Professional Reviews (PRDs) in Early Year Settings in Scotland: A Critical Exploration of the PRD Process and Potential

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Abstract

This research study principally aims to investigate the process and potential of professional reviews (PRDs)[1] in early years settings. This topic was an area of interest to me as a researcher, because I have been working for over 20 years in childhood practice and only received two PRDs in that time. Early years is evolving, and policy and guidance is everchanging. Siraj and Kingston (2015, p. 15) highlight it is therefore essential that practitioners maintain commitment to professional learning to effectively deliver the provision the service expects, leading to improved outcomes for children.

Staff within an early years setting were key research participants. The investigation was positioned in the interpretivist paradigm, as it explored early years practitioners' (EYP) experiences and perceptions. This study will interrogate whether staff require a PRD for professional learning to happen, thus exploring PRDs' purpose. The study will also compare continuous professional development requirements, within the Glasgow context specifically, in early years, and that of the teaching profession (primary and secondary sectors).

The data collected indicated that the potential of PRDs was dependent on how the process was carried out. Themes emerged highlighting that leadership was perceived to be a main factor to the success or failure of the PRD process, and how staff professional development could ultimately impact on provision and outcomes. The implications of this research could ignite change and highlight the absence of current literature in this field of study.

Keywords: early years practitioners (EYP), Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), professional review and development (PRD), professional learning

Introduction

This article is written in the first person because as the researcher I had an active role in the study. Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 305) explain that writing in qualitative research often involves putting yourself into the text and reflecting on your own role within the research.

In this research I used my own setting as a case study to explore staff PRDs. This is a particular area of interest to me as, although there are policies, guidance and literature that underpin practice relating

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[1] Professional Review and Development (PRD) is an ongoing learning process supported by an annual meeting between reviewer and reviewee. For pragmatism, this paper also refers to the annual meeting as a PRD.

to the importance of and participation in PRDs, they refer mainly to engagement in continuous professional learning (CPL). In guidance aimed at the Early Learning and Childcare sector (ELC), CPL is an essential component of ELC quality (Education Scotland, 2020). Scottish Government (2023) would like a well-trained, professional and skilled workforce with access to high quality professional learning. To achieve this, the Scottish Government has invested in a workforce development programme (Scottish Government, 2023) which will ensure all staff are aware of best practice and are supported in their workplace.

One of my duties as head of nursery (HON), is to ensure staff PRDs are delivered. While there are variations in structures and practice, the common principle of the PRD is to advance the skillset for practitioners/leaders by providing the opportunity to meet annually with senior management, to identify areas for development and growth, and to highlight strengths in their practice. In their workforce review Siraj and Kingston (2015, p. 60) emphasise the importance of staff gaining experience and being highly qualified to ensure outcomes are positive and equitable for all children. This is expected to support the Scottish Government's (2022, p.71) ambition for Scotland to be the "best place in the world to grow up". Significantly, to progress professionally, practitioners should reflect on this policy intention and engage in continuous learning (Scottish Government, 2023).

This study will examine the potential effect and influence of leadership on PRDs. McDowall-Clark and Murray (2012) indicate that leadership does not rest on positions of authority, noting that all practitioners can inspire change, regardless of their formal leadership status. This research aims not only to inform practice in my setting, but also offers insights and deeper understanding of the influence the leader and leadership approach has on PRDs. In addition to developing one's own knowledge, practice and growth, Ragland (2006) highlights that developing practice through professional enquiry results in extending and deepening professional practice, creating local knowledge (Mockler, 2013). Thus, this study will potentially extend knowledge to sites of practice beyond the case study centre as there is potential for others to learn from this exploration.

Literature Review

Prior to conducting any project, it is important to develop a robust understanding of any previous research done in the same or similar field and to develop a secure knowledge of current literature pertaining to the subject matter (Saunders & Rojon, 2011). While conducting this research, I noted an absence of current literature within the Scottish context to strengthen the rationale for this study.

ELC Policy Within the Scottish context

There has always been a strong focus on developing the ELC workforce, especially in the past four years with the recent increase in entitlement, rising from 600 hours to 1140 hours. This has resulted in ongoing review and development of legislation, policy and ELC guidance, focusing on professionalism and leadership (Education Scotland, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2020; Siraj & Kingston, 2015; Scottish Social Services Council, 2015; Wingrave & McMahon, 2016).

