Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Social Care Practice

The importance of self-awareness for social care practice

An exploration of social care students’ understanding of self-awareness and its importance for social care practice in Athlone Institute of Technology

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DECLARATION

I declare that this project is entirely the work of the author and it has not been submitted to any other university or higher education institution, or for any other academic award in this institution. Where work of other people has been used, it has been fully referenced.

Signature of author ________________________ Date ________________________
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ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this research is to explore the social care students’ understanding of the concept of self-awareness and its importance for social care practice.

The objectives are to evaluate students understanding of self-awareness and to query the quality of self-awareness training provided for them in Athlone Institute of Technology.

In ascertaining this information, a qualitative research method was adopted in form of semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted with fourth year social care students in AIT. Significant results were found on how well students understood the concept of self-awareness.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Self-awareness is critical for social care practitioners. The extent to which social care students understand the concept of self-awareness and its use for social care practice is the main focus of this research. The task of the professional social care practitioner involves facilitating the wellness of another person. O’Connor and Murphy (2006) held that professional development need to have a dual-focus approach, which is focusing on the actual work to be done and an equal focus on the person doing the work. The social care practitioner must attend to their own emotional responses and attitudes which ultimately influences the way they execute their work. O’Connor and Murphy (2006) also found that a social care worker without self-awareness may become overwhelmed in the presence of strong feelings while carrying out their task. In order for existing and future social care practitioner to be efficient in their work the self-awareness skill is essential.

The author’s aim is to find out social care students’ understanding of self-awareness and its use for social care practice.

The objectives are:

1. To explore student’s views on the importance of self-awareness for social care practice and the impact of their own self-awareness skills on practice placements.
2. To investigate students’ assessment of the quality of training on self-awareness and reflective practice for social care students.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Various article have been written in relation to the importance of self-awareness for social care practitioners, authors such as Lyons (2007) Share and McElwee (2005), Healy and Spencer (2008), Burnard (2002), O’Connor and Murphy (2006), all agree that self-awareness is the main ingredient of social care practice. According to Garfat, McElwee and Charles (2005, P.108), “the social care practitioner in the field to help others has no choice but to know self, and know self intimately.” The overall purpose of this chapter is to evaluate sources which show the importance of self-awareness for social care practitioners.

2.2 Self-awareness

The concept of self-awareness involves learning the conscious use of the self. According to Fewster (2001), self is more than physical, more than emotional, and more than cognitive. It is the sum total of all our aspects, it exists at the core of our experience. Self forms the individual lens through which we perceive and interpret all of our experiences. Philip Burnard’s 2002 impressive work on experimental and reflective practice for nurses and health care professionals describes self-awareness as a special type of schema that consists of all the knowledge we have about ourselves. London (2002) states that self-insight is a multidimensional concept that boils down to recognising personal strength and weaknesses, while recognising that the extent to which we are aware of ourselves may depend on the situation. He further went on to state that people are more aware of themselves in new situations, rather than in regular experiences.
2.3 Self-awareness training and the social care practitioner

