

ECIE5007

Skills for employment for the 21st century

E-Portfolio

Student Number: 2118579

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Reflective Account on Skill Development during
Foundation Degree in Inclusive Education.

Introduction to the Dewey Reflective Model.

Completing a foundation degree in Inclusive Education has been a transformative journey, one that has shaped my understanding of the educational landscape and my role as a teaching assistant. Using John Dewey's reflective model as a framework, I will explore the various stages of my learning experience, evaluate my feelings, discuss the challenges that I have faced, and the insights that I gained along the way.

John Dewey, an influential philosopher and educator, emphasised the importance of experiential learning and reflective thinking as integral components of education. Dewey's reflective model encourages individuals to engage with their experiences thoughtfully, allowing them to derive meaning and insights that inform future actions. The reflective process involves several stages: recognising the experience, describing it, analysing it, evaluating it, and drawing conclusions that lead to actionable outcomes.

Dewey argued that reflection is about recounting events and critically assessing them to facilitate

learning and personal growth. This model serves as a valuable framework for examining my journey throughout my foundation degree in Inclusive Education, helping me articulate the skills I have developed and identify my personal development needs.

Foundation Degree in Inclusive Education:

The foundation degree in Inclusive Education involved a diverse curriculum that has encompassed theoretical perspectives and practical applications of inclusive practices. This course has covered topics, such as special educational needs frameworks, diversity in learning and the legal frameworks that underpin educational policies and procedures. I have participated in all modules, which have all given me an insight into classroom management strategies, developing Individualised Educational Plans (IEPs), and understanding the psychological aspects of learning differences. Throughout this opportunity I engaged in all the practical elements whilst working at Brynmill primary School, here I have observed and assisted teachers in inclusive

classrooms. These experiences have allowed me to see firsthand the challenges and the successes of implementing inclusive strategies. I have worked alongside learners with differing abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds, which has deepened my understanding of the importance of fostering a nurturing and inclusive environment. Additionally, group projects formed an integral part of my learning experience. Collaborating with peers who are much younger than myself and from diverse backgrounds provided me with a rich context for discussions and exchanges of ideas. We examined real-life case studies, shared our observations and experiences in our working environments to gain and understanding and knowledge of different practices. My initial thoughts and expectations enrolling in the foundation degree in Inclusive Education was a significant step toward achieving my career goals in the educational sector. My primary motivation for choosing this program stemmed from a deep-seated desire to advocate for equitable learning opportunities for all students, particularly those with diverse needs. I anticipated gaining a

comprehensive understanding of inclusive practices and developing skills that would enhance my ability to support students effectively. At the outset, I felt a mix of excitement and apprehension. The excitement arose from my passion for education and the opportunity to make a meaningful impact in the lives of children. However, I was also aware of the challenges I would face balancing my studies, full-time work, and caregiving responsibilities for my dad, who has dementia. This duality of emotions prompted me to reflect on my resilience and adaptability—traits I would need to cultivate throughout my studies.

Developing employability skills and ‘personal brand’

One of the most significant aspects of my foundation degree experience was the emphasis on developing my employability skills and enhancing my brand. Engaging with the coursework and participating in various activities provided numerous opportunities to refine my

communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

Using Dewey's reflective model, I will examine my experiences in this area:

1. Recognising the Experience: Throughout the program, I participated in group discussions, collaborative projects, and presentations. These experiences required me to communicate effectively and work collaboratively with my peers.

2. Describing the Experience: My participation in group projects involved collaborating with classmates to develop inclusive lesson plans and strategies. These activities encouraged open dialogue and the sharing of diverse perspectives.

3. Analysing the Experience: I began to recognise the importance of effective communication in educational settings as I engaged in these collaborative efforts. Literature supports this notion, indicating collaboration enhances learning outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). I also realised that my confidence and assertiveness

impacted my ability to contribute to group discussions.

4. Evaluating the Experience: My participation in group activities was beneficial. I learned to articulate my ideas clearly and appreciate the insights of my peers. However, I also recognised that I sometimes struggled assertively, particularly in more extensive group settings.

5. Drawing Conclusions: I concluded that developing my assertiveness and confidence in group discussions was essential for building a solid personal brand. This realisation motivated me to seek opportunities to take on leadership roles in group projects and discussions.

6. Actionable Outcomes: Moving forward, I planned to engage in extracurricular activities that required teamwork and leadership, such as joining student organisations or volunteering for group initiatives. This would help me practice assertiveness and further develop my brand.

Engagement in Lectures and Balancing Responsibilities

Balancing my academic responsibilities with full-time work and caregiving duties was one of my most significant challenges during my foundation degree. Attending lectures while managing my dad's care required effective time management and emotional resilience.

1. Recognising the Experience: I struggled to manage my time effectively. My responsibilities often conflicted, leading to stress and fatigue.

2. Describing the Experience: There were weeks when I struggled to meet assignment deadlines due to unexpected caregiving demands. I often found myself torn between attending lectures and attending to my dad's needs.

