

GRADUATE CERTIFICATE in
Consolidation of Social Work Practice
LEVEL 6 - 60 Credits
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LEARNER PORTFOLIO
(PORTH AGORED and UNIVERSITY OF
WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID)

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Cohort: 18 onwards

Task: 1 a & b

Task 1- A

The model of reflection I plan to use to critically reflect on my professional development since qualifying will be Siobhan Maclean's 'The Big 6' (2020). The Big 6 helps us to consider 6 things to aide being critically reflective; power, values, emotions, knowledge, self-awareness and uncertainty, I will refer to these throughout.

Working with families in a community children's team since qualifying, has given me opportunities to continue developing my knowledge of social work practice and the legislation and codes of practice that guide us. I have had opportunities to undertake formal assessments which include making professional judgements on individual's needs for care and support. Working with families and other professionals in a multi-agency context to support them to achieve their outcomes.

I continue to build on my confidence in using my own professional judgement within complex situations. This can include being creative to support families enabling them to achieve their outcomes, this is something I would like to continue developing further. When a service has not worked for a family or there isn't a service available that 'fits', thinking innovatively, utilising the professional relationships we build are important and something I feel I could improve on (Teater, 2014).

There are elements of practice I have attempted to ingrain such as the principles of the Social Services and Well-Being Wales Act 2014 (SSWBA); voice and control, prevention and early intervention, well-being, co-production and multi-agency working and the Codes of Professional Practice (Social Care Wales, 2017). When considering the power dynamics; we are seen as holding power and there is often fear of our involvement with some families, this becomes a barrier to their engagement and can sometimes shift the power dynamics. The importance of prevention and early intervention is discussed however, when engagement at voluntary levels is the barrier to successful intervention, I as a social worker have feelings of powerlessness when we 'cannot get in the door'.

Social work Values; advocacy, anti-oppressive practice and social justice (BASWA, 2012; Beckett, Maynard & Jordan, 2017). These values and use of communication skills while working open and honestly to build relationships can be powerful tools with the hardest to reach families. Communication skills and encouraging engagement within complex situations

is something I wish to develop further this year by utilising mentorship and opportunities to shadow experienced workers.

I continue to develop an understanding of different aspects that effect individuals; domestic violence, substance misuse, disabilities, exploitation, abuse etc. the vast areas require knowledge and understanding of the impact of these things on children and their families, it cements the need for training within these contexts which I utilise when I have the opportunity as part of my CPD. I am also aware that I cannot be an expert in all these different areas and have feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt when faced with challenging and complex cases. I plan to utilise supervision to discuss any feelings and to be supported within my case management and allow me to improve exercising professional accountability in increasingly complex situations as a future learning need (Howe & Gray, 2013).

Working in a multi-agency context is something I feel I have developed throughout my first year in practice, I attended safeguarding training in my first year where the emphasis on safeguarding being 'everyone's responsibility' really sank in (Irranca-Davies, 2017). At times I have felt frustrated with professionals who had high or unrealistic expectations of families I worked with. I experience nervousness during larger groups of multi-agency professionals and can find chairing these meetings more difficult; practice will likely support me and build my confidence in this area and support me to manage my role as a social worker in increasingly complex situations. I often discuss uncertainty within my supervision and an almost 'imposter syndrome' when thinking of myself as a representative of the Local Authority, it is a position I take with gravitas and is likely to continue as I care about my families and want to ensure they are supported as best I can. I continue to develop a focus on working in partnership with multi-agency professionals (Morris, 2008).

Working in an outcomes focused and strengths based way is entrenched within the SSWBA, I have had opportunities to attend training in this area and also do my own research. Having 'what matters' conversations (Social Care Wales (SCW), 2022) with families building on their strengths and resilience, this supports the principle voice and control and being open and honest with families is important to ensure they feel heard and understand that you believe them as the experts within their lives while safeguarding children (Welsh Government (WG), 2011; SCW, 2017).