Lyons (2007) Masters Thesis ‘Just bring yourself’ which explored the training of self within social care education articulates that training the ‘self’ is about getting to know yourself, reflecting on who you are, and that ‘self’ training is necessary for everyone who wishes to become caring, functional and participating member of society. O’Connor and Murphy’s (2006) article which discussed theory, policy and practice of social care suggest that in order to work effectively, the social care practitioner must attend to their emotional responses and attitudes which actually influences what they do with their academic achievements. It is their view that thorough and effective social care training needs to focus on both the task and the person doing the task. This dynamic largely determines the effectiveness of the professional effort. There is however a discrepancy in this considering the outcome of the research carried out by Lyons (2007), the research which to explored the training of ‘self’ within social care education found that, 77% of social care graduates concurred that more training is needed on self for social care students. The research which was facilitated using a qualitative data collection also found that some graduates (37%) were unsure if they learned enough about themselves to practice effectively. It is pointed out by O’Connor and Murphy (2006) that detailed academic knowledge alone does not necessarily mean an individual care worker can work effectively with service users. Therefore, the social care practitioner’s sensitivity to engage with service users is as important as their theoretical knowledge. This is also supported by the statement of S. Thompson and N. Thompson (2008) that the ways in which an individual caring for the other can bring their warmth, empathy and concern can make a lot of difference in the wellbeing of the client. The aim of self-awareness for health care professionals generally is to enable them to increase their interpersonal skill which is ultimately evident in their work.
Ward (1998) stated that in order to be aware of others the self must be present, the social care practitioner’s job involves being responsive to others, thus the work of a social care practitioner cannot be correctly done without first being aware of their own self. Healy and Spencer’s (2008) highly respected book which examined the importance self-awareness for health care students argues that people in the forefront of providing services to people who are physically or emotionally dependant will have to be able to cope with potential emotional consequences of this on them, The social care practitioner will be faced with people who have been through turmoil of some sort; this could be because of physical illness, a mental health need or social need. Some clients may be going through experiences which are out of the ordinary run of things for them; this could mean from minor injuries to major crises. According to Keogh’s (2004) study, 96.5% of social care workers questioned had experienced violence, with 78% experiencing both physical and verbal abuse. Understanding the inner ‘self’ can help the social care practitioner cope with strong reactions. Burnard (2002) highlights the limitations of not knowing self and states that the absence of self-awareness is equated to blindness which makes a person blind to their choices, in the case of a social care practitioner, blind to caring and therapeutic choices they could make on behalf of the patient. Davies, Finlay and Bullman’s (2006) book on the changing practice in health and social care highlighted the fact that social care practitioners without self awareness may not be able to give free attention because there is too much of their own emotional baggage. In other words, the social care practitioners may not be psychologically available for the service user. Being self-aware helps the social care practitioner to be ‘present’ in their work. ‘Present’ according to Davies et al., (2006) means being psychologically present, without distraction from outside or disturbances within. That is, perceiving the service user with far less distortions which means better practice. “It is increasingly important to put forward a clear, honest and authentic presentation of self, for in the end all that is happening at the
health care patient interface is that one group is trying to help another” Burnard (2002).

2.4 Self-awareness as an instrument of reflective practice in social care.

Central to the process of professional development of social care practitioner is the students understanding of reflection on practice Lyons (2007). According to Bulman and Schutz’s (2004) literature on reflective practice in nursing, self-awareness may be described as the foundation skill upon which reflective practice is built. Johns (2004) describes reflection as being mindful of self, either within or after experience and that reflection is a window through which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of a particular experience, in order to confront, understand and move towards resolving contradiction between one’s vision and actual practice. Reflective practice is paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively, this leads to developmental insight. The role of self-awareness in reflective practice is to certify that social care practitioners do not become too inflexible in their approach. According to S. Thompson and N. Thompson (2008), “Self-awareness is one of the foundation stones of critically reflective practice and, in turn, critically reflective practice supports and facilitates the development of greater self-awareness”. Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) state that the need to attend to feelings and attitudes, in particular making use of the positive feelings and dealing with negative feeling, is essential in reflection which calls for self-awareness. In essence, in order to be a reflective practitioner, the self-awareness skill must be present.
2.5 Differing views on self-awareness and reflective practice

Baumeister claims that skilled performance can be impaired due to self-knowledge or awareness *insofar* as attending to inner processes disrupts the smooth execution of automatic or over learned responses. This can occur when most of the individual’s attention is turned inwards to their emotions. (Baumeister, 1984; cited in Baumeister 1999 p.5) Being overly aware of one’s self can lead to paranoid thinking as individuals tend to overestimate the degree to which external events are directed at them. (Fenigstein, 1984; cited in Baumeister 1999 p.5) Supporting this view, Mayer (2004) advises that too much self-awareness could be a disadvantage, because many people suffer having too little understanding of their responsiveness. Therefore, there is a chance that such people could be dishonest with themselves, which can have negative effect on their interpersonal skill. In opposition, Higham (2006) asserts that self-awareness and reflection is intended to identify good aspect of practice as well as areas for improvement.

