

Abstract: 2005-2006 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows SoTL Project  
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### **Personal SWOT Analysis: A Tool to Facilitate Student Reflection**

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Self reflection has been identified as a critical part of becoming a professional educator. Schön (1987) identified reflection as the central element in being able to resolve ill-defined “problems of real-world practice” (p. 4). State licensing standards for teachers include reflective practice (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2006). University programs that prepare agricultural education teachers must include learning activities that support students’ development of self reflection skills and practices.

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis is a common tool in organizational strategic planning. It requires examining both the internal capacities (strengths and weaknesses) and the external environment (opportunities and threats). It can, however, also be applied at the individual level. A personal SWOT analysis has been promoted for career planning (QuintCareers.Com). For this project a personal SWOT procedure was developed where students reflected on their development as a teacher.

While many tested tools exist for facilitating student reflection, the SWOT analysis framework includes a few key features. The structured process of looking at the four aspects assists in keeping students from only focusing on one aspect of their development. The graphic nature of a SWOT grid assists some students in thinking strategically about both the positive and potential limiting factors in their development. This project implemented a personal SWOT analysis as one component of helping students reflect on their development as agricultural educators.

#### Methodology

A two-sided one page form was developed to facilitate the personal SWOT analysis. The front side was titled PERSONAL SWOT ANALYSIS OF TEACHING. It was based on the classic two row, two column grid with one term placed in each quadrant with strengths and weaknesses in the first row and opportunities and threats in the second.

The back side of the form was titled PERSONAL ACTION PLAN. It contained a series of four prompts at the top of the page to guide students and then open space for writing individual steps. One prompt was developed for each part of the SWOT analysis. The prompts were stated as follows:

What steps will you take to...

1. Capitalize on your teaching strengths?
2. Improve in your areas of weakness?
3. Take full advantage of opportunities?
4. Limit the impact of threats?

To test the effectiveness of a personal SWOT analysis in this setting it was implemented with students at different points in their professional development. The first group were students enrolled in the senior level teaching methods course. Students were asked to complete the analysis at two points in the course. The first point was near the middle of the course as the students were just starting the field

experience component in area high school agricultural education programs. The process was repeated at the end of the semester to see if there were any changes. The second group to participate in the test consisted of student teachers. The third group included teachers enrolled in a beginning teacher course. It included teachers with up to four years of experience.

A similar procedure was used to administer the personal SWOT analysis to the teaching methods students and student teachers. Students were required to complete the analysis as part of the course or student teaching seminar. Students had the option to participate in an IRB approved research project by returning an informed consent form. Completed forms were collected at the end of the analysis, photo copied, and the originals returned so the students could keep the action plan they had developed. Copies were kept for analysis. Since the beginning teacher course was entirely online a slightly different procedure was used. Completing the analysis was a course requirement. An electronic version of the form was available in the web-based course management system used to facilitate the course. Students were given the opportunity to complete an online informed consent agreement. The forms submitted by students agreeing to participate were printed for analysis.

### Results to date

The personal SWOT analysis proved to be a useful tool for helping both pre-service and in-service agricultural education teachers in self reflection. From a practical standpoint the students were able to complete the form without assistance and reacted favorably to the experience. In analyzing the completed forms several trends were observed. Students identified items that were consistent with other evidence (teacher observations, student journals, etc.). Students answers also changed over time. As students developed during the field experience of the teaching methods course or the course of their student teaching semester there were changes in their SWOT results.

### References

QuintCareers.Com (nd). Using a SWOT analysis in your career planning. Retrieved July 28, 2006 from [http://www.quintcareers.com/SWOT\\_Analysis.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/SWOT_Analysis.html)

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