

Personal and Professional Development

ECIE5015

Component 2

Reflection

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Acknowledgement

I acknowledge I have used generative AI in this assignment to support my research, including search for bibliography, grammar correction, used tools to summarise, compare and interrogate materials and I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my work.

REFLECTION

Reflective practice is an important part of professional development because it allows people to critically examine their experiences, identify areas for learning and improve their future practice. Hence, this reflection aims to explore my professional development by focusing on the relationship between my professional role as a Teaching Assistant and learning on the Foundation Degree as well as the actions that have arisen from the learning process. This reflection will use Jasper's ERA model, developed by Margaret Jasper (2013) where ERA stands for Experience, Reflection and Action representing the three stages of the reflective cycle. The areas of development that I will discuss will focus on my communication skills, confidence and professional knowledge.

EXPERIENCE

Early on when I started my journey as Teaching Assistant, I was assigned to a male, year 7 learner who I will refer to as learner Fyn, who had complex needs. He is dyslexic and with a history of behavioural challenges, excluded from his primary school due to severe dysregulation and was sent to a different school. My role was to provide a 1:1 support, as well as to scribe for him while letting him to remain involved in every classroom activity including PE. Meeting learner Fyn initially was a bit unpleasant as I've recognised immediately his indifference towards me. He turned to his friend and whispered something that made both of them chuckle. Before the day even ends, he was openly talking to his friend speaking in an awkward sentence like "me no like school" and said the word black and side glanced me. This was my first ever assignment as teaching assistant and my confidence was completely knocked down. I felt insulted and disrespected that a boy this age can be so inconsiderate to adults. I was nearly in tears, but I carried on supervising him as they were just doing some colouring. I still gave him praise and encouragement of how beautiful his choice of colour pallets was. He continued to ignore me and I backed down eventually. I went to see my manager and relayed everything that happened. Learner Fyn was called to the office by the manager, and we had a talk about it, but he denied any of what happened. Although he said that he was just saying to his friend that black is his favourite colour. My manager could not really do much and learner Fyn was let off. I was asked to take my time to recover and to go back to my learner whenever I am ready that day. The antagonizing behaviour of learner Fyn towards me continued each day and I was just surviving. I could not support him in any way as he refused to cooperate with me until we were in Math's lessons. I noticed that he was becoming frustrated and agitated as his face was turning red. He appeared unsure of how to begin and repeatedly turned around to friends in the classroom while everyone is working. I started to talk to him and asked if there is anything I can do to help. He acknowledged me and admitted he hadn't got a clue of how to solve the questions. I explained the task as clear as I can by showing what is needed to do then asked him if he understood. His face remained blank, so I changed my approach. I collected some interlocking blocks resource available in the classroom to provide a more visual support

of my explanation and together, we completed half of the task. I then encouraged him to have a go for the rest of the questions which can be linked to Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout the lesson, I used positive encouragement and avoided giving the answers to the question when he is stuck. Instead, I asked questions that made him think where he might have gone wrong. I praised his effort and he appeared more confident by the end of the lesson. This challenging experience gave me the opportunity to adapt my approach to providing support, develop my role, and, most importantly, communicate openly with my manager at a time when my confidence was very low.

REFLECTION

Upon reflection on this entire experience, my initial perception of Fyn as a complicated learner, after I have read his one profile, was driven by my anxiety and lack of confidence. It was my first day, noting that I used to work in different field, so I was nervous and I did not know what to expect. I entered the role with a sense of responsibility but also with limited experience of managing challenging behaviour and supporting a learner with dyslexia. Fyn's previous history of exclusion from his old primary had already created an expectation in my head that he would be a challenging learner. Looking back, I recognised that I have based my interpretation of Fyn's behaviour from this background before I even have the chance to meet him.

Meanwhile, my first meeting with him was somewhat unpleasant as I sensed a certain indifference towards me. I recognised that my reaction was based on how I personally felt his comment as directed towards me. Being new to the job, I had expected to feel confident and to be accepted by the learners; however, my expectation was challenged by the experience. I now realised that working with children can involve behaviours that are difficult to interpret most of all I understand now that learner's behaviour does not necessarily reflect their feelings or intentions towards me personally. He may have been attempting to make his friend laugh or simply behaving in a way that I misunderstood.