2.6 Conclusion

In preparing future social care practitioners, given the importance of self-awareness for the profession, social care practitioners ought to be properly trained in the area of self-awareness in the early stages of their learning and throughout their course. Social care practice as a profession requires giving attention to someone else, this is made complex when the practitioner is not well equipped with the self-awareness skill. Authors like Share and McElwee (2005), Burnard (2002) Johns (2004), Healy and Spencer (2008) and O’Connor and Murphy (2006) affirm that self-awareness adequately prepares the social care worker for the complexity of the job. However, there has not been much research done or written articles on how this important skill should be imparted on to existing and future social care practitioners. The disadvantages of lack of self-awareness for the social care practitioner have been
uncovered throughout this literature review; yet there is little emphasis on the quality of self-awareness training required for social care students. The author’s research aims to explore student’s understanding of self-awareness and its importance for social care practice and investigate the quality of self-awareness training for social care students in Athlone Institute of Technology.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of carrying out this research. It explains the qualitative approach used to actualize the authors aim to explore social care student’s understanding of self-awareness and its usefulness for social care practice particularly on practice placements. Also to evaluate student’s assessment of the quality of self-awareness training provided for social care students.

3.2 Method

A research method is a technique for collecting data, for example a semi structured interview, questionnaires or focus groups (Bryman, 2004). Qualitative research methods are a multi method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Quantitative research method is about collecting numerical data to explain a particular phenomenon (Muijs, 2011). After careful consideration of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The author found that qualitative method will allow for the author to gather quality information from the respondent of this research by means of semi-structured interviews. This research topic explores the importance of self-awareness for social care practice; therefore, the compilation of participant’s personal experiences is crucial which the qualitative method allows for. Also this method of research allows the researcher to observe problematic moments during question and answer time and what it means for the research. Puntcha and Potter (2007) states that a qualitative researcher wants to understand the issue through the eyes of the participants. The concept of self-awareness is a complex one; it involves critical analysis of one’s experience therefore, it is important to choose a research method that will provide the avenue for face-to-face discussion.
3.3 Participants

As the research is centred on social care students, the researcher chose participants from the two class groups of fourth year social care students in Athlone Institute of Technology. There were five participants in all, three of whom are from the Social care practice class group, and two from the applied social studies in social care class group. The participants consisted of four females and one male. The discrepancy in the gender balance among the research respondents is due to the fact that there are more female social care students than male in AIT generally. The author decided to have a mix of students of fourth year social care students, from both class groups in order to determine any difference in the quality of self-awareness training received by both groups.

3.4 Procedure

The semi-structured interviews were carried out in empty classrooms in Athlone Institute of Technology; the interview times were scheduled in advance to suit each participant. All the participants received a cover letter and the interview schedule drawn up by the author prior to the interview, samples of which can be found in appendices B and C. Each interview which lasted for 20 minutes was recorded for later analysis.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Edwards and Mauthner in Mauthner et al., (2005) describes ethics as something that concerns morality of human conduct. In relation to social research, it refers to moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process. According to Flick (2006) research should be based on informed consent. The researcher
applied the principle of informed consent; all the participants were asked to sign a consent form before partaking in the interview. (See Appendix A) The participants were also made aware of their rights to withdraw their participation at any point in time, and were all informed that anonymity would be taken seriously.

3.6 Limitations

One of the limitations of this method of research is that the participants may not be a representative of the larger population in terms of their opinion on the subject matter. In this research, the sample size is a minority and this has a limiting impact on the possibilities of the research.
4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The result section illustrates findings derived from the five semi-structured interviews with involved 4th year social care students for the purpose of realizing the author’s aim of exploring students’ views on the importance of self-awareness, the semi-structured interview questions were organised and presented under the two objectives of the author in order to present the result in a concise form. Apart from the segment of the interview schedule which consisted of background detail questions such as age, gender and discipline, the first set of questions was designed in order to extract the participants understanding of self-awareness and its importance for social care practice, while the second set of questions was designed to explore participants views on the quality of self-awareness training received by social care students. The topics that emerged during the interview are as follows:

