



Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network: 6th Call for Student Papers –
June 2019

Please insert this form at the start of your work.
Please email your submission to Dr Jackie Musgrave
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Title of submission	Reflection on an aspect of practice.
Level of study	Level 4
Word count	1495
I consent for my photo, short bio and paper to be uploaded to the ECSDN website (www.ecsdn.org)	Y Student signature Hannah Dray
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Feedback from ECSDN	Thank you for sending in your work Hannah. You have focused on an area of academic skill, rather than on an area of practice. You have raised some important messages for ECS students, that is, the

	<p>importance of reflecting on feedback and then feeding it forward into future work. You have used some examples which are interesting, for presentation purposes, these would work better for the website if you were able to use the Smart Art Graphics tool on word -. this will keep the formatting contained. There are a few areas to revise (see tracked changes) Please could you attend to this and send it back as soon as possible and we can publish it on the ECSDN website? Many thanks again and well done - Helen</p>
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Hannah Dray

Reflection on an aspect of practice

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1168 words

Introduction

Reflection is one of the defining characteristics of professional practice (Schon, 1987); an essential part of a practitioner's role (Reed and Canning, 2009). Particularly within the early years sector, reflection aids continuous professional advancement (Timmins, Murphy, Howe and Dennehy, 2013), accepting responsibility for one's personal learning and development (Bridgestock, 2014), in order to provide the highest quality provision for children (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011). In reflecting upon my personal professional practice, this report will explore the learning and insight gained from placement, academic study and personal experiences, assisted by the use of SWOT analysis, SMART target setting method and the reflective models of Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (1988).

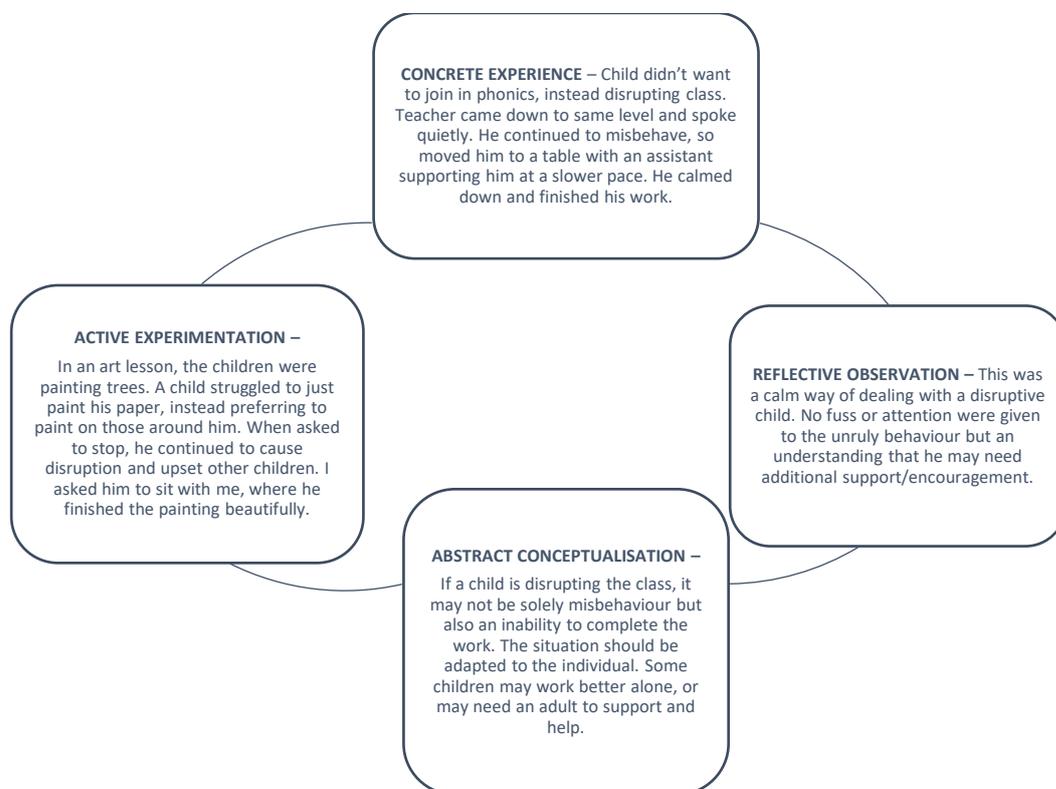
Work placements hold importance for a student's development and practise (Wilson, 2012), with learning occurring when 'knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p.38). As an individual with a growth mindset (Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck, 2007), believing that my knowledge and skillset can be enhanced and developed, I embraced every opportunity for learning, analysing the experience, reflecting and improving on my practice (Hickson, 2011). Whilst assisting in a reception class I conducted a SWOT analysis to objectively assess my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Orr, 2013), aiding better future preparation for the next placement (Addams and Allred, 2013).

