



# **Certificate of Higher Education Employability Skills**

**Module: Professional Career Development**

**Module code: (BMSW4012\_SWAN)**

**Part 2: Reflective Essay**

**Name: Varvara Hotico**

**Student Number: 2334144**

**Total word count: 1500**

Personally, reaching university is an achievement despite the challenges that can come with it; They are often varied and deeply personal. Adult learners typically prioritize their roles as workers or employees over being students, regardless of any motivations to continue their education (Urban & Jirsakova, 2021).

Through the method of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle which consists of six stages: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan we can find out its challenges in a sequential way. So, I present my experiences as a demonstration of this model (Gibbs 1988).

### 1. Description

When I started university, it was a real struggle. During my first period as an adult student, I faced so many challenges that later made the first experience quite difficult for me. I was coming back to school as a non-traditional student having spent a few years in the workforce, working before deciding I would come back and get my education (Zimmerman 2002). Key challenges included transitioning into academic life, managing studies with personal responsibilities, and negotiating university procedures (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Another provocation I encountered was traveling from far away to attend lectures, which was not always possible because of family duties.

Balancing a full-time job, family responsibilities, and coursework was overwhelming. I had to adjust to the academic environment, relearn study skills and organize daily activities with my two children.

Academic writing, transitioning from high school assignments that typically involve writing brief, descriptive content to university essays that necessitate in-depth critical analysis, thorough research, and strict adherence to formatting rules can be daunting. Adjusting to this shift proved challenging as I found it difficult to express my thoughts coherently and convincingly (Cottrell, 2019).

### 2. Feelings

Upon starting this course, I experienced a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Although I was impatient to develop new skills and advance those I already had, I was also skeptical about

the outcomes and the practicality of my plans to implement these methods (Schuk, Petrich & Meece 2014). Even though there were moments of discontent when I encountered difficulties or made only moderate progress, as I went along. I felt a sense of accomplishment with every task finished (Brookfield, 2017).

The anxiety was a result of concerns about meeting the academic requirements at the university level. Frustration grew as feedback pointed out shortcomings in argumentation, structure, and referencing. Even though I worked hard, receiving low grades initially was discouraging and led me to doubt my academic skills.

I was stressed when not able to understand new topics, however, the lecturers were extremely helpful, so this helped me tremendously. Meeting new people also was an incredibly positive fact to socialize more given that I am working and studying full-time so truly little free time to go out and meet new people (Tinto 1993).

The most positive experience as a beginner was to get out of my comfort zone, interact and speak in front of people accepting feedback from other colleagues.

### 3. Evaluation

Looking back, the experience had both advantages and disadvantages. Positively, the coursework was pertinent to my career and intellectually engaging. Some parts of my experience were positive. In particular, the orientation programs helped me become more familiar with the campus and its services for students (Krause & Coate, 2008).

During the first week, orientation programs aimed at integrating new students were beneficial, providing essential information about university life and resources. However, these programs were a challenge for most leaving adult learners. On the positive side, I found support through adult learner groups and academic advisors, which helped me navigate initial challenges.

### 4. Analysis

The main challenge met was the shift from descriptive to analytical writing when composing university essays. Furthermore, mastering proper referencing and citation presented new hurdles essential for avoiding plagiarism and upholding academic honesty. Studies indicate that numerous students encounter comparable

obstacles during the transition to university-level writing due to the elevated demand for cognitive and analytical abilities (Wingate, 2012).

The orientation programs are a pivotal element of the first experience, serving as a vital tool in acclimating new students, me included, to the campus environment, its facilities, and the range of services designed to assist students (Tinto, 1993). By delivering a comprehensive overview of university life, these programs facilitate a smooth transition by furnishing abundant information on academic support systems, extracurricular opportunities, and student services.

Participating in orientation programs is a vital component of early university experience. By offering a comprehensive overview of university life, these programs facilitate a smooth transition by furnishing valuable insights on academic resources, extracurricular opportunities, and support facilities (Barefoot 2004).