Research indicates that excellent investment in ELC can mitigate against potential social and economic disadvantage (Heckman & Mastertov, 2007; Siraj & Kingston, 2015). The ambition is to close the attainment gap, with a skilled workforce positively impacting children's attainment and future life chances (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Dunlop, 2015). My research indicates that the process of meeting annually with a leader, using processes like PRDs to discuss professional development, as suggested by Scottish Government (2016), would benefit workforce development.

Nationally, ELC settings are inspected by HMIE against Education Scotland's *How good is our early learning and childcare*? (HGIOELC) (2016). This document provides an important contribution to

support those working in the ELC sector and supports the setting's capacity for improvement. Quality indicator 1.4 (Education Scotland, 2016, p.19) states that highly effective practice in early years would see "all practitioners undertake reviews, at least annually, to help to improve and develop practice". This concurs with Glasgow City Council (GCC) (2016), as staff are expected to evaluate their own professional development (PD) needs and engage in CPD to ensure they have the right skills to meet all children and young people's needs.

Professional Review and Development (PRD)

In relation to documents already discussed, according to Scott's (2003) contextual framework the process of PRDs is not mandatory and is non-descriptive. Some leaders may choose a differing method to the PRD, to achieve an equally good standard. Weak practice would be deemed as staff not having regular feedback to identify and support their skills and knowledge and could result in poor outcomes for children (Care Inspectorate, 2022; Education Scotland, 2016). Not engaging in programmes such as PRDs could be considered as weak leadership practice if current systems in place result in infrequent feedback or support that is not tailored to staff needs as PRDs would be. Smith and Tillema (2001) suggest that the purpose of PRD varies and can achieve many improvements for individuals such as new learning and development and accountability for promotion. However, Cleveland et al. (1989) argue that when PRDs are not clear they can become misleading.

Local Policies

Within GCC there are many localised policies to support PRDs and staff development, such as the annual service plan and improvement report ASPIR (2021 – 2022). This report evaluates education services, recognising that all staff contributions are respected, and their skills development is encouraged to help improve outcomes for children. The development of staff knowledge, skills and abilities has consistently been viewed as the foundation of organisational development and improvement within GCC (GCC, 2021-2022). GCC suggest that the promotion of leadership at all levels within your ELC setting will undoubtedly create effective cultures for success. In comparison, GCC's (2023) strategic plan supports learning collaboratively, including leadership at all levels to prevent overreliance on one leader, and one senior leadership team. This supports the PRD process that would encourage staff to lead their own development, therefore enabling GCC's improvement plans.

Professional Development

Both EYPs and teachers are expected to engage in mandatory continuous professional development (CPD), however EYPs have more autonomy as to how this is recorded, with no requirement to have this signed off by a senior leader. There is however an expectation from the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), the ELC workforce's registration body, that a record of development will be kept. EYPs may or may not be asked to show this to the SSSC. This differs significantly from the teaching profession, as General Teaching Council (GTC) registration requires teachers to record annual training and development (in Glasgow this is done through CPD manager, some local authorities have their own system, and others use the GTCS website). The record is then signed off by a senior leader. I have found no clear reason in any literature or policy explaining this disparity. Similar issues have been highlighted in recent research in England (Sakr & Bonetti, 2023) where they have found an inconsistent approach in the recording of CPD across early years settings. This has resulted in a lack of data being collated and gaps in this research field.

Higson and Wilson (1995) suggest that employees can move onto their next training goals when their professional development is signed off, and Kelly and McDiarmid (2002) argue that engaging in CPD leads to improved and updated skills, demonstrating more competence in the job role. When there is strong pedagogical content shared and developed in a professional learning community, greater

professional success is achieved (Sparks, 2002) and it is crucial that staff know the leader's character, and trust that the leader has faith in them, caring about their success as individuals, which can be achieved from leading by example (Buck, 2018).

I have highlighted a disparity in the mandatory requirement of teachers' CPD to be signed off, while EYPs CPD is not. There is potential here to explore this topic further and to inspire change for the professional recognition EYPs deserve.

Having outlined the literature significant to my research, I will now situate the study giving more detail of the paradigm and discuss my methods and methodology.

Methodology and Methods

According to Khun (1970) all research must take place within a paradigm, which he describes as a research culture defined by commonality of purpose.