One of the most important things I learned is the importance of not making assumptions about a learner's intention (Brookfield, 2017). Although I felt that Fyn's behaviour was completely aimed at me, I can never know for certain what he meant. This experience helped me recognise the importance of critically reflecting on my own assumptions and considering the situation from the learner's perspective rather than interpreting their behaviour based solely on my own perception. Also, my belief in maintaining professional boundaries is reinforced by the way I continued to supervise and support Fyn, providing positive encouragement despite my personal discomfort (Education Workforce Council, 2022). It only means that I can separate my personal feelings from my professional responsibility. I also recognised when I had reached my emotional limit and sought support from my manager rather than allowing the situation to escalate. I learned the

value of seeking support, as I initially thought asking for help might make me look incapable, but I now understand that seeking guidance is a strength and an important part of professional practice (Education Workforce Council, 2025). Opening up to my manager helped me to process the situation better as she is experienced and can see things in a different perspective.

Following my continued unpleasant encounters with Fyn, which made me feel uncomfortable each day, he acknowledged me for the first time in Math's lesson. I began to consider whether his behaviour could have been a result of his frustrations, uncertainty or even a lack of understanding at all. This changed my perspective and drove me to respond to his underlying needs rather than reacting negatively to his previous behaviour. I learned the importance of adapting my communication and teaching strategies. I realised that my first explanation was not effective because Fyn did not appear to understand. Instead of assuming that he was not willing to learn, I changed my approach and introduced a practical resource. This demonstrated to me that learners can benefit from different methods of explanation, such as visual and practical, step-by-step support rather than relying solely on verbal explanation (Welsh Government, 2021). As a teaching assistant, I need to be observant and flexible enough to recognise when an approach is not working and make the necessary adjustments (Welsh Government, 2022).

Another learning point that I realise is the importance of positive reinforcement. Fyn appeared to lack the confidence in solving the task, but by giving praise and encouragement for his effort, he was able to carry on doing the task independently. This can be linked to B.F. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, which suggests that behaviours are more likely to be repeated when they are followed by positive reinforcement (Skinner, 1953.) I realise now that the most significant of this whole experience is I developed my own confidence, resilience, professional boundaries and adaptability in dealing with learner's behavioural challenges. I did not allow my emotional inconvenience to cloud my responsibility to support Fyn. Instead, I dealt with it professionally by focusing on his needs.

ACTION

As a Teaching Assistant, I am likely to encounter a range of different situations each day, particularly as our school has a population of more than a thousand learners. My role may involve supporting individual learners or groups, supervising learners during lunch breaks, assisting them during practical activities and working alongside teachers to support learner's academic and emotional development. These responsibilities require me to be flexible, patient, and adaptable according to each individual's needs.

My action plan, therefore, is to focus on developing my professional role, confidence, communication skills and ability to respond in any awkward situations. In the future, I will try to remain calm and consider different explanation rather than responding emotionally. I would also remind myself that young people may communicate in ways

that adults find inappropriate or confusing. In some cases, challenging behaviour may just be a form of communication and could be related to difficulties, additional needs or disabilities the learner is experiencing. By remaining calm and professional, I will be in a better position to assess and respond in a supportive way.

I will also consider the importance of using positive and respectful language when communicating to learners as this can help build trust and create good relationships. Additionally, I will try to look beyond challenging behaviour and consider what may be causing it. I will observe learners carefully and pay attention to patterns in their behaviour like becoming overwhelmed or dysregulated. I will communicate with them openly when it's appropriate and adapt my approach when they are struggling. I will work collaboratively with lead teachers and other professionals involved with the learner to ensure that I understand the needs of the learner and my approach is aligned to the support already in place. This will help me to support the learner in a more constructive way rather than focusing on the behaviour itself.

I will also continue to use practical and visual resources to where appropriate to attempt my explanation and I will provide the necessary scaffolding method, needed to encourage independent thinking as well as continuing to recognise effort through positive reinforcement.

Overall, my aim is to become a calm, confident, reflective and supportive Teaching Assistant who can respond appropriately to a range of situations. I will continue to reflect on my experiences, learn from other members of staff and adapt my practice to meet the individual needs of learners. By developing my communication skills, understanding challenging behaviour, using appropriate scaffolding and promoting positive relationships, I hope to contribute to a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment in which all learners feel valued and encouraged to achieve their potential.

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