<p>Strengths</p> <p>S1: Forms good relationships with children.</p> <p>S2: Hard working and professional.</p> <p>S3: Uses initiative to offer help.</p> <p>S4: Plans age-appropriate, fun activities.</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>W1: Initially lacked confidence when meeting parents.</p> <p>W2: Organisational skills regarding OAP cycles.</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>O1: Babysitting jobs.</p> <p>O2: Using feedback from my mentor through appraisals.</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>T1: Spread of illness from other staff and children.</p>

Conducting a SWOT analysis allowed me to critically think and self-assess (Orr, 2013), structuring my ideas (Bodi and Gotea, 2016) in a logical way. It allowed me to gain insight into areas needing improvement (Nouri et al., 2008) and plan strategies to adjust during the next placement (Helms and Nixon, 2010). Change was easy to implement as it was a reasonable extension, improving from a weakness that already existed, rather than something solely new

(Cialdini, 1985). An evident example is taking the area for development from my two-week appraisal detailed 'To engage with parents during morning drop off or afternoon pick up' and using this advice to develop strategies to enhance self-confidence, including practicing conversation starters and preparing particular phrases. The result of this was evident at my next placement when the mentor praised my ability to talk to the parents in the morning. Identifying such a weakness at an early stage helped me to gain new understanding and has improved my professional practice in the long-term (Gibbs, 1988), helping me to recognise the importance of forming a good relationship with parents when caring for their children (Loughran, 2008).

During the same placement, whilst assisting a phonics lesson in reception class, a critical incident occurred, requiring reflection to make sense of the experience (Alanazi, 2018). I used Kolb's (1984) reflective model to help to use the occasion as a learning experience, aiding professional progression (Helyer, 2015).



Academic Study

Being eager to learn, reflect and improve is vitally important to me to enhance professional development and improve my practise (Paige-Smith, Craft and Craft, 2008), to offer the highest quality opportunities for children under my care (Nutbrown, 2012). Thus, after receiving academic feedback, I utilised the guidance to help me form specific, realistic but challenging goals (Locke and Latham, 2002), to achieve improved future results (Mullins, 1999). Planning intentions decreased my levels of stress, listening to feedback helped to gain more successful results (Lee, 2010), supported by research highlighting a link between goal setting and higher student academic performance (Taing *et al.*, 2013).

Specific – Achieve more confidence in academic presentations. I would like to improve my nerves, develop eye contact and body language to convey assurance. In doing this, I will feel more relaxed, impacting on my mindset during the presentation and my overall grade.

Measurable – I will practice presenting alone 5 times the week before the presentation is due to learn the content, encourage eye contact and decrease the need to look at the slides. Then, I will ask my peers to watch my presentation twice, asking for constructive feedback.

Achievable – A week before the presentation, I will start learning the content. I will record the presentation and listen to it, memorising the information. Knowing the presentation well will help me to feel more relaxed and confident, aiding good eye contact and poised body language. Then, I will present in front of others.