One paradigm which underpins empirical research is the interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as a social construction as it is recreated by human minds and enlightens and adds to a greater conversation. This is particular to this study, as all data was generated and interpreted from practitioners' perceptions based on memory and experiences. The axiological assumption presumes that I, as the researcher, am impartial and have unbiased values, opinions and personal feelings and I am not connected to the research (Cohen et al., 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A thematic analysis using the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework was utilised, as I identified themes in opinions, practice and experience from practitioners' points of views. Data was first collected from an anonymous online questionnaire. Being the participants' line manager, anonymity was imperative to provide a safe platform for participants to speak freely, without fear of judgement and repercussions. This produces more validity and honesty of experience (Johnson, 2010).

The second data gathering method chosen was a focus group because this allowed an in-depth discussion between professionals. As there were only six participants, this generated a deeper conversation around the themes and trends identified from the results of the questionnaire. Holloway and Wheeler (2013, p. 127) suggest that, for participants to have their voice heard, discussion groups should be relatively small. In the Findings section, the participants who completed the questionnaire are referred to as P1Q, P2Q etc, and the participants in the focus group are referred to as P1FG, P2FG etc.

I was compliant with ethical guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2024) and the University of Glasgow. On its own, ethical goodness is not sufficient; good methods of gaining data are also vital as, although it is essential to be ethical, this alone will not ensure quality (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007). Good ethical practice and values contribute to further validity of the study.

Findings

This study involved a group of EYPs in differing job roles participating firstly in a questionnaire, exploring their experience of PRDs and enquiring about EYPs perceptions of their purpose and relevance.

Questionnaire

From the 19 participants who completed the questionnaires, eighteen said they had engaged in a PRD, and one said they had not yet received one.

When addressing whether participants were aware of the purpose of PRDs, almost all mentioned improvement and development and some indicated that their PRD linked to the school improvement plan. Participants highlighted that PRDs provide an opportunity to meet and discuss their development and careers aspirations with a leader.

> It's a chance to review your development as a staff member. It is an opportunity to agree goals and objectives and should be viewed as a discussion between yourself and your manager (P9Q).

Almost all participants said the HON or the depute facilitated their PRD using a coaching style. This allowed discussion pertaining to the culture of leadership of learning in the participants setting. Goleman (2000) believes that leaders who coach employees can help them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and believe in their own potential.

Participants were then asked to consider if having a PRD enhanced their skills and professional development (PD), and if so in what way. All but one of the participants highlighted that their PRD was relevant and purposeful, and led to increased knowledge, helping them progress in their job roles and informing their practice.

> I have been able to take forward one of the opportunities identified already and use that to gain knowledge for my future professional development (P11Q).

> Yes, I believe it's important to have the time to share your vision with your manager and also receive that support and guidance (P10Q).

> I think they are purposeful when they are carried out collaboratively with your manager and they have a clear structure (P11Q).

Indicative questions, derived from themes which emerged from the responses to the questionnaire (Table 1), were shared with participants to consider before commencing the focus group discussion.

Table 1
Themes from Questionnaire

Participants' answers	Categories	Themes
Self-development	Practice	Professional development
Training	Coaching	
Evaluation	Knowledge	
Reflection	Skills development	
Opportunity	Progression	
Feeling supported	Collaboration	
Gaining new knowledge	Self-development	
Encouragement	Professional growth	
Motivated		
Confidence		

Focus Group

Six participants, comprising depute head, child development team leader, three child development officers and one support for learning worker, attended the focus group. Following this the answers given were analysed through an inductive process, using the Braun and Clarke (2006) approach to thematic analysis looking for similarities, patterns and traits in experiences of PRDs. Discussions mainly centred around three inter linked themes (Table 2), related to the main topic of the process and potential of PRDs in ELC.

