

Module: Academic and Employability Skills

BMSW4001

Task 2: Reflections on the Topics in the ACE Module

(2000 words)

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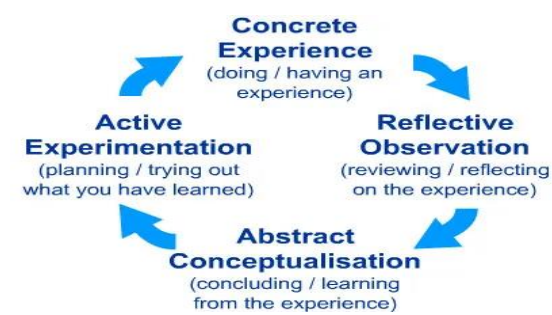
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1. Introduction

This report will show the understanding and knowledge that I have gained since I started my educational journey here at University of Wales Saint Trinity David. In this report I will be applying techniques for reflective writing, based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle. I will be following the four- stage learning cycle as follows:

- Experience
- Reflect
- Conceptualise
- Plan

Figure 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (McLeod, 2017)



Kolb (1984), as quoted in McLeod (2017), states “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”.

According to McLeod (2017) “no one stage of the cycle is effective as a learning procedure on its own”. However, from the four stages in Kolb's model, I feel that Active Experimentation is the stage that most appeals to me. I found it to be quite interesting and useful for myself in this report. I do believe that this approach will help me follow my time at UWTSD and in the future.

I have also come to appreciate Kolb's classification of learning styles. If I follow this, as found in the summary by McLeod (2017), it seems that the Diverging style is the most appropriate for me. This is because I like to ask a lot of questions if I don't understand the task given in my academic work and in everyday activities, before I apply them; I'm worried I'll get it wrong, and therefore I like things properly explained to me, whether by a lecturer or by a friend. I like to listen and learn with an open mind and enjoy personal feedback. This approach works best for me, especially during the preparation for this report. I asked my

lecturer for feedback on a few occasions as I was unsure if I did something correctly or not and he would give me advice on where I've gone wrong and what I could do better. For example, I was advised by my lecturer not to be too conversational in my writing but to express myself in more formal academic English. Bearing all this in mind, it seems strange that I enjoy the Active Experimentation stage the most, as normally people with a Diverging style prefer the first two stages. Perhaps the requirements of the module make me focus on Active Experimentation, whereas in ordinary situations I would prefer Reflective Observation.

2. Reflections on Module Content

I have found this course to be quite a challenge for me, as I haven't studied for a very long time. I'm used to cooking, cleaning, and looking after children, and so at least one topic in this module, time management, has been of invaluable help to me. At least two other topics, public speaking and paraphrasing, will be useful for my intended career working with children: I will need to address groups of them, and I will often need to rephrase my words in a way that they can understand. However, I shall start with the most technical skill in the course: referencing.

2.1. Referencing

The University of New England's guide to Academic Skills (n.d.) states that "In your academic writing, you have to support your points with concrete evidence taken from a variety of valid sources, and name the author/source of your evidence in your writing." The second point means that when producing an academic writing assignment, students will be expected to acknowledge the contribution of published authors by referencing them in a recognised format, both in the text (using the author-date system, in brackets) and in the reference list.

When we were introduced to referencing in my class, I was confused, as I had never used this style in my writing before. At first I didn't see the purpose of citing another person's work as part of my own writing, and I wasn't sure how I was going to get through to this stage. However, after our lecturer's explanations and the information I found by myself, I now understand that citation "recognises that academic writing builds on previous research" (University of New England, n.d.). I can certainly see the ethical and legal dimension here, avoiding plagiarism. According to the UWTSD library and learning resources (2021), plagiarism is submitting work that is not one's own. I wouldn't appreciate another person copying my work if he or she didn't give me credit for it but instead took the credit for themselves.

Of course, good referencing is also a mechanical skill – we must follow stylistic rules or conventions – for this course, this means Harvard style. However, UWTSD provides a handbook online (UWTSD Library and Learning Resources, 2021). I can refer to this at home, using Kolb's Accommodating learning style (McLeod, 2017) - the university has done the research and analysis, so students can simply follow guidelines. Of course, we did some practice in writing and citing references in class too, first by looking at examples and then trying to change incorrect references to the Harvard format.

By the end of the course, I could see why referencing is so important. These are the reasons that I have come to understand:

- To give my academic credit to my ideas and arguments
- To acknowledge the work of others to avoid plagiarism
- To allow readers find the sources I have used in my work
- To demonstrate the depth of my study

2.2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is writing the ideas of another person in my own words (Uefap, 2021). As I found out from both the lectures and online sources, “Lecturers like to see you using paraphrasing in your writing because it demonstrates what you know and understand about their subject (because it is in your own words)” (University of New England, n.d.). It will also prevent any plagiarism.. Paraphrasing and the related skill of summarising have indeed been a challenge for me and definitely an experiment.