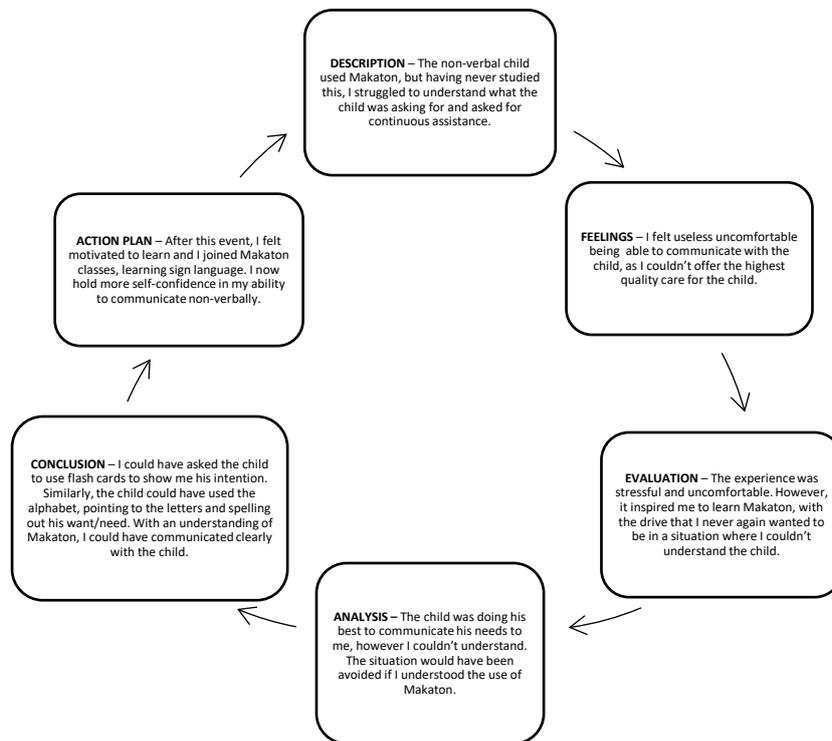
Realistic/Relevance – The process will be worthwhile as it will help to develop self-confidence when presenting. Conflicts may include nerves and a worry about failing.

Timely – Defined by presentation deadlines. I need to be organised and practise a week before the work is due.

Such a method was successful in improving my confidence and, as such, my grades, receiving an A in my latest presentation. In setting such goals after receiving feedback, I found myself less stressed (Lee, 2010), finding it easier to identify specific errors and improve upon my presentation skills (Orsmond and Merry, 2010). As well as gaining academic feedback, the feedback received from presenting to my peers just before the submission deadline helped to fix smaller errors, ensuring I presented to the best standard possible (Ghazal *et al.*, 2018). I found myself inspired to reach the goals, with a sense of pride developing on improvement (Latham, 2004). Observing such a positive direct relationship between specific goals and task performance aligns with Bandura's social cognitive theory of the positive causal effect of motivation and cognition factors on a preferred behaviour alteration (Locke and Latham, 2002).

Personal Experience

During my personal paid work outside of college, I embrace opportunities for continuous professional development (Veale, 2013) constantly learning and reflecting (Smith and Martin, 2014). A critical incident occurred where I was unable to communicate with a non-verbal child, thus I used Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle to allow me to develop a deeper understanding, critically analyse the situation and develop further actions (Brock, 2015). Through using the cycle, I found that I thought systematically about the different stages of the experience (Helyer, 2015) and was able to reflect deeply (Cartwright and McGregor, 2011).



Conclusion

In conclusion, being a professional practitioner is strongly correlated with skills of reflection and lifelong learning (Smith and Martin, 2014). The use of models and theories aid the process of professional development in supplying frameworks to encourage and shape the process of reflection (Helyer and Price, 2015). With the importance of reflection and continuous professional development highlighted in the EYFS (DfE, 2018), I have sought to embrace any opportunity for self-development and regular reflection (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011), embracing a growth mindset (Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck, 2007) to gain new understanding and improve my practice in the long-term.

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