Table 2
Themes from Focus Group

Participants' answers	Categories	Themes
Friendly leader Made to feel relaxed Informal Coaching and mentoring Listened to Valued Distributed leadership Scaffold	Relationships Feelings Styles of leadership Support Culture	Leadership
Nicer learning environment Children actively engaging in learning experiences Relationships formed with families Staff learning from each other	Raising attainment Reflection Change Self-evaluation	Impact on provision
Distributed leadership Opportunities to learn Own areas for development valued and respected Confident Leading Skilled Effective in job role	Further education University Promotion Skilled	Professional development

The six participants who volunteered for the discussion group all had experience of engaging in PRDs. Participants had a minimum of 5 years' working experience, with 3 participants having over 20 years' experience, however this did not mirror the number of PRDs participants had previously engaged in (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Previous PRDs Compared to Working Years
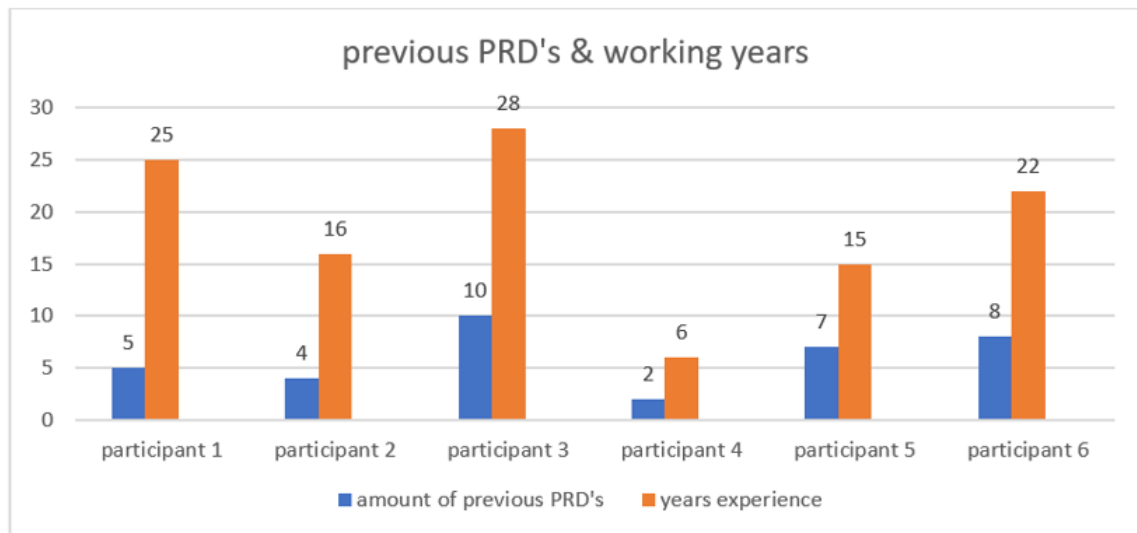
> I have only ever had four PRDs in 16 years and two of them have been in the last two years and what a difference I have found in the past few years (P2FG).

This echoes my own experience of PRDs, however, as the researcher, I aimed to remain impartial, in line with Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2007) ethical guidelines. This posed the question as to why staff had not received a PRD if guidance and documentation suggest otherwise. Buck (2018) discusses leaders who can get stuck in their leadership journey, failing to make necessary changes to their approach or beliefs to lead improvement, which Elmore (2008) refers to as the "default culture" because it suggests that practice has rarely changed.

Focus Group: Leadership

Participants shared their thoughts and experience of leaders who had influenced their PRD, either positively or negatively. Rodd (2006) highlights that one aspect of a leader providing support to their staff is recognising the importance of optimising adult learning styles. By doing this, leaders will understand the principles underpinning adult learning and develop the skills required to improve professional performance in their staff team. Leaders who are supportive, open, respectful and collaborative, encourage their staff to become reflective practitioners thus displaying leadership skills that are deemed effective (Rodd, 2006).

> I have very much been influenced as a support for learning worker as my ideas have been welcomed and I have been allowed to develop the nursery, not only working with the children but the environment. I have been fully supported by the leader (P2FG).

The discussion then focussed on whether participants thought there was a particular leadership style most suited to facilitating PRDs. Participants spoke about how the leader and the coaching style used made them feel more relaxed and at ease. Coaching in ELC is another collaborative method designed

to promote EYPs' ability to provide quality provision (Rush et al., 2003). Effective leaders use coaching to help staff collectively achieve goals, and their individual potential, by permitting staff to find their own answers to facilitate change and development (Drever, 2002).

> It was delivered by my manager and although it was formal it was informal as I felt comfortable and that I could open up freely and it wasn't like an interview that just relaxed me so coming from a way that was delivered to me was more personal and freer flowing you could speak your truth, and I was more comfortable (P5FG).

> The coaching model was very personal to yourself, and it is you that is setting your own targets (P6FG).

