

I will be using Kolb's reflective model for my reflection, as I believe that this cycle appreciates the continuous ability to learn and develop, and that there is no dead end to how far a person's knowledge can grow, especially when there is a desire to improve and do better (University of Puget Sound). This type of reflection is especially suited to a course specialising in education studies, as within an educational setting, the opportunities are endless. There will always be room for progress. Kolb's reflective cycle compliments this idea perfectly as it encourages us to be proactive. "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). We will never know if we do not try. Kolb also promotes self-awareness, and recognises the impact this can also have on an individual's well being. Essentially, doing well will in turn also make us feel better and elevate our mood and self esteem (Blackbyrn, Maryel, 2024).

Upon leaving secondary school, I had no real plan of what I wanted to do as a career, I knew what subjects I enjoyed during school, however being out in the real world and trying to navigate the next steps for myself, was proving to be far more difficult than I had anticipated. I initially enrolled onto A level courses in college, however shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. This had a significant effect on my studies, and eventually I decided that the best thing for me given the circumstances was to venture out into the world of work instead, in an attempt to gauge which roles I enjoyed, and which roles were less suited to my personality and skillset.

This time in my life really encouraged me to activate a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset. I listened to myself in deciding that in order to explore my options and found out what category of jobs would bring out the best in me, I had to make the crucial choice to sacrifice my education for the time being in order to explore new things. This was definitely a challenge for my previously more fixed mindset, and at the time it did feel slightly as though I was taking a risk, however I took action (Dweck, 2017).

I always kept an open mind, I was happy to take on a range of different jobs, and I would say I always tried to give my best effort. I embraced the challenge and decided I was going to get out what I put in (Dweck, fs blog). This really worked in my favour as I definitely got a taste of positions which I knew I couldn't vision myself fulfilling for the rest of my working life, until fortunately, I began working as a teaching assistant for an agency, and eventually secured a full time position within a school. I instantly felt that this was a suitable job for myself. It was a caring job, and I knew it was a career I could flourish in.

Moving forward, I began researching ways I could progress further in my current role, potentially becoming a qualified teacher myself, as I dreamt of one day having a class of my own. When I first came across this degree, I was overjoyed. I believed it would be a leap in the right direction for me, and meant I could venture on into a career I felt passionate about, which is working with children and being able to positively impact, no matter how big or small, young lives and support them to grow into successful and happy adults.

Before enrolling onto the inclusive education foundation degree, I experienced a range of emotions. I was definitely nervous as I wasn't sure what to expect. I was worried I may be behind in the work as I didn't complete my time in college. I was also wondering how I would balance working fulltime alongside studying for an accredited degree, and was stressed that the workload may be too demanding, or time consuming. Although there were bound to be some negative thoughts, they were definitely outweighed by positive expectations. I looked forward to being able to expand my knowledge, and progress in a subject I enjoyed and felt eager to learn more about. I would describe myself as a rather sociable being, so I also was keen on the idea that it could be a convenient way to meet new people with similar interests.

The introduction to the course was very exciting, we got to look around the campus at where our lectures would take place, the library where we could go to further develop our knowledge, or use as a quiet space to study or to write up assignments. I remember it feeling slightly surreal at first. After my journey in college came to an end sooner than I had originally planned, there was a period where I thought I had lost the chance to go on to university, but this course meant I could still chase my dreams, even though it took a slightly different path to get there.

Admittedly, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect from the level of work expected of us by our lecturers, however I did hope that all the experience I gained from working within primary schools for a small number of years would be relevant and useful to the course and hopefully support me a lot through the topics we would learn about. This was definitely the case, and although I found all aspects of the course interesting, I particularly enjoyed the assignments that focused more so on everyday teaching life, and those where I was able to apply, implement or combine both work and university. It was undeniably useful to make use of both skillsets in order to improve in areas of the other.