At first, I didn’t fully understand what paraphrasing was or why it was even needed, even if it is “a highly acceptable way to include the ideas of other people in your writing” (University of New England, n.d.). However, the help of our lecturer and the resources on Moodle gave us a better understanding why paraphrasing is used and when we should use it.

Once I started to implement it in my writing, it became especially helpful when we did our PowerPoint presentations; when we had to research our intended career, we paraphrased and summarised the important information from websites. I saw that paraphrasing is not just a question of changing vocabulary; it is far more important to change a sentence’s grammatical structure – and in summarising this is unavoidable.

There will be other times where I will need to paraphrase in other essays and reports in my academic work – and in my future career I will need to rephrase my own sentences whenever children find it hard to understand me (perhaps due to unfamiliar vocabulary or idioms), so paraphrasing provides good practice for this.

2.3. Time Management

The practice of planning and dividing our time between different tasks, even when we don’t have much time and we are under pressure, is known as time management (Mind tools, 2019).

This module has taught me more about time management differently from the way that I'm used to in my daily home and family life. Now that I have started my educational journey here at UWTSD, I'm learning a whole new meaning. I am learning how to:

- Use time effectively
- Allocate time to study
- Balance my time requirements for different aspects of my life

According to Chapman (2021), in *Tips Managing Your Time*, the key to successful time management is planning and protecting the planned time. I have followed this advice by staying organised and by prioritising my activities, and I make plans accordingly. I thus found a timetable to be very useful in my everyday life. I also found when I did my presentation using time effectively I managed to keep to five minutes talking.

Therefore, after going to Moodle and using the resources, I have a plan starting from now and the near future that will help me acquire great skills in my life for my success. I shall try to do the following:

- Make a list of things to do within a time span
- Mark these of importance first from (high, medium, and low)
- Allow time for planning and problem solving
- Allow for delays and interruptions

I will make use of the timetable I have made and allocate two hours' learning time when needed to help me get through my time at UWTSD.

2.4. Public Speaking and My Presentation

Although presentation and public speaking are almost the same, there is a slight difference between the two: public speaking simply involves giving a speech or talk, whereas a presentation is a speech with visuals to hold the audience's concentration (erica@speaksimple.com, 2017).

This module has helped me overcome my fears of talking in public – only to a small group of people, as I've yet to try public speaking to a large audience. I thought I was going to find this part of the module extremely difficult, as I was never the sort of person who wanted to stand up and speak in public, and I had to learn how to feel comfortable in front of the class. I had never used PowerPoint to present before, so I needed some help leading up to the presentation day on how to summarise ten PowerPoint slides in five minutes.. Therefore, I researched on the internet how to apply this. I found the following guidelines (Ravilious, 2021) to be helpful for me:

- Tell a story
- Avoid too much text
- Use images but not too many
- Practice
- Coping with nerves
- Keep to a schedule
- Make eye contact
- Don't read from the slides

I practised these points at home with my family and friends and applied them in my presentation. I told a story to my audience to get their attention. I also felt this worked with little text and a good image. According to Ravilious (2021), a picture tells a thousand words, and good images are far better than large chunks of text. I found that without a lot of text, and summarising/paraphrasing to convey the information briefly, I managed to keep to a schedule. I also tried to maintain eye contact with small groups around the class, and by not reading from the slides, I did this.

I believe that more of what Kolb calls Active Experimentation will help me in the future if I ever have to do a presentation again. I will continue to find ways to deal with nerves and to make eye contact with people. I've come to realise I will also need these skills in my chosen career working as a special educational needs teacher, to ensure effective and reassuring paralinguistic communication.

Conclusion

During my first term here at UWTSD I have thoroughly enjoyed my experiences on this module. Although I did find some of the topics hard and confusing, it has been interesting to expand my understanding and knowledge of these four modules. At the beginning I didn't have much confidence in presentations, but after following tips I found on the internet I feel I could do it again with no worries. Time management has taught me how to use my time effectively in order to manage my everyday activities (where I have also found that prioritising is very important when we have children to look after) and submit my assignments set by UWTSD before the deadline. Furthermore, I have seen why and how we have to provide references: this is very important in academic writing and will further help me in the future. Paraphrasing and summarising are skills I feel I need more help with as I continue here at UWTSD, as this is not a comfortable area for me. I will continue to practise this verbally, by trying to express the same point in different ways to friends and family.

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