Focus Group: Impact

The next discussion centred around PRD's potential impact on the learning provision. The focus group participants were asked to consider if there was a noticeable impact on the provision as a result of their own PRD and if this impact would still happen if there had been no PRD facilitated. Many participants did not fully answer this question and only a few mentioned positive impact on the learning provision. Mooney and McCafferty (2005) suggest that some people might not see the importance in the job role of EYPs and it is work that does not require specific skills or attributes. However, Hallet (2013) disagrees with this and believes lots of the ELC workforce, many of whom are graduates, are acting as change agents to lead and improve ELC practice.

> I have seen the impact, especially with the environment with the lights etc. The children are calmer, and it helps to regulate and manage distressed behaviours especially in our children with additional support needs or younger children. Children are feeling more happy, safe and secure (P2FG).

> Through my PRDs, one in particular resulted in a change of relationships with families as I was learning new ways of working and how to be more inclusive in my practice to enhance family engagement (P3FG).

The participants were then asked to consider the importance of the relationship with the facilitator of their PRD, affording thought to, if a total stranger facilitated it would it be just as effective? Most participants said that the relationship they had with their leader was important, as this affected how they felt before, during and after their PRD. Today, leaders are required to adopt a supportive role to their staff, often absorbing and containing the anxiety that is unleashed in times of stress or uncertainty (Hirschhorn, 1998; Schein, 1983).

Michael Fullan (2001) highlights that relationships, moral purpose and organisational success are closely interlinked. Kouzes and Posner (2017) show that the value that separates effective and ineffective leaders is the degree to which they care about the people they lead, indicating that leaders need some basis of a relationship with their team.

> One of my PRDs I had no relationship with the manager, and I worried the whole time about what he was thinking about me. I thought he was not interested in what I had to say and had no value of me. In my opinion having a positive relationship with the leader who is delivering your PRD really matters (P1FG).

> I think it does make a difference having a relationship with the manager as if you can feel at ease and relax with your leader and your leader/manager values you and your skills, then it makes you develop and learn a whole lot better (P2FG).

> I think having a relationship with the leader helps as if it was a stranger I would personally hold back and not feel so relaxed (P5FG).

> I had my latest PRD with a new manager, and it gives us an opportunity to get to know each other and build a relationship (P4FG).

The last part of the discussion centred around the relevance and purpose of PRDs in ELC. Although aspects of this were already evident throughout participants previous responses this was a direct question to ensure clarity and validity.

> I think personally PRDs are important because it gives staff a focus and a plan. We are accountable to the SSSC and GCC and as we have a certain amount of CPD we need to do yearly (P6FG).

> Our development needs to evolve like the world we are living in and how we do that could be up for debate. PRDs in one way you can inspire staff to develop further and continue to learn and develop just as their job role changes and develops (P1FG).

> We are prime educators and what we do for the children is important, so we need to be skilled. PRDs can support you to learn new things and I think they are relevant and purposeful. I am 60 and would like to think I have fresh ideas in me and want to keep learning. I look to my management to support me (P3FG).

> We all have standards and codes of practice to adhere to whether we like it or not. There has to be a beginning, middle and end rather than just a tick box exercise. Things are changing so fast, and I am doing a PGD but in a few years' time it will be all different again and more to learn. You need to be constantly upskilling yourself all the time (P4FG).

From the data gathered, almost all participants value the PRD process, if they are carried out by a supportive leader who invests in the process themselves, affording their time, value and respect. Fullan (2001) believes that if you do not treat others fairly you will be a leader without followers, and Stark and Flaherty (2010) emphasise the importance of leaders respecting staff views and opinions.

Focus Group: Professional Development

Almost all participants have seen a positive impact from their PRD either on their own continuous development or in their practice. However, one topic that did arise at this point in the conversation was around leaders' and the local authority's investment in PRDs, particularly concerning the mandatory recording of CPD for teachers but not EYPs.

One participant highlighted that her husband is employed by the same authority in the teaching profession, and she does not understand why his CPD gets signed off each year and EYPs' do not. This could pose the question/theory that his CPD is deemed vital to his development and career and therefore gets recorded and validated. This type of information could be interpreted or misinterpreted by practitioners, potentially thinking their employers are less willing to invest in them in comparison to the teaching profession. This could then result in a demoralised ELC workforce, causing resentment.