3. Analysing the Experience: This experience underscored the significance of self-care and the need for a robust support system. Research indicates caregiver stress can negatively impact academic performance (Lund et al., 2019). I recognised the importance of seeking peer support and utilising campus resources.

4. Evaluating the Experience: Despite these challenges, I managed to maintain a commitment

to my education. I attended most lectures and engaged in discussions, but my exhaustion sometimes affected my concentration.

5. Drawing Conclusions: I needed to develop better time management strategies and prioritise self-care. I also recognised the value of reaching out for support when needed.

6. Actionable Outcomes: To address these challenges, I planned to create a more structured schedule that allocated time for studying, caregiving, and self-care. Additionally, I would seek support from my peers and utilise campus resources, such as counselling services, to manage stress effectively.

Career Progression and Involvement in Additional Learning Needs Team.

As I progressed through the foundation degree, I began identifying a more straightforward career path in inclusive education. The knowledge and skills I acquired empowered me to apply for a position on my school's Additional Learning Needs

Team. This opportunity represented a significant milestone in my career journey, allowing me to apply my academic learning in a practical setting.

1. Recognising the Experience: I applied for the Additional Learning Needs Team position, where I collaborated with teachers and support staff to develop individualised learning plans for students with diverse needs.

2. Describing the Experience: In this role, I worked closely with colleagues to identify strategies for supporting students with specific learning challenges. We developed tailored interventions to enhance their educational experiences.

3. Analysing the Experience: This experience reinforced the importance of collaboration and advocacy in inclusive education. Research emphasises that collaborative approaches enhance students' academic and social outcomes with additional needs (Friend & Cook, 2010).

4. Evaluating the Experience: My involvement in the Additional Learning Needs Team was

transformative. I gained valuable insights into the challenges faced by students with additional needs and learned how to advocate effectively for their support.

5. Drawing Conclusions: My academic learning equipped me with the necessary skills to contribute effectively to the team. However, I recognised that I needed further training in specific areas, such as behaviour management and individualised instruction.

6. Actionable Outcomes: To enhance my effectiveness, I planned to pursue professional development opportunities focused on behaviour management and differentiation strategies. I would also seek mentorship from experienced colleagues within the team.

Identifying Further Development Needs While I have made significant progress during my foundation degree, I acknowledge that I still need to develop further skills to enhance my employability and effectiveness in the field.

Reflecting on my journey using Dewey's model:

1. Recognizing the Experience: I identified specific areas for growth, including more profound knowledge of special educational needs (SEN) legislation, advanced behaviour management techniques, and practical strategies for individualised instruction.

2. Describing the Experience: My coursework and practical experiences revealed gaps in my knowledge that I needed to address to support students effectively.

3. Analysing the Experience: This realisation aligns with the growing emphasis on specialised training for educators working with diverse learners, which is increasingly recognised as a best practice in inclusive education.

4. Evaluating the Experience: Identifying these development needs is crucial for my career progression. Research indicates that continuous professional development is vital for educators to remain effective and responsive to their students' needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

5. Drawing Conclusions: Pursuing further training and professional development opportunities is necessary for my growth and effectiveness in the field.

6. Actionable Outcomes: I planned to enrol in workshops and courses related to SEN legislation and behaviour management. Additionally, I aimed to engage with professional organisations and networks to stay updated on best practices and resources in inclusive education.

Conclusion.

Completing this degree has been a transformative journey, both professionally and personally. I have gained invaluable insights into the diverse needs of my learners and the importance of fostering an environment where my students feel valued and supported. The coursework and practical experiences have equipped me with skills to adapt my teaching methods, collaborate with colleagues and professionals and advocate for inclusive practices. Reflecting on my journey through the foundation degree in Inclusive Education using Dewey's

reflective model has provided valuable insights into my personal and professional development. By critically assessing my experiences, I have identified my strengths, challenges, and areas for further growth. This reflection process has reinforced my commitment to lifelong learning and continuous improvement. As I look to the future, I am excited about the opportunities in inclusive education. The skills and knowledge I have gained through this program have equipped me to make a meaningful impact in the lives of students with additional needs. I am dedicated to ongoing professional development and embracing the challenges of this rewarding career path. With a clear action plan in place, I am eager to continue learning, growing, and advocating for inclusive education in the future. Ultimately, Dewey's reflective model has guided me in understanding the significance of my experiences throughout this journey. Reflecting on my time, I have recognised the importance of empathy, understanding and patience. The challenges in which I have faced have strengthened my commitment to promoting equity and accessibility

in education. As I move forward, I am excited to apply my knowledge and passion to create inclusive spaces that empower all students to thrive. I now recognise that reflection is a powerful tool for personal and professional growth, and I am committed to applying this practice as I continue my career in inclusive education. This degree has not only prepared me for a career in inclusive education but has also instilled a lifelong commitment to learning and growth in the pursuit of a more tolerant, understanding and inclusive society.

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