

Self-Assessment, Self-Evaluation and Reflection.

A reflection upon one's time in university, grounded in the principles of self-evaluation and self-assessment - and how they have played integral roles, is not as simple as it may first seem. Both concepts are integral to the development one must seek to achieve, and attain, to successfully complete studies at undergraduate level - but they are valuable across many instances and levels of learning. Reflection upon one's practice within education, as a student as well as an educator, is increasingly focussed upon within academic writing (Watton, Collings and Moon, 2001) - the role of reflection within education has also seen a significant increase in scholarly discussion, ever since Dewey's 1991 (*cited in* Lew and Schmidt, 2011) 'ground-breaking research' (*ibid*, pp.529). Lew and Schmidt (2011, pp.529) contended that Dewey's research sought to forward the notion that reflection was integral in fostering proper self-reflection, critical thinking and the development of professional values and skills. Many universities, including Nottingham (2018), highlight the importance of critical thinking as a key skill to attain to engage as a successful student. It would therefore be apparent that to succeed within higher education it is necessary for one to develop and refine their ability to reflect upon previous scholarly experiences (e.g. assessments).

Before continuing with this reflective article, it would be useful to reach a common understanding of what self-assessment is. McMillan and Hearn (2008, p.40) state the following 'self-assessment occurs when students judge their own work to improve performance as they identify discrepancies between current and desired performance'. This is the definition one should consider throughout this paper when referring to self-assessment. Self-evaluation is a separate skill that is often overlooked (Warwick University, 2018) and as such should be clearly differentiated from self-assessment. Self-evaluation is concerned with examining the process by which one has learnt or educated. Warwick University (2018) states that subjecting one's methods and strategies to one's own critical evaluation is the mark of a conscientious learner (or educator). It forces an individual to engage with the process with which tasks, assessments in this case, are conducted. Both self-assessment and self-evaluation are skills that form part of what Boekaerts, Maes and Karoly (2005) identify as self-regulation, a multi-faceted complex of cognitions that serve to make progress towards one's goals. Evans (2013) seeks to highlight though that these elements are often used incorrectly in research as the terms are used interchangeably; this poses the specific issue where it is not always possible to decipher what a researcher is specifically targeting.

The focus within higher education upon critical thinking, and reflection as a result, are not without grounding in workplace practice, as both skills play crucial roles in efficient output from an

individual. As Fallon (2014) highlights, there is no real value in making rash decisions, for the time and expense required to amend these situations often outweighs the initial cost of critical evaluation. To translate this example into educational contexts, it is necessary for students to thoroughly examine the path with which they are taking, as a general statement, but also within their studies specifically; in further reading, analysis of texts and assignment drafting. Arguably self-assessment and self-evaluation are to the individual learner, what assessment for learning is to the teacher - they are tools by which one can address their learning and development - aiding it themselves. They are tools to empower the individual. Further to this the Quality Assurance Agency (2014) denotes that self-reflection is the hallmark of good practice in many moral and ethically aware professions. This is of great relevance when considering the thoughts of Long (1992) who argues the higher education itself is a moral enterprise, one that should be conducted for moral reasons as much as academic. It is undeniable that education is embroiled with many moral and ethical debates and practices. Not least of these is the human right to education itself, article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). With the Sustainable Development Goals in mind, one must be aware that each educator, regardless of boundaries, has the moral duty to engage students in education to the best of their ability. This is necessary to fully realise goal 4 of the SDGs and realise education as a human right, as 57 million children are still not in education globally (UN, 2015).

Engaging in self-assessment allows students to appraise what they know as well as what they do not know; by doing this it enables them to address where it is they wish to direct their learning (Sadler, 1989 *cited by* Lewis, 2018). By engaging oneself in an area with which you have not had previous experience it challenges the learner to adapt and set an immediate standard for the work necessary to complete an assessment. Here I am making specific reference to the first assessment completed within my time in higher education, an essay based in the political elements of education. I must confess that before this assignment my knowledge of the political landscape in Britain was limited - no equitable study had been invested in the area. As a result of this it forced me to seek out my own resources - to write an assignment that was based upon my own research, specifically for this task. The assessment was positively received, and the style with which it was conducted in has had massive bearing upon how further assessments were written. I should note that for the majority of assignments following this, a similar process was employed; specific regard was given for the technicalities of the assessment, but I have sought to follow my own research. This is a process that has been shown to work, time and again, so much so that it is my regular practice when composing a written assignment. A separate form of assessment has taken advantage of this style of research across all years of my degree studies; presentations. Both group and individual presentations have