As part of my learning development plan (LDP) I have identified the following; being innovative within my practice which I will use supervision and mentor sessions to build on. Working within larger groups of multi-agency professionals to build on my confidence within complex situations. To continue developing my practice we have also agreed I take on Court work, to build my confidence in my analytical skills and professional judgement. It has also been agreed that I take on more complex cases and attend training to support my learning and development. This will also aid me in achieving the learning outcomes. I will be supported by my manager and my mentor throughout and have a supportive team which I feel has been invaluable since being qualified.

TASK 1- B

It feels like yesterday but, also years ago since beginning my consolidation programme. When tasked to look back and consider how my practice has developed, there are several things to note. When reading back my initial task 1 and what I hoped to achieve over the course of the year, I am positive I have made progress on my LDP. That being said, I think I have realised there will always be progress to make and although my learning needs may change there is also a cyclical nature within that. The importance of continued professional development (CPD) and utilising supervision will always be important and something I will continue utilising to reflect on my practice and manage my role within increasingly complex situations (Howe & Gray, 2013).

I will again utilise 'the big 6' as a reflective model (Maclean, 2020), it is my favourite and helps consider social work values. There is also the prompt to consider my own emotions within this model which I think I can sometimes leave out of my reflections at times.

This year I have had multiple opportunities to attend training as part of my learning development plan. We are told to prioritise this however, 'best-laid plans'. I have managed to attend some noteworthy training which supported building on my knowledge of Domestic Violence, Care Planning and Mental Health this year, all of which continue to inform my practice, especially, with working collaboratively with other services such as health, education and 3rd sector services such as domestic abuse organisations. Working together to support families is essential and building these professional relationships has helped shape my

practice this year and something I feel I do well. If I ever have self-doubt of my own knowledge when it comes to health, education etc. I have asked people for advice and information, which I believe makes me a better social worker for the families I work with. Utilising resources available, such as community care inform and free webinars from Siobhan Maclean has supported me to keep my practice and knowledge relevant during evenings/weekends so that even when I haven't been able to attend training I have built on my CPD, which I will continue to utilise.

My confidence and ability has grown over the consolidation programme, one of my learning needs initially identified was to build confidence in my analytical and professional judgement. I have definitely built on this and it is something I continue to develop. I have had opportunities to write comprehensive reports for Court within sensitive timescales. This has supported me to build on my analysis with more complexity and also to offer recommendations, within this utilising my professional judgement, I have utilised support during supervision and training opportunities to develop this over the year. I have also had to identify when the timescale was unrealistic and utilised supervision and case consultation to ask for an extension from the court when I took over a case. This may not have been ideal however, in order for me to complete the assessment to a good standard and good practice this was necessary. This strengthened my own resilience within these situations.

I still have an uneasiness when considering myself as a representative of the Local Authority and the weight of this responsibility is felt more so, when the stakes are high with the families we work with; I have also succumbed to the idea that a certain amount of 'imposter syndrome' is quite natural and this is because of that responsibility and how much I want to 'get it right' for the children I work with (Knott & Scragg, 2007; Urwin, 2017).

Social work can feel solitary at times especially with hybrid working more common place. There has been some difficult days that have impacted me emotionally and it is at these times I am grateful to work in a supportive team. There is a lot of talk about 'burn out' within the social work sphere and this is something that I intend to be mindful of in future, I know I can be neglectful when it comes to self-care; being busy shouldn't mean skipping lunch and working till late however, it can be the reality of the role. I have attempted to be more forceful with my own boundaries, alas, this is a work in progress and will be a future learning need (Howarth, 2018).

I have received feedback from a family I have worked with over most of this year, they spoke about how the relationship I built with them had made a positive difference. This was a family where it was very difficult to initially engage them but over time we built trust through working open and honestly together and me having consideration for the power dynamics. It was not without its difficulties at times and the feedback was relayed during an initial child protection conference. In all honesty I was humbled that during what was a difficult time for this parent they acknowledged the positive professional relationship I had with them and how this had supported the family.

(Word count: 1741)