

Name: Julie James

Student Number: 2316334

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Reflection

I have chosen to write this reflection using The ERA Cycle which was developed by Professor Melanie Jasper in 2013. It has three simple stages, Experience, Reflection and Action. The theory encourages you to understand the experience, learn through its reflection process and more importantly act upon that experience with action to move yourself forward (Fallin, 2024). All models of reflection guide us, using familiar language, to reflect through many, or few stages and encourage us to explore, review and improve (O'Rourke-Henriette, 2024). Previously I have used The Gibbs Reflective Cycle 1988, whereas some find this very structured six stage approach beneficial, I personally found it very rigid, this resulted in my writing of a reflection failing to flow and was duly noted. After much investigation I decided to use this simpler and straightforward approach to support continuity in my writing.

Jasper's first stage, Experience, requires you to delve deeply, analyse thoroughly and leave nothing out. I felt this stage of analysing the past would best explain my long journey to become the mature student I am today. My parents had me later in life and I was enveloped in love and security. I knew after school I would go home to a roaring fire, my Mum would be baking or sewing and my dad home by 5pm. I was encouraged to be polite and respectful, never taking the largest slice of cake or to be vain, or boastful. My parents were very protective and I rarely went on school trips. After leaving school I had been accepted to train as a higher-level nurse in Cardiff, my parents were fearful of me going to Cardiff and after a visit from my form teacher and Careers Advisor at my home, a compromise was achieved and I was going to Ammanford College to train to be a Nursery Nurse, in college in the week, home every weekend and placements in local schools and hospital. I was a little disappointed,

but I respected their decision and was very grateful to my teachers for persuading my parents to let me go. Although I enjoyed the course and was proud to qualify, I knew my learning journey was not over and I continued to find interest and progression in education. Later, when working in dental prevent care, my employer suggested sponsoring my training to become a Hygienist, as I was married with a young son, attending Cardiff University Hospital full time was impossible. Equally, being invited to consider joining the lecturing team whilst training as a Dental Nurse on an evening course with my 2nd son due was unfortunate timing. However, I embraced motherhood and marriage and felt I was living a meaningful and purposeful life. I had returned to working with children and I had a new-found enthusiasm for my role, which complemented my homelife, I was in my own state of excellence which continued for many years (Main, 2023). In 2022 a close friend and colleague had qualified as a HLTA, wishing to further herself she had been informed about the Inclusive Education Foundation Degree. I was amazed to discover the course was available locally and ran personal lectures with alternative lectures available on line. I was part of a new team in the Nursery Department and we were all eager to find out more. I was nervous about the digital involvement but I reminded myself that I had learnt so much during the Covid 19 pandemic to support on line learning that I could learn a little more. I wondered was I too old to share this dream with these young women? I was swept along with excitement and when it was suggested that if we all agreed the course could be accessible in our own school, it was unanimous! I just had to believe in myself, I knew that returning to study would provide challenges but through embracing these challenges and making a great effort, it could be achieved (Walia, 2024).

Jasper's 2nd stage, Reflection, encourages us to think about our experience and explore our feelings (Council, 2025). I have engaged well with previous assignments; I have found them interesting and stimulating. I have struggled at times with the digital involvement and have felt frustration and anxiousness. However, this module has proved to be the most difficult, writing very positively about myself, promoting my achievements, displaying myself as a brand is everything my childhood frowned upon. I am not a boastful person; my joy is actually the success of my own children and the children in my care. I take pride in my work and strive to achieve high standards but never for praise. I had never made a professional CV as I have been in the same school for twenty years. I had no idea where to begin or how much was relevant for today. I felt stressed and emotional. My much younger counterparts had decades of a career ahead of them with many paths to choose, whilst I felt my path was short,