been conducted, with differing skills required for both. At the core though, presentations require a confidence in what one is presenting - a good presentation requires one to have knowledge of the subject area beyond what is required for the PowerPoint, per se. Data cited from Washington Post (no date, *cited by* Stewart and Pearson, 2016) shows that public speaking is the greatest fear for many Americans; this is something not likely to differ in the UK public. As many people can attest to, myself included, presentations are rather stressful, and require practice to become proficient in the associated skills. Gallo (2014) states that seventy per cent of people surveyed acknowledge presentation skills are critical for career success - he then contends that the further thirty per cent have not yet realised this truth. Specific regard will be given to the time skills associated with presentations, as these are some with which I acknowledge I am most lacking. This in terms of assessment is not ideal, as there has not been a single presentation where I have run to time - this is something that reflecting upon I must change if I am to progress to greater success in this area.

Feedback in the classroom cannot be a one-way street (Arthur and Peterson, 2012), it is necessary and highly advantageous to seek a status of cooperation between learner and educator in a setting where assessment for learning is deployed. It should be mentioned that this advantage is not solely applicable in the instance of assessment for learning; any effective assessment engages both the learner and assessor to reach a conclusion. While assessment for learning has not played as active of a role in my experience of university, it will be integral for many others post-university. As an education studies course, it is reasonable to expect that many students will progress to a teaching qualification after completion of their studies. This means that an appreciation for self-assessment, and how it aids the educator is of great value - this specifically challenges the underlying perception highlighted by Adams and King (1995); teachers are to do the teaching and marking. By challenging this perception early, and embodying the opposite of it, it is possible to reinforce the cycle of constant cooperative development between learner and educator. A constant cycle of improving one's skills, proficiency and attributes is necessary in life; this is the concept of lifelong learning, which shall be addressed later in this discussion. Deploying a practice of good feedback enables peer assessment as a vital means of attaining feedback as an educator; Patri (2002) states that by involving students in the process of assessment teachers may be able to be more productive with their limited time.

When considering the formalised feedback structure deployed during my higher education experience one immediately thinks of the feedback forms attached to all written assignments. They feature three questions the student must answer: 'what are the best aspects of the work?', 'what are the aspects requiring improvement?', 'what has been the most satisfying part of the work?' (UWTSD, 2017, p.2). By engaging with these questions, one is forced to examine the entire assessed

article, recount both the process of its creation, but also the product. By engaging in this process, one practices both self-assessment and self-evaluation, skills that are critical in nature and do not come easily to all students (Orsmand, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary for students to practice the skill, as by doing so they improve their ability to perform it - the adage of practice makes perfect rings true. There is a necessity for feedback when engaging with the practice of self-assessment though, as Sluijsmans, Dochy and Moerkerke (1998) highlight there is the possibility of a mismatch between the actual performance and a learner's perceived performance. By ensuring feedback into this experience it is possible to correct any issues, so that the learner may evaluate and address where in their self-assessment they have come awry. With good quality feedback it is possible to scaffold further learning in ways much similar to those deployed within formative assessment (AfL in practice). This is the type of practice described by Race (2008, p.4) whereby feedback is designed to facilitate the movement of 'things from the danger box into the transit box, on the way towards the target box'. Here Race is referring to the movement of competencies from a position where a learner is unaware and unable to do them, to a position where they are working towards that competency, eventually achieving the aim of being competent in that ability. A further predominant form of feedback has been in one-to-one face-to-face conversations. Race (*ibid*) notes that this format can be highly advantageous in providing personal yet authoritative feedback that often addresses learners' individual needs. However, one must take care to not prioritise a single method of feedback, Shute (2008, *cited in* Evans, 2013) argues that no feedback method has been identified as being individually superior, further highlighting that there is no individual form of feedback identified as being the most useful (Nelson and Schunn, 2009, *cited in* Evans, 2013). It has been in my experience that the most useful feedback is often the one-to-one conversation with references made to the submitted assignment; this allows me to receive both supportive advice, as well as critical review.