This familiarity significantly alleviates the initial apprehension of navigating through a new and expansive campus. The encounter encompassed both advantageous and less favorable elements. On a positive note, the university's orientation programs delivered invaluable initial guidance to enhance students' acclimatization process.

effectively alleviates any initial concerns about navigating through the expansive campus setting.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, going back to school as an adult was rewarding and tough at the same time. The benefits of pursuing my educational aspirations, both personally and intellectually, outweighed the initial challenges of adjusting to the academic atmosphere. This event made it clear how crucial it is to make use of the resources at hand and to have a resilient, growth mindset.

The experience made it clear how important it is to make use of the social networks, professional advice, and academic assistance that are accessible. I was able to get past the first obstacles, including learning unfamiliar concepts and creating productive study habits, thanks to these resources. In particular, the lecturers' assistance was crucial in helping me understand concepts, provide criticism, and oversee the challenges of my schoolwork. My perspective expanded and my study strategy improved because of taking part in a variety of learning styles and approaches.

Additionally, the interactions with other students at initial introductions and the course were quite nice. Despite my hectic schedule, it enabled me to socialize and

build relationships, which was essential for my motivation and mental health. In addition to companionship and support, meeting new people gave me a deeper appreciation for the variety of backgrounds and experiences that enhance the classroom. It served as a reminder of the role of community and the exchange of experiences and information in promoting development.

The experience made clear how important it is to have a resilient attitude and a dedication to lifelong learning.

## 6. Action Plan

Moving forward, I plan to continue using university resources to enhance my learning experience. I will also set realistic goals and priorities to balance academic, professional, and personal responsibilities effectively. Regular reflection on my progress and challenges will help in stay motivated and make necessary adjustments to my study strategies (Lea & Street 1998).

Use University Resources: I plan to fully utilise the study groups, workshops, and tutoring sessions that my university offers as academic support services. These materials are incredibly helpful for comprehending difficult subjects and getting more perspectives from teachers and peers (Cottrell, 2019).

Establish Realistic Priorities and Goals: I will establish attainable goals every semester to successfully manage my work, personal, and studies. This includes setting deadlines for finishing homework, preparing for tests, and engaging in the workplace. Setting priorities for my chores will help me avoid feeling overwhelmed and manage my stress.

## Reflection

I have embarked on a journey of rediscovery and growth by returning to study as an adult student. I have found Gibbs' Reflective Cycle to be a valuable tool for reflecting on my experience, helping me understand the emotional and practical aspects of my return to education. Through this reflection, I have gained insights into the importance of resilience, support systems, and continuous learning in navigating the complexities of adult education. In the future, I will continue to perfect my ways of studying, asking for help when necessary, and taking a balanced approach to academics. Continuing to reflect on experiences will help me ensure that growth and success in academics persist (Kolb 1984).

This reflective essay captures the essence of my experience and serves as a guide for other adult learners embarking on a similar path. Although the journey is challenging, with determination and the right support, it is entirely possible to achieve academic and personal success.

Reference:

Barefoot, B. O. (2004). Higher education's revolving door: Confronting the problem of student drop-out in the first year. *The Journal of College Student Retention*, 5(3), 201–228.

*Brookfield, S. D. (2017). Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.*

*Cottrell, S. (2019). The Study Skills Handbook (5th ed.). Red Globe Press.*

*Gibbs, G. (1988). Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods. Oxford: Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.*

*Kahu, E. R., & Nelson, K. (2018). Student engagement in the educational interface: Understanding the mechanisms of student success. Higher Education Research & Development, 37(1), 58-71.*

*Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Prentice Hall.*

*Krause, K.-L., & Coates, H. (2008). Students' engagement in first-year university. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 33(5), 493–505.*  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930701698892>

*Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. Studies in Higher Education, 23(2), 157-172.*  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380364>

*Schunk, D. H., Petrich, P. R., & Meece, J. L. (2014). Motivation in Education: Theory, Research, and Applications (4th ed.). Pearson Education.*

*Tinto, V. (1993). Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.*

*Urban K., Jirsakova J. (2021). Motivation and personality traits in adult learners. Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 1-16.*

*Wingate, U. (2012). 'Argument!' helping students understand what essay writing is about. Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 11(2), 145-154.*

*Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory into Practice, 41(2), 64-70.*

[https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2)