

Reflection on an aspect of practice/ the role of the student practitioner

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Introduction

Aim of the report:

The aim of this report is to identify, reflect and analyse, using Gibbs' (1988) model of reflection, how feedback can support myself as an early years student, and find links on how it may facilitate professional development.

Why reflection?

Reflection is a critical examination of an incident, to improve and change (Bolton, 2010; Farrell, 2013). According to Flanagan (1954), for an incident to be categorised as critical, it must have contributed to an experience in either a positive or a negative manner (Farrell, 2013; Alanazi, 2018). Hughes, Smith and Creese (2015) state that reflection upon feedback from academic work can be used as a tool, to improve academic skills. However, Yeager and Dweck (2012) argue that in order to professionally develop, an individual with a growth mindset is required to reflect on failures and successes (Bolton, 2010). Therefore, an individual who attributes these incidents to oneself, and believes that one can control and change (Thompson, 2017). Hallet (2013) agrees and states that professional and personal self-knowledge is a skill which not everyone is willing to critically engage with.

Professional Development in the Early Years:

Hanson and Appleby (2017) argue that early years students who engage in reflective practice will additionally allow themselves to learn from a process of deeply thinking about children's development and learning. This is supported by Hallet (2013), who states that reflective practice is important when working with children as it improves provision. This occurs by enabling practitioners to carry out informed decisions, understanding self-know-

ledge and frameworks for children, therefore enhancing their professional development (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2018). The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) states that practitioners must reflect upon children's development and apply this to their practice (DfE, 2017). Appleby and Hanson (2017) explain this by making a link between how an early years practitioner or student, needs to engage themselves in skills such as; "**active learning** [original emphasis] - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements" (DfE, 2017, p.10), to have the expectation for children to do the same.

'Gibbs' Reflective Cycle': **Reflection on Feedback**

- a. Description: Last semester, during my degree studies, one of my written assignments was a report on children's physical development. The concept was understood and there was enough time and help given for completion from lectures. However, the grade that I received was 58 per cent, the lowest grade I have received within this course. The feedback that was given back to me mentioned the area of development which I have struggled with throughout all my assignments, proof-reading.
- b. Feelings: As I read the last comment of the report which was "**It is not acceptable** [emphasis added] to have not proofread this-you must ensure your format is consistent", I was very upset with myself. I went back on the report and closely observed all the different fonts and sizes of text which were used throughout the report. I was surprised by how I had turned in an assignment without ensuring it was written in the standard which I usually do. I am unsure whether this was because it was written in a report format, in comparison to previous 'essay' type assignments. Or because I had always received grades I was pleased with, therefore I did not focus on the assignment

as much as needed. Lastly, this has motivated me to ensure this report will be written in the standard which I believe represents me as a professional early years student.

- c. Evaluation: The feedback that I received was accurate, as Cortell (2010) states that students must be open to all feedback, despite their personal opinion. Carless (2006) found that the majority of students predominantly focus on their grade rather than written feedback. Therefore, it may be that proofreading has never majorly affected my grade thus, I did not focus on improving it. On the contrary, Doan (2013) found that the extent which students may use their feedback to improve depends on the quality of the feedback which they receive. Although this is supported by Quinton and Smallbone (2010), the argument is raised that students need ‘to be actively involved in monitoring their own learning and progress’ (Quinton and Smallbone, 2010, p. 128). Hence, reflecting on feedback is important for my progress as a student.
- d. Analysis: In order to analyse this experience, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis (Orr, 2013) will be implemented upon academic trends as well as the feedback from the physical development report. Bodi and Gotea (2013) state that SWOT is a simple way to analyse objectively, external (opportunities and threats) as well as internal (strengths and weaknesses) factors, within a problem one is trying to solve (Osita, Onyebuchi and Justina, 2014). Orr (2013) agrees SWOT is a useful tool nevertheless, the argument is raised that it should not be used solely thus, it is implemented within a reflective cycle.

STRENGTHS (what one does well)	WEAKNESSES (what could one develop)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good time-management skills • Range of sources • Good critical analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not proofreading • Grammatical errors • Run-on sentences
OPPORTUNITIES (factors which one can use to their advantage)	THREATS (factors which affect one negatively)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Tutors whom know the subject area • Peers from college to proofread my work • College library/public library • The internet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English as a second language • Peers not willing to help

Identifying strengths and weaknesses in my writing will allow me to develop professionally as an early years practitioner. As proof-reading requires attention to detail, similarly, this is a skill required when one is working with children (Hanson and Appleby, 2017). For example, the EYFS states "...staff to identify signs of possible abuse and neglect at the earliest opportunity and to respond in a timely and appropriate way. These may include significant changes in children's behaviour" (DfE, 2017, p. 17). To identify gaps and changes in children's development and behaviour, one needs the skills to pay attention to details (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). Lastly, when completing OAP cycles and documentation of a child's Learning Journey, proof-reading is important. As such day-to-day paperwork whilst working with families and during placements, in relation to children's development, will need to have a standard of professionalism (Trodd, 2013).