> Comparing myself in early years doing a PRD and my husband in teaching doing his PRD, the accountability and recording is completely different. Both of us are responsible for professional development. In comparison under the same bracket of working in education within the same local authority, he is held more accountable. He must record everything online and at the end of the year his manager has to sign it off. Whereas my CPD it is me who is recording it as I wish.

I don't need to show it and get it signed. I think there has to be some uniform across PRDs and the recording of CPD (P6FG).

In my previous authority I had to bring a folder with me to my PRD of proof of training and development and it was good to reflect on and see how far you have progressed in a year. My previous manager in this authority asked me if I had engaged in any training and I brought out my folder and I was told no you don't need anything like this in Glasgow, we more or less trust you in what you are doing (P5FG).

Reflecting on the information presented in Table 3, you can clearly see the disparity between both professions in education.

Table 3
Comparison of CPD Requirements for ELC Staff and Teachers

CPD requirements	ELC staff	Teaching profession
Record must be kept on CPD manager with a specific emphasis on impact		*
CPD signed off yearly by line manager		*
PRDs yearly	*	*
Leader sent alerts to remind them that staff CPD record needs signing off		*
CPD action plan in place that generates a record		*

It is natural for staff to look inwards at their own practice, however Education Scotland (2016) recommend that we look outwards at what others do to progress. The focus group enabled practitioners to do this and display critically reflective practice which Education Scotland (2020) suggests is best done with others to add a fresh perspective.

Whalley (2008) emphasises that by reflecting on our practice we can identify if change is required or whether to maintain the current quality, through evaluating capacity for improvement. This group of participants were all in agreement that there should be some sort of uniformity across all aspects of education in relation to recording of CPD.

Feeling valued in the workplace by their line manager or the authority they work for is clearly important to this group of EYPs in this study. Goleman (1996) argues that leaders who lead with emotional intelligence and value people motivate colleagues to achieve a common goal. An aspect of future development would be for EYPs to feel valued and future research has the potential to explore this disparity across the education sector.

In my job role as ELC depute, I am responsible for staff's CPD manager. Previously I had to sign off an EAL teacher's CPD record who was based with us, yet there is no one who signs mine off. There is inconsistency here (P6FG).

Hearing that teachers are getting their CPD signed off makes me feel undervalued. I never knew that happened. I just thought we were all the same in education (P5FG).

We should all be treated the same. It is only fair. I have always felt different as a support for learning worker and wasn't valued the same as others up until a few years ago when this new leader started. I was made to feel the same as everyone else. This is when I really felt I was making a difference in my job (P2FG).

Finally, participants were asked what single words they would use to describe the benefits, limitations and future of PRDs (Table 4).

Table 4
Participants' Views of the Benefits, Limitations and Future of PRDs

Benefits	Limitations	Future
Collaborative (P1FG)	Time (P1FG, P2FG, P5FG)	Crucial (P1FG)
Achievement (P2FG)	Funding (P3FG)	Empowerment (P2FG)
Voice (P2FG)	Staffing (P5FG)	Approachable management (P3FG)
Self-belief (P4FG)	Management (P6FG)	Self-development (P4FG)
Evolving (P5FG)		Encouragement (P5FG)
Development (P6FG)		Achievement (P6FG)

I will now summarise the main three themes identified from the data.

Leadership Influence

The first theme identified from the data is leadership influence. Rolfe (2011) suggests that when leaders model good practice, they encourage, empower and motivate others to become leaders of learning. The leaders in this particular case study setting, as well as others mentioned, had a positive influence on the way PRDs were delivered. Participants commented on how they were made to feel, including relaxed, listened to, and welcomed by the coaching style of leadership used. However previous negative experiences were also discussed, highlighting the need for careful consideration of the leadership approach used to facilitate PRDs to ensure the approach is best suited to maximise the potential of PRDs. Evolving as a leader is not only a professional journey, but a personal one too, as everyone has unique skills, values and attributes (Mistry & Sood, 2015). As leaders we must recognise the potential impact our approach can have on EYPs, especially regarding PRDs.

Impact on Provision

The second theme identified from the data was impact on the learning provision. When analysing the data, it showed that participants struggled to detail the impact their PRDs had on the setting's provision. Reflecting on their responses, they may have found it problematic to articulate the actual impact and improvement on the provision from their own self-development. As the researcher I could not alter or shape the responses, however I did notice that the participants appeared to find

this challenging. This could be a future aspect of improvement and development for leaders and practitioners to consider.

