

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

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Introduction

In this report, I will be reflecting upon progression in my academic work using self-assessment tools. These tools include the use of SWOT analysis and the SMART target method. I will be reflecting on my learning as a student studying to become an Early Years practitioner, analysing how I may apply this learning in a professional context and the effectiveness of the chosen tools.

Reflecting on practice is essential in the role of an early year's practitioner (Craft and Paige-Smith, 2011). Reflection is purposively looking at and deliberating on our experiences, actions, and feelings and analysing these to learn from them (Atkins and Murphy, 1994). Reflection allows us to consider ourselves and the world and come to terms with our responsibilities and roles (Reed and Canning, 2009). Moon (2008) views reflection as having the abilities and skills to take a critical stance, whereas Brookfield (1995) expresses that learners reflect when they analyse their personal experiences. To provide a holistic representation of being reflective, I will aim to consider Moon's (2008) and Brookfield's (1995) perception of reflection in my reflective report. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017) welcomes the concept that reflective practice is crucial. The statutory framework stipulates 'Providers must support staff to undertake appropriate training and professional development.' (DfE, 2017, p. 21). Current policy demonstrates that reflective practice is necessary for the way that we respond to children's needs; for practitioners, the challenge is how this can be achieved (Reed and Canning, 2009).

Academic

My first assignment at University was a presentation on safeguarding. The task was comprehensible; however, the grade I obtained was 52%. This grade does not align with the expectations I have of myself. To examine this incident, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis (Orr, 2013) will be conducted along with feedback from the safeguarding presentation. SWOT analysis is a manageable way to analyse external (opportunities and threats) as well as internal (strengths and weaknesses) determinants objectively (Bodi and Gotea, 2016). SWOT analysis demonstrates what may aid in reaching objectives and what obstacles must be overcome to achieve the results sought-after (McLaurin, Bell, and Smith, 2009).

INTERNAL	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Effective eye contact▪ All assessment criteria covered▪ Clear introduction▪ Effective time management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ No journal articles included▪ Relying on notes to present▪ Spelling mistakes▪ Lack of proof-reading
EXTERNAL	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Peers to practice presenting to▪ Library▪ Tutors▪ Using previous feedback from my tutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Critical incident (loss of family member)▪ Lack of experience in level 4 work

Farrell (2013) stated that reflection occurs by exploring and articulating the incidents believed to be critical. One of the external factors identified in the SWOT analysis was

the critical incident of the loss of a family member. A critical incident can be any observable experience that manifests itself as a significant incident that provides a fundamental basis for analysis (Gremier, 2004). This critical incident in my life was the death of a primary carer one week before my presentation. Bereavement during University can have adverse outcomes for students' fruition in academics (Neimeyer et al., 2008). The grieving course may be convoluted by feelings of academic pressure, an atmosphere that is not facilitative to grief expression (Newton and Ohrt, 2018). Another complication in the grieving process for students is the geographic distance from their conventional support systems (Servaty-Seib and Hamilton, 2006). Both factors which impact the grieving process were true to my experience. I was under high academic pressure due to my first assessment week at University, and my usual support systems were far away. These factors which impacted my grieving process provide insight into why this critical incident became a threat.

SWOT is seen as a purposeful tool; however, Orr (2013) claims that it should not be used exclusively. Similarly, Osgood (2006) suggests that SWOT analysis should become the basis for further planning. Therefore, it is to be implemented with the SMART target method, where we may determine how to accomplish the objectives.

Specific	I would like to achieve higher grades in my academic presentations. I would like to develop my presentation skills by not relying on my notes to present and improving my nerves on presenting to others. One of the comments in my feedback for the safeguarding presentation was that I established good eye contact, but my voice was hesitant at times. By developing my presentation skills, I will feel more confident, and my presentation will flow, thus, impacting my grade.
Measurable	I will practice presenting my work to build my confidence in presentation skills. At first, I will present alone to learn the content of the presentation to decrease reliance on my notes. After this, I will ask

	my peers or University tutors to watch my presentation, asking for formative criticism.
Achievable	A couple of weeks before presenting, I will start to learn the content of the presentation. I will do this by practising the content multiple times and only writing short notes to aid myself to minimise reliance. After this, I will present in front of my peers.
Relevant	This goal is worthwhile as it will help me to gain confidence in presentation skills and achieve higher grades in my academic presentations.
Timely	The target date is related to the presentation date. I need to manage my time effectively and start practising a couple of weeks before the presentation date.

SWOT analysis provides a way to evaluate the range of factors that influence your practice and can give you valuable admonition in making decisions about what to do next (Osgood, 2006). This is to be followed up with further planning; in this case, I have used the SMART target method. Goal setting is often facilitated by using the SMART framework in which an objective is intended to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (Wade, 2009). Bodi and Gotea (2016) suggest that SWOT analysis is descriptive and does not offer action for advancement. Therefore, using the SMART target method in combination with SWOT analysis permitted me to create a clear plan to improve my grades (Lawlor and Hornyak, 2012). As maintained by Moyles (2001), educational progression depends on the practitioner feeling that they want to make an amendment. The SMART target method of stating my goals allowed me to drive forward my education. The SMART target framework has become a favoured way of focussing on performance (Fielding 1999). Nonetheless, there has been insufficient controlled deliberation of the validity of the SMART framework (Day and Tosey, 2011).

As attested by Locke and Latham (2002), goals need to be specific, realistic, proximal in time and engage the student's dedication. For these goals to be accomplishable, learners greatly merit from constructive feedback (Day and Tosey, 2011). Applying the SWOT and SMART framework was successful in my example. I was able to use the feedback I had acquired in my first presentation and analyse it using SWOT analysis to create a SMART target. In my latest presentation, I received a grade of 76%, which is a large improvement in my first presentation grade of 56%. Despite this, there is a risk that SMART targets can be harnessed in an expendable fashion, disjointed from active participation and reflection in practice (Bullock and Wikeley, 2008). Studies indicate that the external use of models of reflection, and indifference towards model use is prevalent in students (Timmins and Dunne, 2009). Schon (1983) regarded reflection as having two characteristics: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action refers to the reaction that occurs as you are doing. Reflection-on-action refers to the contemplation of practice retrospectively by analysing and interpreting the situation (Fitzgerald, 1994). To be a reflective practitioner, we must reflect in action and on the action (Schon, 1983) to ensure we are not becoming disconnected from actively engaging (Bullock and Wikeley, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, reflecting on practice is essential in the work of an early year's practitioner (Craft and Paige-Smith, 2011). In my report, I aimed to provide a holistic representation of being a reflective learner, by using self-assessment tools such as SWOT analysis and the SMART target method. I was able to reflect on academic experiences by using my skills and abilities to think critically (Moon, 2008) and analysing my experiences (Brookfield, 1995). Applying the SWOT and SMART framework was a successful method of reflection for myself. I was able to use the feedback I had acquired in my first presentation and analyse it using SWOT analysis to create a SMART target, improving my grade drastically. These self-reflection tools are ones that I will continue to use in my future professional practice. Despite finding a method of reflection that was successful for my needs, I must continuously ensure I am engaging in reflective practice and not become disjointed from active engagement (Bullock and Wikeley, 2008). As proclaimed by Schon (1987), the practical relevance of reflection depends more on the ability of professionals to use it rather than its theoretical validity.

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