

Contemporary Challenges Making a Difference

Module code: ECIE4010

Description

To conclude our first year on the Foundation Degree in Inclusive Education, we were assigned a module titled *Contemporary Challenges Making a Difference*. The first part of this Module was a group task, we were required to select one wicked problem defined as “*a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve due to its complex and interconnected nature*” (Wong, 2023) we needed to propose a solution to alleviate its effects. As a group we choose the topic of Food sustainability this refers to environmentally friendly practice that are both economically viable and socially responsible. It involves producing enough food to meet current needs while protecting the environment, supporting the well-being of farmers, and strengthening local communities (Gabriel, 2024). Our plan is to introduce a community kitchen and garden within local schools, where both parent and children could learn to grow and cook healthy, low-cost meals. This would link with the New Curriculum for Wales which states ‘*Sustainability is mandatory within the new Curriculum for Wales and will form part of every learner's education throughout their learning journey*’. (Miles 2022) The idea being children would take home the produce they helped grow, along with recipe cards, so they could recreate the meals with their families. By engaging students and their families in both food production and preparation, we aim to foster a more self-sufficient community. Over time, the idea would be to expand on this to include workshops on more sustainable practices, encouraging long-term environmental awareness and resilience.

The second part of the Module was to write a reflective piece on our own reflection on our group work this was to be in the style of Gibbs Reflective. Gibbs Reflective cycle is a popular six stage model for reflection, it acts as a structure to guide individuals to think systematically about their experiences they had during a specific situation the stages are Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action Plan. (Main, 2023). Once are groups where assigned; we arranged an initial meeting to strategies our approach. It quickly became apparent that the deadline for our project needed to be moved up. This was due to one group member’s unforeseeable family commitment, which meant we had to adjust our timeline to ensure everyone could contribute meaningfully before their availability diminished. In this initial meeting we discussed what solution we would all be happy present and our roles using the Tuckman model of conflict Management and Team work whereby you go through five stages commonly known as: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning this method illustrates how as a groups mature, leadership tends to shift towards a more collaborative or shared approach (wcupa.edu, 2024). In this initial meeting we agreed that we did not need a team leader as we found that working together and supporting each other was the way that worked best for us. Our presentation needed to be in presented in the style of Pecha

Kucha this is a technique whereby an oral presentation is visually supported by twenty images that change every 20 seconds (alumniportal-deutschland.org, 2021).

Feelings

From the outset, I felt extremely confused and anxious as I did not fully understand the concept we needed to use. There were moments when walking away seemed like the easier option. This was the first time I had experienced such overwhelming feelings in this foundation Degree. When I encounter something unfamiliar, my anxiety and insecurities often trigger a fight-or-flight response—a physiological reaction to mental or physical threats (verywellmind.com, 2024). Meaning my body was preparing itself to either confront the stress or escape the situation. This is not a new experience for me; anxiety has been a lifelong companion. However, I have learned various techniques to help bring myself back down to a calmer state. Once I manage to regulate my anxiety, I can step back and reevaluate the situation more objectively.

The added pressure of our timeline constraint also became an added problem it added extra pressure to complete our project on a shorter time scale. The uncertainty about the how this adjustment might impact our group dynamics added to my anxiety. I found it challenging to share these concerns with the group due to the sensitive nature of the reasons behind the timeline adjustment. Once I gained a clearer understanding of what was expected from us, I began to feel less anxious, I was intrigued by the Pecha Kucha format. Although I had some reservations on how we would get across such a complex world problem effectively within the short time frame, I was confident with our group and good planning, we would make it work.

As a group, we decided early on that we needed to arrange weekly meetups to support one another throughout the assignment. These meetings became invaluable and significantly enhanced my confidence. I found that the team dynamics worked well, with each of us contributing something unique to the group while also offering support to one another.

At the end of our group work, I felt a sense of relief and achievement. As a group, we overcome a significant challenge together, I am incredibly grateful for the team I worked with. Our collaboration and support for each other played a huge role in our success, and I am extremely proud of the final presentation we produced.

Evaluation

On reflection, the shift in the deadline for our group presentation was both a challenge and an opportunity. The need to bring forward our timeline created some pressure both individually and as a group, but it also encouraged us to prioritise our tasks and manage our time more effectively. I am someone who tends to procrastinate, which is defined as "*being slow or late in starting something that should be done, by putting it off until later*" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2025). However, the

revised deadline helped me stay more focused on the assignment, as I didn't want to let the others in my group down. It became clear that early communication was essential for us to meet this deadline successfully, this was done in the form of our weekly meet ups alongside communicating through a group chat online. The Situation made us focus more which ultimately brought the group closer together all this highlighted the group's ability to adapt and remain focused under pressure.

Analysis

While working through this project it became apart that there were some similarities between our own restrictions and that of a wicked problem, just like a wicked problem we had to be flexible and adaptable we had to trust each other's input and keep focus despite the challenges and aim for the best possible outcome within the limits we had. Although at the beginning there was initially some difference of option about which of the wicked problems we would focus on, it never caused tension between the group in fact, it had the opposite effect by encouraging us to have open discussions, and allowing everyone to share their views, it ultimately brought us closer together as a team. E Perry states that good teamwork is about working together and collaborating to come up with a better approach, teamwork can fulfil the human desire for belonging and contributing to something greater than ourselves (Perry, 2022). The fact that our group communicated regularly and respectfully, and although some members were more forthcoming with ideas on how to present our presentation everyone contributed in a meaningful way. Which in turn lead us to ultimately working as one to build a clear concise presentation.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the whole experience I learned being flexible and having clear communication is important when working on complex projects especially those that tackles wicked problems. The initial challenges with time restraints, while stressful, ultimately strengthened our group by forcing us to be more organised and sympathetic towards one another's situations. From a personal perspective I have discovered that with support of others, I am able to stay on track and focused. ultimately the whole experience taught me that sometimes we need to be pushed out of our comfort zones to realise what we are truly capable of achieving.

Action Plan

In future group work activities, I believe that by sharing my insecurities and concerns from the start would enable the group to work more effectively. It would help build trust within the group and create an open and supportive environment, this in turn will encourage others to do the same allowing us to better understand each other's strengths and weakness leading to a more effective team. Moving forward I will aim to be more proactive in conducting my research earlier on. During this project, I contacted a local organisation called The Incredible Seed Library based in Carmarthen

(incredibleseedlibrary, 2023). Which provides free seeds to the community, I reached out to gain a deeper insight into their work and how it could connect to our community Kitchen and garden concept. unfortunately, due to the time restraints I did not hear back from them until after we had submitted our prestation. In hindsight, if I had begun my research earlier, the information they provided could have added value to our project. The experience has taught me the importance of early engagement and time management when working on an assignment both as a group or individually.

References

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