Lifelong learning is a wide-reaching concept but can be associated with the purpose of 'up-skilling', reskilling and continual development, to remain relevant in a changing labour market (Foresight, 2016, p.4). As has been demonstrated with economic upheaval in recent memory, the labour market is turbulent, with those who are able to adapt left more able to find new footing. The government of Great Britain aims to form an economy driven on innovation and highly skilled labourers in the workforce (Cable, 2014) following the knowledge-based economy proposed by the OECD (1996). Increased human capital is necessary to meet the demands of a successful knowledge-based economy, with high demand for highly skilled workers a key characteristic of these economies (*ibid*). Smethurst (1995, *cited in* Aspin and Chapman, 2001, p.1) highlights that to be successful in life, regardless of field, one must possess 'independence of mind and autonomy of spirit' - one must be

able to forge their own path. This is key in understanding why building independent learners is a high priority within educational policy. An independent learner assumes control and responsibility for the learning process; this requires them to acquire an understanding of their own learning and form their own motivation to learn (Meyer *et al*, 2008). To understand one's own learning requires the ability to self-evaluate as was defined earlier by Warwick University (2018). Internalising motivation is not an issue specific to education, nor is it an issue that has only recently become of concern; there is a vast amount of literature concerned with this subject. There are many factors, more than would be reasonable to discuss in this paper, however, a good article to research would be the work of Gagné and Deci (2005). By developing the internal motivation to learn, one enables themselves with the ability to direct and propel their own learning. I must confess that as I review what has been of my third year of degree studies, I have not internalised my motivation to learn. I know this because of the difference in performance between the soft-deadline approach of dissertation focussed work, and hard-deadline approach of defined modules. I realised after completing the community engagement project proposal that hard deadlines are of some importance when motivating me as a learner. It is this realisation that has informed my decision making when considering education beyond degree level; through understanding my learning I know that without significant adaptation a masters level course with increased emphasis upon dissertation elements would not be favourable to me.

Both self-assessment and self-evaluation require clear goal setting. The GROW framework provided by Warwick University (2005) offers a clear structure for which goals should be framed within. One should imagine what success looks like, what it feels like and how you know that you have succeeded (*ibid*). By doing this it enables oneself to clearly identify the terms for which success should take, it gives a clear endpoint to the individuals task. Examining my process for assignment writing I find that very often this is not done, very rarely do I formulate a definitive 'plan' for where a text should go. Instead I have several concepts that I wish to include; the way that these concepts are woven together is determined by the research. One must be aware of the reality of one's situation when seeking to achieve in the GROW model, questioning why it is important to achieve that goal (*ibid*). Furthermore, one must identify possible options, as well as the most appropriate route; by doing so one is enabled to make clear goal-orientated decisions. It is these goals orientated decisions that provide the clear direction that is necessary for self-assessment and self-evaluation to be an effective means of self-motivation, and self-correction.

Self-assessment and self-evaluation are the tools to which a learner becomes something greater than a 'student'. It is true that we never stop learning, and nor should we - but, as a learner that performs these vital skills, one may progress past being a 'student'. By progressing it allows one to

become a self-determined learner, where oneself is the 'educator', per se. A learner who can ensure equity in their own education, is empowered to develop and adapt as the environment surrounding them dictates. This is ultimately the aim of governmental policy for those who are attempting to create a knowledge powered economy. By becoming this type of individual, one is empowered to master the challenges ahead and propel to success. Self-assessment and self-evaluation are skills that when practiced regularly become so effective they are ingrained to one's behaviours. When such a point is reached one partakes in these reflective activities without potentially realising it; through the process of writing this discussion I have certainly realised this. It has occurred to me that when debating the path forward for my education I have not explicitly reflected in this manner; by doing so it has enabled me to reach a conclusion as to what is best for me. Without the reflection enabled in this piece it is apparent that such a conclusion may not have been possible.

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