Professional Development (PD)

Data highlighted that PRDs provide an opportunity to exemplify PD. McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) suggest the only way PD can be successful is when it occurs in settings that support the process. After reviewing the research data, the leader has the responsibility of supporting all EYPs in achieving and developing their professional status and becoming effective practitioners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has afforded me the opportunity to share the perspectives, experiences and individual accounts of a group of EYPs in Glasgow, relating to the process and potential of PRDs.

Summary of Findings

There was an established culture of learning evident with this group of EYPs. Many participants were already in further education, attending university or independently accessing training. The participants articulated that one of the reasons they engaged in CPD was due to the PRD process. However, also identified was the fact that recording and signing off their CPD was non-mandatory and based on an aspect of *trust* from their employer GCC. This then highlighted disparity between EYPs and the teaching profession, who all work under the same bracket of education. Participants expressed feelings of being undervalued in their profession.

Participants highlighted receiving many opportunities to lead in their setting after identifying development goals during their PRDs. Evident here was leadership at all levels, embracing a culture where everyone matters, aligning with GCC's (2023) strategic plan.

Implications on Practice

Participants found it challenging to articulate the impact their PRD had on the provision, potentially highlighting areas for improving future practice. Firstly, for the leader facilitating PRDs to ensure staff have opportunities to learn new ways of capturing and recording data which enables them to quickly identify impact with more ease. Secondly, for staff to reflect and self-evaluate how their PD actually impacts on the provision. This study has already influenced my own practice through the introduction of an action plan for EYPs to record their own data, capturing the impact of their PD. I would urge the local authority to take cognisance of the findings of this research in regards to ensuring greater parity for EYPs mandatory recording and signing off of PRDs.

Involvement in this publication indicates GCC's collaborative approach and parity of esteem in delivering services across education. By engaging in networked learning, not only are we working towards one of the authority's grand challenges of networked learning organisation (GCC, 2022), we will be improving our service and valuing staff development through staff engaging in leadership at all levels and having access to CPD. This research could ignite discussion around the process and potential of PRDs and create an opportunity for professionals delivering PRDs to look outwards at what others are doing, ultimately improving their own practice and ensuring they are maximising the potential of PRDs in their settings (Education Scotland, 2016).

Future Implications for ELC Practice

My findings can inform practice across our authority by encouraging other leaders responsible for delivering PRDs to consider and reflect on the data in this study. Leaders will be required to invest in the process of PRDs and recognise the potential impact they can have on the provision by ensuring they facilitate them meaningfully and consistently each year. A commitment to developing PRD processes and realising the potential will help to build a professional learning community in ELC. In light of the ELC workforce expanding significantly, it is imperative that consideration is given by the local authority to address the mandatory consistent recording of CPD to mirror that of the teaching profession. EYPs are currently labelled as non-teaching staff however my findings confirm my own opinion that they deserve the same professional recognition and should be afforded the same investment as teachers, thus placing importance on the professionalism in the sector.

The data gathered has shown that PRDs can be a positive process for staff to use as a platform for reflecting, evaluating and planning future development. The tentative conclusions of my study suggest that there is a need for better systems for recording and monitoring of CPD consistently across ELC. The study also appears to support the argument for a change in the frequency in which PRDs are being facilitated and delivered in ELC.

In conclusion this case study confirms the importance of PRDs for creating opportunities for professional learning, highlighting that leadership was a key influence on the PRD's process and potential. This study offers evidence for promoting a shift in the culture of leadership, suggesting we must leave behind hierarchical authority. Instead, we should value developing relationships and processes to support the delivery of PRDs, enhancing and optimising conditions for learning for all (GCC, 2023). Due to the absence of current literature in the Scottish context of PRD relevance and purpose in early years, there is a call to explore this further.

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Tricia Mills is Head at Hilltop Nursery School in the south side of Glasgow. Tricia is currently responsible for a staff team of 35 early years practitioners. She has 26 years' professional experience in early years education, in Scotland, progressing through the years in job roles starting with CDO, team leader, depute and finally head of nursery. She graduated in 2017 with a BA in childhood practice then in December 2023, with an MEd in childhood practice at the University of Glasgow's School of Education. Patricia is passionate about leading in the early years sector and about driving forward change and improvements. She classes herself as a pedagogical leader who has been on her own self-improvement journey, developing from manager to leader.

Acknowledgements