time was limited and I was fully committed to my current employer. My strong affinity was preventing thoughts of looking elsewhere for employment or to make a plan which could involve not being with children and families I have built trusting relationships with. I knew I had to take control and reflect upon my current anxieties to complete this assignment and spoke to my lecturer who understood my dilemma. Within a short space of time connections had been re-established with lecture discussions, links had been completed and my self-esteem restored. I had let my emotions take control of my thoughts and allowed doubt to surface. I had concentrated on the past negatively, remembering only missed opportunities instead of celebrating the many qualities I have gained through a securely attached childhood, knowing I had the full support of my parents and I had experienced the unconditional love of motherhood (Bates, 2019). With my head clear, I took the advice given and began The Zander Letter. I was filled with confidence and was back on track. I was no longer static but fully motivated to continue (Aubrey and Riley, 2019, p. 262). During the assignment I was requested to cover the whole of the nursery department for 5 weeks, with 63 children over one day, 2 rooms and 5 staff. With this added responsibility I had to be organised and made a timetable for school and for the assignment, which included taking a long walk in the fresh air, regardless of the weather, to keep my head clear and in perspective to complete all that was expected of me. A simple strategy which reduces stress and anxiety and one which I use constantly to help me to cope when situations escalate (Mind, 2025). I am also fortunate to have the comradery of the group, we work together, began this journey together and support each other constantly. We regularly hold discussions in the staff room or via our WhatsApp group, literally asking questions at any time of the day or night and knowing someone will offer words of support is such a comfort. Equally, when an assignment is nearing the end, those words of encouragement are invaluable and even though we are all in different places, at different stages we are all willing each other on to complete and succeed. The connection is invaluable and appreciated (McLeod, 2025). I feel I am informed now and make associations constantly through out my working day. I have always recognised the value of children learning through play but I now understand that value at a higher level, the linguistic connection between play, imagination, modelling behaviours and internal thoughts. I now see mixed groups not just socially but as scaffolding each-others learning experience to achieve more together than alone. A comparison I could make to my own group (Aubrey and Riley, 2019, p.66).

The 3rd and final stage of Jasper's ERA cycle is Action, it is through this procedure that change can only be made to improve (O'Rourke-Henriette, 2024). I have learnt that whilst it is important to look back it is more important to look forward and using a reflective cycle as part of my development will help me to make better decisions for the future. The process will highlight attributes and areas which need improvement. Acting upon these evaluations will expand my knowledge and desirability in employment (The University of Edinburgh, 2024). To support future sessions, I recognise the importance of growth in my development and that of my colleagues and children in my care to achieve a common goal. As a catalytic leader I will encourage communication to promote life-long learning, sharing ideas and experimental innovation, evolving, growing and accepting critical feedback on a continual basis (Salimi, nd). As part of my action plan, I approached my current employer to enquire which options could be available to me after qualifying with my Foundation Degree in Inclusive Education. It was at this time the invitation arose to be lead cover for the Nursery Department. I felt this was an opportunity to prove my worth and feel a greater weight of responsibility. I embraced the opportunity and successfully played to the strengths of the team to create a positive, child-centred, cross curricular learning environment which was visited by management, governors and other heads during a numeracy walk. This experience has led to the suggestion of wrap around care for 3-year-olds, furthering my experience of working more closely with vulnerable children and their families, health professionals and other professional multi-agencies. I realise that I need to be more familiar with screening programmes to recognise a possibly missed milestone or the need for an early intervention. I have already arranged online courses to make this achievable. I have managed to balance home life, higher work responsibilities and this difficult assignment with some degree of organisation. As the commitment levels rise to the degree this could be my experience of the future. I would, therefore need to start assignments as early as possible, to balance time and organise that time so that I feel I am in control (Cottrell, 2013). During the five-week period as HLTA lead cover, I worked more closely with other teachers at planning meetings, organising literacy, numeracy, phse, welsh and religious education activities. I also began testing for speech and language referrals with the ALN co-ordinator, again all relevant to future roles which I hope to continue to build my confidence and proficiency. The feedback from management has been very positive and I have learnt from this practical exposure what a greater weight of sole responsibility feels like and how I may adapt this experience for future roles as I continue to grow (Pedagogy4Change,2019).

I chose to use The ERA Reflective Cycle because I am a mature student, I am not a blank slate, I have had many different experiences over a long period of time, all of which have contributed to my journey. This reflective cycle acknowledges that my experiences as a whole is actually the beginning point to venturing onto developing new skills and improved future roles. I have found delving into my past quite emotional, but I also appreciate that I can only make informed decisions for the future from acknowledging different situations from the past. As I enter my final year of study before qualifying with my Foundation Degree in Inclusive Education, I shall embrace each new experience and take the opportunity to empower myself. I will continue to use The ERA Reflective Cycle as a driving force to learn from experiences, to reflect upon change and to move forward positively, taking control of my own destiny (Jasper, 2003).

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