Objective 1: To explore students views on the importance of self-awareness and its usefulness for social care practice and the impact of their own self-awareness skills on their practice placements. Topics that emerged during this section of the interview include:

- Participants understanding of self-awareness.
- The importance of self-awareness and reflective practice personally and professionally as a social care practitioner.
- Impact of self-awareness on practice placements.
- Possible disadvantages of self-awareness and reflective practice personally and for social care practice.
4.2 Participants understanding of self-awareness

When participants were asked about their understanding of self awareness, three out of five participants responded in generic terms. Participant A stated, “self-awareness is when you are aware of everything to do with yourself, how you perceive things, how you interact with people and things like that”. Participant C indicated that she was unsure what self-awareness meant, “I can’t say exactly what it means to be honest, but I think maybe a person’s personality or what one understand about their self”. Participant B identifies it as, “ability to know your strengths and weaknesses and to know your limitations”. Participants D and E had difficulty explaining their understanding of self-awareness.

4.3 The importance of self-awareness personally and professionally as a social care practitioner.

Participants were asked about the importance and usefulness of self-awareness personally and professionally as a social care practitioner. There was a general consensus on the importance of self-awareness among all the participants. They all agreed that self-awareness is important personally and also professionally. Participant B asserts that, “you cannot function properly without self awareness; one might behave in an offensive way to others without knowing it”. Participant C was of a similar opinion with participant B stated that, “it is important for social care practitioners to be self-aware, because social care practitioners work with people they must first know themselves”. Participant A also said that, “As a social care practitioner it is important to be aware of your own personality so that you are open to other people’s opinion”.
4.4 Impact of self-awareness on practice placements

Two of the five participants found self-awareness to be helpful during their practice placements and they gave a brief explanation of their encounter. Participant A explains why she believes so, “Oh yes, I find it very useful, when I was on placement last year, I was very opinionated and had a very strong character, when I would talk to somebody, my opinion would be very strong, I had to step back a bit, I reflected on that and realised and learnt from it”. Participant E agreed to this by stating, “Yes, it helped me to manage my anger issues”. The other participants also agreed by saying ‘yes’ to the question but gave no further explanation.

4.5 Possible disadvantages of self-awareness

The participants were asked if they think there could be instances where self-awareness could be disadvantageous. There were dissimilar opinions on this topic; participants D and B believe strongly that self-awareness has its limitations while participants A and C do not believe that there is a down side to being self-aware. Participant D explains that, “people can become too regressive in their thinking and behaviour; also people can get overly involved in situations and become hypocritical”. This is supported by the statement of participant B who said, “When you are overly self-aware, you tend to pretend a lot and react to situations in certain ways just to follow a pattern”. Participant A says, “There is no disadvantage whatsoever to being self-aware, it is a good thing”. In the same track as participant A, participant C explains that, “self-awareness makes people better in their dealings with other people, I can’t think of any disadvantages”. However, the participant E states that she cannot
state precisely if self-awareness could be disadvantageous, “I have no answer for this one, I really don’t know but there could be”.

**Objective 2:** To investigate student’s assessment of the quality of training on self-awareness and reflective practice for social care students.

During this section of the interview recommendations to promote self-awareness training for social care students emerged as a topic.

