
THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTITIONER

Lyndsey Smith
2404314
ECEY4009
3052

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I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) on 10 November 2024 to check my work using the following prompt:

1. Please check the following text for readability and grammar.
I confirm that I have not presented any AI-generated text as my work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts and notes, before the use of AI tools.

1. PDP

Personal Development Plan

Currently, I am working towards a university degree. The degree is in the early years, and it is something I have become passionate about. I also work part-time at a primary school, mostly with nursery children but also with infants and juniors. Working with children from a deprived area has encouraged me to aim for a career that helps and supports children and families in need. I would like to work in social services in the next five years.

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	Timelines	What will this help me to achieve?
Engage with the well-being services provided to me by the university; including study skills support groups, check-ins with my well-being advisor, counselling sessions, and using compensatory measures if needed.	- I will be able to have confidence in my university studies, my abilities, and myself. - I won't have to use compensatory measures, or only use them in a crisis. - I will feel supported by the university and will make the most out of my university experience.	- I will check in regularly with my well-being advisor and share my worries or concerns so that we can create a plan for the future. - Attending the study skills sessions that will be provided for me to get the best support. - Let my advisor know when my mental health starts to deteriorate so I can access the yearly counselling sessions. - Ask my advisor to put the compensatory measures in place only if we have explored other options.	November 2024- July 2025	- Manage my mental health in a better way with better outcomes. - Confidence in myself and my studies. - Better outcomes in my work. - A more cheerful outlook towards learning. - To be the best version of myself while at university.
Improve my knowledge and skills in advanced safeguarding, child mental health, challenging behaviour & additional learning needs.	- I will be able to fully understand my responsibilities and safeguarding role within my work. - I will be able to confidently recognize signs of abuse and neglect. - I will be able to respond correctly to abuse and neglect.	- Attend the safeguarding training evening at my place of work. - Access the ALN online course through the Hwb Wales account. - Enquire with the NSPCC about the different available courses.	- November 2024- December 2024 - By December	- Better outcomes when managing difficult behaviour. - Inclusivity in the nursery setting. - Responding quicker to potential signs of abuse and neglect. - Supporting a wider range of children. - By being able to identify the diverse needs of children I can plan more effective activities and play.

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	Timelines	What will this help me to achieve?
	My improved skills and understanding can help identify the needs of children.		By July 2022	
Have a position within Social Services that focuses on supporting children and families experiencing difficulties.	- When I am employed by Social Services and can provide help and support to families in need. - I can put my degree and further training to use.	- Make sure I have the qualifications required to apply for the job. - Regularly update my CV with any new achievements. - Volunteer within the Social Services sector to gain more experience.	By December 2022	- A better chance of securing the position I want. - Clarity of career choice. - Volunteering will not only improve my experience but also open my eyes to the tough side of the job.

2. Briefing Paper

What is reflection & reflective practice? Reflection refers to going back over something in our minds. However, reflecting as an Early Years practitioner differs slightly from this. It means making our thinking clearer, broadening our understanding, and strengthening our learning to make better changes. (Cottrell, 2023, p.203-204) According to Little Scholars School of Early Learning, (2023), Reflective practice is engaging in the process of reviewing and understanding to reach a better outcome. Reflecting on our professional practice enables us to learn from our accomplishments, provide better care and experiences, and improve our methods.	Why is reflective practice important to EY practice? As Brock explains, Early Years professionals need to continuously progress in their professional expertise and personal values to meet the continuous challenges of change. Using reflective practice allows us to develop new skills as practitioners and improve how we practice. This approach enables practitioners to overcome challenges and difficulties and enhance experiences among co-workers, and those the practitioner is responsible for. (Page, 2013, p.21-22)
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The theory of reflective practice:

Reflective practice originated from the work of Dewey and Schon.

As explained by Iriss, in 1933 Dewey saw reflective practice as a key part of a cycle, a cycle that permits us to learn from past encounters. Dewey believed that reflective practice began when practitioners encountered difficult situations. He then went on to explain that practitioners, having experienced those difficulties could reflect and analyse what had happened, or what had gone wrong. This enables practitioners to find solutions that would alter the outcome in the future.

Dewey (1933, P.107) goes on to explain the five stages of his theory:

1. **Noticing a difficulty**- When a difficult or unexpected situation arises, reflection can then occur.
2. **Define the difficulty**- Highlight what is causing the difficulty and make the problem clear. Assess both from different points of view and identify any meanings and/or assumptions behind the causes.
3. **Develop possible explanations**- Take into consideration the possible explanations of the difficulties that occurred to help understand how and why the difficulties were presented, and if there are any possible solutions to them.
4. **Elaborate on the explanations**- Take the time to establish whether any progress can be made to understand what is required as a solution, who it involves and what the benefits and risks may be.
5. **Apply and experiment**- Experiment with new approaches, behaviours and perceptions to expand on the possible explanations that originated from reflection. These developments create the basis for further reflection and continuous learning.

According to Gulari, Dewey was one of the first to acknowledge reflective practice. Schon then later followed, with the difference being that Schons theory focuses majorly on action and learning from experiences.

