facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice and gestures are great ways to communicate with children. Children are often more visual and will mirror or mimic what they see. Therefore, the practitioner must be sure to be effective in how they communicate, making sure they are using a range of skills to help them engage with a child. Brain and Mukherji, (2005) state that non verbal cues contradict verbal messages. Therefore, practitioners need to make sure they are not confusing the child and remain consistent in the way they interact. Children must feel like they are able to talk to their practitioner openly and honestly, creating trust. It is also important to remember these non verbal ways of communicating whilst talking to parents or colleagues. The practitioner must be professional and aware of how they are conducting themselves.

Having an in depth knowledge and understanding of policies in professional practice is important. The practitioner should have read and signed organisation policies including safeguarding policies. Practitioners should have a good knowledge of legislation such as, children act for England and Wales 1989, child protection procedures 2019, the social services and well-being (Wales) act 2014 and UNCRC Children act 2004. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. It is the role and responsibility of each practitioner to safeguard and promote welfare of the children. There is a responsibility to keep the children safe and know the child well. Practitioners should know how to report a safeguarding concern in their setting and be confident. Buckler, (2023) explains children under the age of five are considered high risk. She states that before a child's fifth birthday as many as 22.5% of children would have been referred to social care, 17% would require an assessment by social services, 14.3% were children in need and 11.1% were children who were thought to have been abused or neglected. Therefore, it is the role of the practitioner to be aware of the risk factors and recognise any significant changes to the child. The practitioner must respond appropriately and professionally. Practitioners in early year settings spend a vast amount of time with children, getting to know them and spending time building respect and trust. Early intervention by practitioners can have the greatest impact on children, helping to create a positive outcome for the child whilst meeting their needs.

Working in partnership with multi agencies is beneficial for professional practice and meeting the needs of the children. Professional practitioners will work with social services, Teaching Assistant's, speech and language, safeguarding officers, ALNCos, CIW and Estyn. These agencies and governing bodies will work together to make sure that certain standards are met. Practitioners will also need to work with family members of the children. Sharing important information with these partnerships are essential when getting to know a child and their needs. Gasper, (2010) talks about a practice in which information is shared and decision making is collaborative. He talks about using their contributions to better support the child. He talks about how these partnerships can help practitioners identify the needs of the child, access the most appropriate help and help plan and reflect on their work to

best meet the needs of the child. He believes that this will increase the child's confidence and self-worth.

Observation and planning are essential in early year education, and both play a key role in supporting professional practice. It is the role of the practitioner to observe the children in their setting. Focussing on how they play, what they play and who they play with. By observing the children, the practitioner can get a better understanding of the children they work with and plan to help the children progress. The practitioner's role is to recognise development and achievement, whilst making sure the children are progressing and thriving in their learning environment. The Welsh Government, (no date) explains it is not what we learn but how and why we learn it. The Curriculum for Wales (CFW) supports this planning and observation cycle and is set out to combine different experiences, knowledge and skills. The pedagogy is centred around supporting the children's learning needs, and does this by supporting them to become ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical, informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals. The curriculum supports the practitioner to provide an inclusive education to all children. Children must learn from real experiences and not a representation of something. To support this, the forest school association, (no date) explains that they have a adopted a child centred approach. The program supports play and risk taking that develops confidence and self esteem in children. Other countries such as Scandinavia, have also adopted this child led approach to meet the inclusive needs of the children. It is important to remember that a good mix of learning styles will help the practitioner in practice to support children in an early year setting.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is key when working with children in early year education, and the professional practitioner must have a good understanding of the 54 articles. The UNCRC is a declaration that applies to anyone under the age of eighteen. It recognises the rights of children and how their basic human rights should be respected and promoted. Article 3 is about the best interests of the child. It explains that the child must be the priority in all decisions made. UNICEF, (2019) This article is significant in every day decisions within an early years setting. Other major articles that are relevant to early years articles 28 and 29. These state that every child has the right to an education and that education

must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. A practitioner should be aware of these articles when working with children and do their upmost to adhere to them all the while making sure they are meeting the inclusive needs of the children.

In summary, the professional practitioner should have and demonstrate a good mix of all the key aspects discussed. The practitioner should be ethical, have excellent knowledge on practice in early years and always be keen to improve through reflection. Those practitioners who adopt these strategies within their practice, will be sure to meet the individual needs of the children they work with and offer the most professional support and inclusive learning experience.

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