Prior to starting this course, I was always fearful of speaking up regarding things that were not quite right in my workplace, mostly due to my age and lack of experience compared to other members of staff, worrying I may say the wrong thing or other people wouldn't agree and be supportive. This degree has given my confidence a real boost, as I now feel that I am equipped with a good foundation of knowledge to become a catalytic leader in my occupation. "A catalyst is defined as an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action. A catalytic leader then, is an agent of change" (Attaway, p.4, 2022). I feel much braver now when it comes to voicing my opinion on certain matters now that I have learnt a great deal studying, and being a catalytic leader is definitely a skill which will be useful for my whole career. I still feel as though there is room for growth, as although I am aware that my ability to be a leader is not relevant to my job role as a teaching assistant, and I can take charge to encourage change where I feel it is right regardless of my authority (Reed and Canning, 2012), I also feel that I still hold back sometimes as I do not feel comfortable telling others what to do, however, I hope that as I progress further and become a qualified professional, I will feel yet again more empowered to activate positive change.

Although I had mixed emotions regarding the level and standard of work expected from us when originally commencing, I was pleasantly surprised that my results from my assignments have been relatively high throughout, even on the very first assignments, and still now that the difficulty is increasing. Although I was sure my job as a teaching assistant would be very beneficial and put me at an advantage during my studies, I lowered my expectation due to the fact that I am an extreme procrastinator. Although I felt that my engagement and understanding during lectures was sound, and I was capable of producing a good piece of work if I put my mind to it, I really struggled with the idea of getting started, therefore I would leave everything to the last minute.

There are many negatives to procrastination, such as not working to full potential as a result, for example making careless mistakes in an assignment due to rushing, or even missing deadlines therefore not receiving a deserving grade regardless (Hancock, McLeod). Procrastination, especially of more important tasks, can also lead to feelings of anxiety and guilt, which can in turn have a negative impact on wellbeing (University of Kansas). I really struggled for a long time with putting off work until the very last minute, and there have been times where I had left it so late that there was no chance to proofread the work before submitting, or even barely submitting before the deadline. This was especially worrying when I have also found myself running into technical difficulties during the submission process. Luckily, I am still satisfied with the marks I have achieved for the duration of the degree, however I do wonder whether I may have able to do better again had I used my time more carefully and put more effort into my writing.

That being said, I have definitely worked on my tendency to procrastinate since the beginning of the degree, and I think I have a right to admit that I have improved tremendously. I have recently focused on attempting to divide the workload over a space of a few weeks, rather than letting it mount up to the very last day, and I have noticed that I am significantly less stressed and have sense of pride when it comes to writing my work, I am slowly realising that I feel happier within myself knowing I am allowing myself space to breathe, particularly after completing the work, sometimes even earlier than the deadline, however there is still room for progress.

My motivation throughout the course has always been the excitement of graduation at the end, and receiving my diploma and the freedom qualifications offer. I must admit when I have days where I may not feel like making my way down to the campus for a lecture after a long day at work, or when I would rather do something that I enjoy

instead of using my time to write up my assignment, I remind myself of my end goal, and how much I've always dreamed of one day celebrating with a cap and gown myself surrounded by all of my loved ones, and I know it would have all been worth it, and that's still what is getting me through now. This is also listed as one of the seven habits of successful people "begin with the end in mind" (Covey, 2017) and I would say that keeping a positive outlook on the future is another good practice to follow in any of life's obstacles.

Moving forward, I am eager to commence onto the next year of education, which will also be the final step before I am able to go on to apply for the PGCE course. I feel very excited for the future, and I feel I have learnt a great deal already from my past experiences in both work, and throughout the foundation degree. I plan to continue to develop my skillset and set myself challenges in order to push myself.

I definitely am intending on setting up a LinkedIn profile as I feel it would be a great way of networking with other likeminded people. I also strongly believe that the sooner I get in touch with others who are in a similar field of work to myself, it would be a great way of gauging exactly what other vacancies may be available to me when I have achieved my degree. Although I would love to be a teacher, I may also spark an interest in another similar position so I will keep my options open and remain open to change.

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