### 4.6 Recommendations to promote self-awareness training for social care students

When participants were asked if they think they have received enough training on self-awareness, there was a consensus amongst all the participants that social care students need more training on self-awareness and reflective practice. All of the participant agreed that they would prefer to have been more prepared in these areas. Participant A explains that, “Most of my reflective training would have been through my art class; I think maybe, it should be made compulsory as some student wouldn’t choose art as an elective like I did”. Agreeing that there is need for more training in the area, participant B said, “Personally I don’t think we’ve done much in the area of self-awareness, although I remember something about johari window which was in first year, but in reflection I have done quite a bit in the creative art module although I think we could have done more, I think modules should be introduced on self-awareness and reflective practice and it should be made compulsory”. Participant D added that, “I think it would have been more beneficial if we had done it in 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year. We definitely need more training on self-awareness. I think there should be a module on it, some of the modules we do I don’t think are as important as self-awareness would be, students should engage more with students counsellors which I believe will help students”. The thoughts of participants C and E are also in the same line.
In summary, five topics emerged during the result section. Most of the participants had a common idea of what self-awareness means, however it was generally described as knowing everything that has to do with one’s self. The majority of the participant believed that self-awareness is important both personally and professionally. (For example during their practice placements) two of the five participants believe that being self-aware can be disadvantageous when overly used. The topic with the most agreement is the recommendation to promote compulsory self-awareness training for social care students. The five participants all agreed that there needs to be more training on self-awareness and reflective practice for social care students. This is because participants agreed that they did not have enough training on self-awareness.
5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter compares findings from the research interviews with works of other authors discussed in the literature review. The findings shall be contrasted and discussed under the five topics that emerged during the semi-structured interview. Four topics emerged from the first objective and the fifth emerged from the second objective.

Objective 1: To explore social care student’s views on the importance of self-awareness and its usefulness for social care practice their and the impact of their own self-awareness skills on practice placements.

5.2 Participants understanding of self-awareness

The author found that the majority of the participants had a generic understanding of what self-awareness is. According to Burnard (2002) the concept of self-awareness involves learning the conscious use of the self. Participant C was initially at a loss when the author asked about her understanding of self-awareness; she however recalled some aspect of the topic when the author associated self-awareness with reflective practice. She states “I can’t say exactly what it means... but I think maybe a person’s personality or what one understand about their self”. This participant maintains s/he is familiar with reflection but had little knowledge on self-awareness. This appears contradictory to the affirmation of Bulman and schutz (2004) who described self-awareness as the foundation skill upon which reflective practice is built. S. Thompson and N. Thompson (2008) also emphasised the relationship between self-awareness and reflection. “Self-awareness is one of the foundation stones of critically reflective practice and, in turn, critically reflective practice supports and facilitates the development of greater self-awareness”. Participants A, B and C who chose creative art as
an elective subject appeared to have a better understanding and explanation of the concept of self awareness and reflective practice compared participants D and E who had difficulty explaining it. The impression of the author was that all of the participants could do with more information on self-awareness. The concept of self-awareness is a complex one, thus students need comprehensive information and training in the area in order to fully benefit from it both as an individual and as a professional social care practitioner.

5.3 The importance of self-awareness and reflective practice personally and professionally as a social care practitioner

The work of the social care practitioner is highly sensitive and the knowledge of self is an instrument of perfection for social care practitioners (Wicklund and Duval, 1971; cited in Baumeister, 1999; p.22). This correlates with the view of the majority of the participant as they all stated that self-awareness is important both as an individual and as a social care practitioner. This is interesting as they found it difficult to explain their understanding of self-awareness, but it seems they all do have some knowledge of its value. Participant B asserts that, “by the nature of the job, we deal with people so we ought to be aware of our own self”. He continued stressing his point by adding “for example if a person is easily angered, and he or she is not aware, it might prove difficult to work with another person who constantly exhibits challenging behaviour. This is proven right by the findings of Keogh’s (2004) study which found that 96.5% of social care workers questioned had experienced violence, with 78% experiencing both physical and verbal abuse. Also consistent with this is Healy and Spencer’s (2008) view that the social care practitioner will be faced with people who have been through turmoil of some sort, this could mean from physical illness, a mental health need or social need, hence the need to be emotionally prepared. Participant D states that,
“self-awareness is very important for social care practitioners, if you don’t know yourself and you are dealing with youngsters for example, you wouldn’t be of benefit to them”. This statement is comparable to Burnard’s (2002) view on the limitations of the lack of self-awareness for social care practitioners, he articulates that the absence of self-awareness is equated to blindness which makes a person blind to their choices, in the case of a social care practitioner, blind to caring and therapeutic choices they could make on behalf of the patient. It is established here that, despite not being able to articulate well their understanding of self-awareness, participants believed that it is important both personally and a social care practitioner.