The University of Hull explains that Schon's theory considers reflection 'in' action, which is during an event or situation, and reflection 'on' action, which is to reflect afterwards.

Schon (1983) goes on to explain his reflective practice theory in three stages:

1. **Before action**- This concept allows for professional expertise and judgment to operate on instinct. It's responding instinctively due to the ability to recognise the depth of training and knowledge that has been received.
2. **In action**- This method involves thinking 'on your feet' whilst fully engaged in a situation or activity. Immediate reflection allows the practitioner to gain a responsive approach in a timely manner and the ability to apply effective responses.
3. **On action**- Reflecting on a difficulty or situation is crucial in allowing for critical evaluation. Reflecting on action provides the opportunity for the experience to be thoroughly thought over. Sharing the outcomes of on-action reflection can also enhance practice and contribute to much greater wisdom

Gibbs' Model:



Figure 1: Gibbs' Reflective Model (1988)

Driscoll's Model:

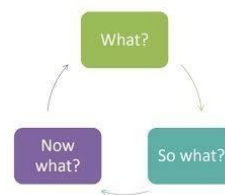


Figure 2: Driscoll's Reflective Model (1994)

Analysis of models

Channell argues that Gibbs' reflective cycle has many advantages and disadvantages. They go on to say that the cycle is user-friendly, and the detailed step-by-step guide is easy to use and easy to follow. Channell also states that it is versatile, that many different professionals and industries can adapt the cycle to their practice. However, Channell believes that to use the reflective cycle to full advantage, requires specific skills to use criticism constructively, skills that not every professional acquires.

Study Prism suggests that Driscoll's model is neat, with only three components. They state that the model is easily accessible and supports the understanding of reflective practice.

Claims made by the University of Edinburgh state that based only on three simple questions, Driscoll's model provides the most basic framework, to reflect. The university also suggests that reflection will not be achieved completely as the three questions fail to encourage thinking in critical depth.

Although similar, Driscoll's model is simplified. Its simplicity is what makes it more appealing in opposition to Gibbs' six-question model. Both models have straightforward questions, making them easy to remember and both can be applied to a variety of situations.

However, both models have come under criticism for being too basic and lacking in promoting critical thinking and analysis, which is fundamental to reflective practice. (Regan, J. 2021)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, reflection and reflective practice is fundamental to becoming a successful professional practitioner. Using reflective practice enables practitioners to overcome the everyday challenges and difficulties amongst those for which, the practitioner is responsible.

Reflection encourages practitioners to develop new skills and understanding whilst keeping up with the demands of change and allows us to provide better care and better experiences.

Dewey was one of the first to acknowledge the cycle of reflection, explaining through different stages of his theory, such as recognising difficulties, understanding them and finding solutions.

It's understood that Schon then went on to build on Dewey's theory, resulting in the three stages of his practice; Before-action, In-action and On-action, or in simpler terms; before, during and after.

Furthermore, Gibbs and Driscoll also went on to develop reflective cycles, encouraging professionals to continuously reflect on their practice using an easy step-by-step guide. The framework of these reflective cycles is fundamental to reflect in a way that promotes greater learning opportunities and greater wisdom within the practitioner setting, resulting in an overall greater professional practitioner.

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3. Essay

The significance of different aspects of professional practice and why these are important in meeting the needs of children.

A professional has the knowledge and skills needed to perform their job well. Wilson et al. argue that there are typically three main components that explain what it means to be a professional. These include using their skills and knowledge with judgment, sharing practices and values with others, and using responsibilities to ensure that what is being done is genuine and valuable. Wilson et al. Explain that these three components highlight the importance of the rights and responsibilities of the professional. These include appropriate knowledge and understanding, to give the practitioner the right to make personal judgments and conclusions, whilst understanding the responsibility to make them sensibly and beneficially. Sharing knowledge and values with others gives the professional the right to contribute to the values and practices within their professional setting, and the responsibility to ensure everyone is adhering to the best level of professional practice. Finally, holding their work to great value enables the right of influence amongst others, and the responsibility to do so to allow for improvement in all areas of professionalism.

Longford County Children's Committee believe that Early Years practitioners are identified by their dedication to children. This is explained in greater detail by Wandsworth Early Years who states that professional practice consists of:

Leadership and management are strong and effective. This is to ensure that professionals have the necessary skills needed and that personal growth, training and opportunities to reflect and improve are readily available.

Stimulative and captivating environments. Environments should be able to provide a diverse range of play opportunities and encourage creativity, problem-solving skills and critical thinking.

Exceptional levels of teaching and learning. This involves professionals who are skilled, reflective and able to adapt different approaches to support the inclusive and individual needs of children.

Good quality interactions and effective communication. Interaction and communication among children and professionals are a positive way to promote and encourage expressive language, healthy conversation and development in social and emotional well-being.

Observation. Using observation enables professionals to identify key strengths and weaknesses during children's development. This allows for effective improvement strategies to be put in place.

Promoting an inclusive environment. This can embrace diversity and inclusion, ensuring every child can make progress in their development regardless of background, needs and abilities.