- e. Conclusion: In conclusion, the results I received in my last report were not the level which I was expecting. Therefore, through analysis and evaluation of this incident, I have identified the problem and how by improving academically, I can also facilitate my professional development as an early years student and practitioner. The SWOT analysis clearly outlined the strengths such as; good time-management skills, which can be used in my advantage in order to develop my weaknesses, such as; not proof-reading my work. However, the last stage of the reflective cycle will give me a clear timeline of how I can use these strengths and opportunities to progress.
- f. Action Plan: Robins (2014) states that establishing goals within academic studies, increases professional success (Taing *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, Day and Tosey (2011) argue that academic attainment was seen higher in students who set appropriate, challenging and clear goals (Lawlor and Hornyak, 2012). Therefore, to address how I will

improve within this report, I will implement the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound (SMART) target method (O'Neill and Conzemius, 2006).

S pecific (what one wants to achieve)	I would like to achieve 70 per cent on this assignment. Therefore, I need to focus on proof-reading my work before sending it.
M easurable (when will one knows that it will be met?)	I will know that this will be met, once I receive the grade and the feedback from my tutor.
A chievable (is the goal realistic?)	The goal is realistic, as the highest grade I have received is 68. Therefore I am aiming an achievable grade.
R ealistic (is it worthwhile?The intrinsic value of sustaining the goal)	I would like to progress in my academic studies, and improve my skills of proof-reading, as this will also allow me to develop professionally.
T ime-bound (how long will it take and when will it be complete?)	This will occur as I write. I will proof-read each time I finish writing for the day. I will also allow 2 days before submitting in order to proof-read it.

The SWOT analysis allowed me to have a clear understanding of external and internal factors within my academic writing. In addition, it has also allowed identification on how I can use these to progress professionally. Osita, Onyebuchi and Justina (2014) argue SWOT is very beneficial towards understanding and solving a problem. However, it was observed that the steps I must take in order to improve were not clear (De Los Santos and Zanca, 2018). Chermack and Kasshanna (2007) state that a major misuse of SWOT analysis occurs when it is not implemented within a plan. Similarly, Boti and Gotea (2016) argue that SWOT is descriptive and does not offer steps for improvement. Therefore, using a SMART target allowed me to interpret further through a clear outline of what I must do within this report in order to improve (Lawlor and Hornyak, 2012). Further, Robins (2014),

argues that not everyone agrees that SMART goals are beneficial. However, SMART has been a motivational strategy for myself, as Aghera *et al.*, (2018) found that creating SMART goals contributes higher towards achieving them (Taing *et al.*, 2013). Finally, reflective practice and using tools such as SWOT analysis has been useful within different early years sectors such as newborn hearing screening (White and Baiser, 2011), obesity prevention interventions (Ortega-Altamirano *et al.*, 2019) as well as different activities within schools for children (Llagjevic-Govori *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the process of reflection upon my academic studies can also be implemented when engaging with children. This may occur by reflecting on an activity using Gibb's reflective cycle, evaluating it using SWOT analysis and planning next steps using SMART targets.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reflection is an essential part of progress towards personal and professional development in the early years (Cortell, 2010; Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2018). Through reflecting on feedback from academic work and personal characteristics, one may find gaps in practice, which may result to better provision for children and their families (Hallet, 2013; Travers, Morisano and Locke, 2015; Appleby and Hanson, 2017). Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle has given me the opportunity to analyse and evaluate academic and personal characteristics to professionally develop. Further, although SWOT analysis is a simple strategy, it does not give a clear outline of how to overcome a problem (Chermack and Kasshanna, 2007; Osita, Onyebuchi and Justina, 2014). Although Robins (2014) argues the majority may not find it beneficial, implementing a SMART target, has allowed me to understand what I can do to improve within this report. Lastly, an individual with a growth mindset is required to identify gaps, and have the will to learn and improve their practice (Bolton, 2010; Kemmis, 2010; Yeager and Dweck, 2012; Thompson, 2017).

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