5.4 Impact of self-awareness on practice placements

Despite requiring some explanations on the concept of self-awareness prior to the interview, four out of the five participants agreed that self-awareness had impacted their practice placement positively, while the fifth participant had nothing to say in relation to this topic. Participant A referring to self-awareness on placement explained that, “...I find it useful, when I was on placement last year, I was very opinionated and had a very strong character, when I would talk to somebody, my opinion would be very strong, I had to step back a bit, I reflected on that and realised and learned from it”. This is consistent with the view of O’Connor and Murphy (2006) that in order to work effectively, the social care practitioner must attend to their emotional responses and attitudes when dealing with clients. The issue of self-awareness is consistently highlighted by O’Connor and Murphy (2006) he suggests that thorough and effective social care training needs to focus on both the task and the person doing the task.
5.5 Possible disadvantages of self-awareness and reflective practice personally and professionally as a social care practitioner.

Different view exists in relation to whether self-awareness can become disadvantageous at some point. Similar to findings in the literature review, the author found that the participants of the research interview were divided on this topic; two out of the five participants believed self-awareness can become disadvantageous. The opinion of participant D was that, “people can become too regressive in their thinking and behaviour; also people can get overly involved in situations and become hypocritical”. This correlates with the claims of Meyer (2004) that there is a chance that people who are overly self-aware could be dishonest with themselves, which can create difficulty in social care practice and also between the social care practitioners as they can appear insincere to others. According to Baumeister (1984) skilled performance can be impaired due to self-knowledge or awareness insofar as attending to inner processes disrupts the smooth execution of automatic or over learned responses. For example when too much attention is turned towards the individual’s emotions their skilled performance may suffer setback. Participant B believes that, “there is no disadvantage whatsoever to being self-aware, it is a good thing”. This is in line with Higham’s (2006) opinion that self-awareness and reflection is intended to identify good aspects of practice as well as areas for improvement. However, these different views highlight the fact that the concept of self-awareness is not universally valued in the same way as pointed out by Burnard (2002), while some believe that self-awareness is what we need to be able to function effectively, others believe self-awareness can cause drawbacks for individual and professional performance.
Objective 2: To investigate student’s assessment of the quality of training on self-awareness and reflective practice for social care students.

5.6 Recommendations to promote self-awareness training for social care students

The results appear to indicate that the participants have some knowledge of self-awareness, and they all believe self-awareness is a skill valuable for professional social care practice. The participants all agreed that there is definitely room for improvement on the quality of self-awareness training being received by social care students, as they did not receive the training throughout the four year course. The research carried out by Lyons (2007) which gathered that 77% of graduates of social care concurred that more training is needed on self for social care practice proves that there is need to improve the quality of self-awareness training provided for social care students. Three out of the five participant indicated that they were familiar with reflective practice but had little knowledge on self-awareness. This contradicts the work of Bulman and Schutz (2004) which suggest that self-awareness is the foundation skill upon which reflective practice is built. Subsequently the participant agreed that self-awareness as a subject should be made compulsory for social care students following a brief explanation of self-awareness by the author. According to participant D “I think it would have been more beneficial if we had done it in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year. We definitely need more training on self-awareness. I think there should be a module on it, some of the modules we do I don’t think are as important as self-awareness would be”. This is agreed to by all of the participants, they all believe that self-awareness should be emphasised on for social care students. This is in line with the views of O’Connor and Murphy (2006) affirming that thorough and effective social care training needs to focus on both the task and the person doing the task. The participants’ lack of articulation of their understanding of self-awareness indicates the need for further quality self-awareness training. Comprehensive training on the skill of self-awareness will reflect positively personally and professionally.
6 EVALUATION OF METHOD