Encouraging self-regulation and supporting well-being. This can promote self-confidence and opportunities for child-centred reflection and can be done through the teaching of mindfulness techniques.

Implementing clear and robust safeguarding policies. Professionals must regularly review safeguarding policies and procedures and regularly complete risk assessments to ensure the welfare and safety of all children and professionals, and to ensure the environment is always suitable and safe.

Important values of an Early Years professional can include having an authentic interest in children, effective communication skills, not only with children but parents and carers also, confidence, patience and professionalism, a nurturing, kind and compassionate nature, commitment, teamwork and a good sense of fun (Powell, 2010).

Values in the Early Years are important for many reasons. Values assist in developing a professional identity and character and help professionals develop a holistic understanding of children's needs. Values help professionals to understand their role amongst partnerships, families and communities and can aid in contributing towards safeguarding factors when needed, to help and support children.

(The General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021)

When working with children and families, a professional practitioner's role relies on communication. A large percentage of the work undertaken by practitioners involves communication, by listening, understanding, questioning and responding to what is being communicated by children and their families.

Trust is a key part of communicating effectively between practitioners, children, families, and organisations involved in the care of the child. (Dunhill, 2009)

Birth to 5 matters suggests that good relationships between practitioners and children will encourage the child to feel a sense of belonging, to feel heard and understood, and to also feel a sense of safety.

The DFE believe that one of the benefits of having good relationships with parents, family and carers is that research has shown having them involved as much as possible with the child's development and learning, facilitates the child's progress positively, regardless of their background.

As a practitioner, it is important to have in-depth knowledge and understanding when it comes to development, attachments and behaviours, and understanding of each child's needs. By having in-depth knowledge in these areas, the practitioner gains a clearer understanding of what needs to be provided and how to provide it. A practitioner must understand that for children to progress through their developmental milestones, there are also physical and psychological needs that must be met. Some of these needs include food, water, shelter, warmth,

suitable clothing, rest and activity. Children also need to be valued as individuals, have opportunities to learn, succeed and achieve, and receive affection and care (Barber, 2019).

The NSPCC recognise that all children have rights when it comes to protection and harm and that every organisation, such as nurseries, must have procedures and policies when it comes to safeguarding. All practitioners must be trained in safeguarding and are able to recognise causes for concern and follow the safeguarding policies put in place. Anyone with a safeguarding concern must take action and share concerns with the DSL or the police.

According to the NSPCC, when working as part of a multi-agency team it's important to always prioritise the needs of children. It is important to take into consideration any other teams or organisations working with the child and to share information promptly and effectively. Working together allows practitioners, agencies and organisations to fully understand any risks a child may be exposed to and how to take effective steps to keep them safe.

Barber and Paul-Smith suggest that observing children is the starting point in the relationship formed between practitioner and child. They say that observation is an opportunity to explore "the wonder of each child". Understanding the reasons behind an observation can give the practitioner more awareness of what to look for and what it means for the child's development, such as identifying a child's skills, what the child likes and dislikes, and how a child interacts with other children. These observations can then be used to plan effectively in a way that best supports the child.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) helps to guide practitioners to work together with children to understand and promote the rights of the child, ensuring they are put into practice every day. (UNICEF)

UNICEF explains the fifty-two articles in the UNCRC. Articles one to forty-two are based on the rights of children, with four broad categories focusing on the child's right to life, the child's right to develop, the child's right to protection and the child's right to participate. Articles forty-three to forty-five are the articles based on implementing articles one to forty-two, by adults and the government. Professional practitioners must adhere to these articles to ensure that children have their rights recognised, respected and implemented every day.

One of the core values of an Early Years practitioner is to ensure that the child's best interests are made a priority. Article three of the UNCRC- the best interests of the child. Many of these articles, such as articles three and twelve- respect the views of the child and are at the very core of Early Years practice.

The UNCRC is a legally binding agreement that supports the rights of every child, regardless of race, religion and abilities. (Save the Children)

A professional must possess the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform the job well, holding their work to a high standard.

Early Years practitioners are recognised for their dedication to children, which consists of having good, strong leadership that can offer the necessary training opportunities and reflection, to enable practitioners to reflect and learn on their practice. It also consists of having an environment for children that is stimulating and captivating, whilst being able to provide a diverse range of play opportunities, and can encourage practitioners to observe how children play, learn and develop, to create more inclusive sessions that focus on the specific needs of children.

Early Years professionals must always refer to their core values, such as effective communication skills and an authentic interest in children. Core values play an important role in professionalism as they help to develop a holistic understanding of the needs of children.

Articles forty-three to forty-five in the UNCRC can guide practitioners to implement the rights of children, such as the right to develop. By doing this, it ensures that the needs of the children are always a priority.

Another important aspect of being a professional practitioner is having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. A practitioner must undertake the correct safeguarding training and follow the safeguarding policy set out by the DSL. Promptly recognising possible safeguarding concerns can ensure that the correct procedures are put in place and the child is safe.

So, in conclusion, there are many different aspects of professional practice, however at the very core of professional practice is always the child, ensuring that the child's needs are always met and the child is getting the best possible start in life.

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