The adoption of the qualitative method for this research proved successful as it allowed in-depth data to be collected on a complex phenomenon. The interviews also allowed for brief explanations on subjects that participants were unclear or confused about in private. For example, the term ‘self-awareness’ although sounded familiar to majority of the participants, four of them needed some explanation on its literal meaning. This would have been impossible if the author conducted the research using a quantitative method such as questionnaires. The author found that it is important to give explanation of topic at the beginning to avoid diversion in the middle of interviews. Some of the limitations of the current research method include lack of time and limited number of participants accessed. Considering the size of the participants used in conducting the current research, it is difficult to generalise the findings to all social care students in Athlone Institute of Technology.
7 CONCLUSION

The overall results of the research suggest that students of social care practice in A.I.T need more information and training on self-awareness. Bearing in mind that self-awareness is an important tool for social care practitioners, the need for improved training on self-awareness is fundamental. Although all participants agreed that self-awareness is an important skill both as an individual and as a social care practitioner, the participants all lacked in-depth knowledge of it or were at least limited in their articulation of their understanding of self-awareness. Four of the five interviewees required some sort of clarification on the meaning of self-awareness after which the interviews continued. In addition to this, one participant was confused on the relationship between reflective practice and self-awareness. Following this research, the author believes that improving the level of self-awareness training would be advantageous and welcome by social care students. This research agrees with several authors in the literature review who highlighted the importance of self-awareness for social care practice, e.g. O’Connor and Murphy (2006), Burnard (2002), Lyons (2007), Healy and Spencer (2008), and so on. Based on the results of this research, the author recommends further studies to be carried out specifically focussing on social care students understanding of self-awareness the quality of self-awareness training provided for social care students in A.I.T. to determine if there is need for a change in the self-awareness training provided for social care students.
8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the current research, evidence has arisen that there is need to deepen students’ knowledge on self-awareness and this should be included in the social care programme given the importance of self-awareness and reflective practice for social care practice.

- There is need to introduce self-awareness and reflective practice as a compulsory module right through the four year programme for social care students.
- Services such as counselling should be made available for social care students.
REFERENCE LIST

- Denzin, N. And Lincoln, Y. (1994) *Handbook of qualitative research*, Sage: C.A
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J. and miller, J. (Eds), (2005), *ethics in qualitative research*, Sage; London
Appendix A

Consent Letter

I consent to take part in the research which will be conducted by Folake Ajiboye. The purpose of the research has been explained to me and I understand that excerpts from the recorded interview which include verbal communication will be studied.

I grant authorisation for the use of the above information with the understanding that anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved at all times.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my permission at any time.

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                                  Signature of participant                                                                   Date
Appendix B

Cover letter

18th October 2011

Dear _____________________

I am presently working towards an honours degree in social care practice in Athlone Institute Technology and I am currently undertaking a research project. I have chosen the importance of self-awareness for social care practice as the area I wish to explore. The research entails interviewing a number of social care students who intend to work in the field of social care.

I would like to invite you to take part in the study. The study will involve an interview which will focus on your understanding of self-awareness and your views on the importance of self-awareness for social care practice. The study also aims to find out about the quality of self-awareness training you have received since the beginning of your social care course.

The interview will take place on the 25th of October 2011. The interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will be taped and then transcribed, and the participants will not be identified in the research as anonymity will be guaranteed. The information received from you will be used solely for the purpose of this research. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this research. If you have any questions before the interview please contact me (A00149114@student.ait.ie) thank You.

Yours sincerely

Folake Ajiboye
Appendix C

Interview schedule


Background details;

- Age?
- Gender?
- Your course, class group and year of study?

Participants views on the importance of self-awareness in social care, and the impact of self-awareness on practice placement.

- What do you understand by self-awareness?
- Why is self-awareness important personally?
- Should a social care practitioner be self-aware?
- Why is self-awareness important for reflective practice in social care?
- How has self-awareness impacted on your practice placements? (examples, if any)
- Do you think there could be instances where self-awareness is disadvantageous?

Participants view on the level and quality of training in self-awareness for social care students.

- How much of self-awareness training have you received since your first year of social care training?
- Do you think you have enough training on self-awareness?
- Do you think social care students might need more training in the area of self-awareness?
- How do you think students might be better trained? (if your answer to the last question is yes)