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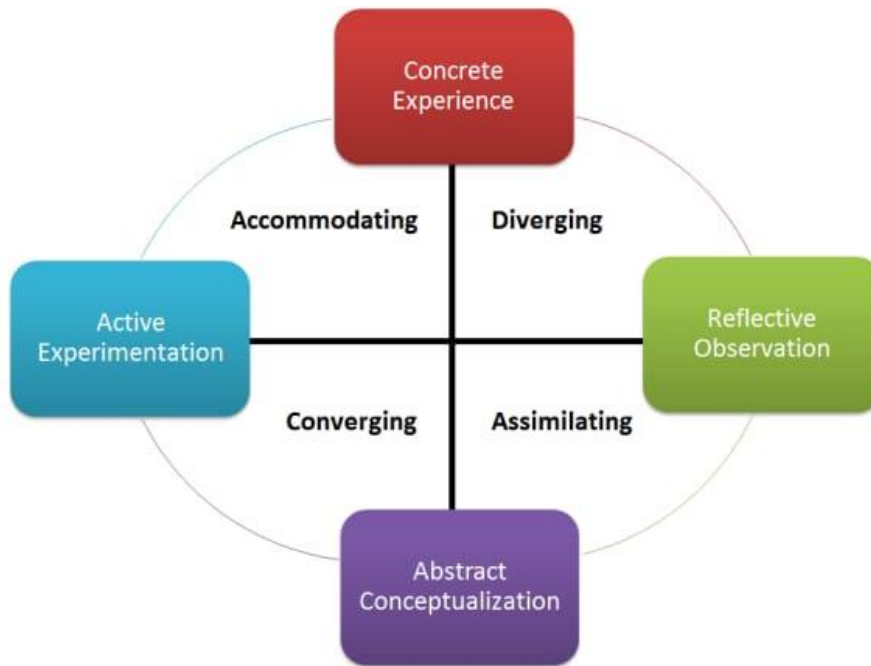
Assignment title: Reflections on Aspects of the ACE Course

Introduction

This report will show the knowledge I have acquired in the Cert HE courses, and my feelings about the ways in which I acquired it, applying reflective writing and following Kolb's model as described in McLeod (2007).

After a very long time away from education, coming back to it was very challenging. Even the vocabulary that was used in lectures, on the PPT slides and (especially) in the course materials was sometimes unfamiliar. Fortunately, I have found the support, understanding, and help to enable me to get settled. Nevertheless, independent learning is a big part of the course, and so I found that self-study and use of online resources were in some ways even more useful than guidance from lecturers. Here I navigated the unfamiliar terminology by intuition, deducing the meaning of new words from their context and aiming for a global understanding before I moved on to specific questions.

I have chosen to write about time management, CV writing, and cover letters, as well as public speaking. Those particular skills, as taught through focus on those topics in separate weeks, but re-evaluated by me through reading at home later, will help me in the process of achieving my career as a nursery teacher. Two of them, CV writing and cover letters, are vital in the initial stage of applying for jobs. Of course, they require a good command not only of grammar and vocabulary but also style, and although this style is not academic, it is equally formal, and so sometimes the lectures and materials on academic writing were useful when analysing examples of good cover letters. The other two, time management and public speaking, will be essential in the working environment itself. A nursery teacher must be well organised and have the ability to communicate clearly and at the right level – not only with the children but also with their parents and with fellow teachers. The good practice that the time management component of the course encourages will be very useful to me, and the experience of standing in front of class and conveying information will be good preparation in both a professional sense and also a psychological one.



First, I should say something about the model of reflection that I followed. Kolb's learning method is mostly used for skill training. It helps people become more responsible by encouraging them to reflect on their actions, reaching conclusions and putting ideas into practice. In the words of Kolb (1984), as quoted in McLeod (2017), "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience "

When I read about the types of people who follow any one of Kolb's four learning styles (McLeod, 2017), I immediately assumed that I would prefer the diverging style, since the description of people who prefer this seemed quite close to a description of an ideal nursery teacher: after all, anyone working with children must have an open mind and be happy to work in groups. On the other hand, I could see elements of the accommodating style that also seemed attractive to me, with its emphasis on instinct. However, in the end, the reality of my experience of the course was both more complex and more limited. It was more complex because in fact I needed to adopt elements of all the styles listed, and it was more limited (at least at the moment) because there was not very much opportunity for the active experimentation that the accommodating style requires, at least on campus. There again, there was one very important opportunity for active experimentation: the presentation. Perhaps this was sufficient at my current stage of progress.

Reflections on the module content

1. Time Management

Regarding time management, I always thought it was just an ordinary skill that had no relevance to academic studies, but the module showed me that it is a very important priority in approaching any academic task. It is particularly important in meeting deadlines but also useful in terms of assimilating new knowledge.

It involves some technical or statistical operations, but these are actually quite encouraging and reassuring. For example, according to the Pareto Principle's 80:20 rule, 80% of outcomes result from 20% of all causes (Time Management Abilities, n.d.). This means that 80% of our time might be almost wasted, but the other 20% is very productive, so whatever we do in that time should be prioritised. After reading this and realising how much time I waste watching tv and going on social media I decided to take action by limiting the time I spend on those activities, using this time for studying instead. It was hard at the beginning, but I managed very well. So perhaps this was an instance of successful active experimentation.

It seems to me that managing time by scheduling and goal setting is a very effective way of increasing productivity. So I have learned that time management is actually a skill that can make me more employable. As such, the ability to prioritise and focus deserves to be mentioned on a CV along with more formal qualifications. This brings me to the topic of CVs in general."

2. CV Writing

For this part of the course, I had to locate all the important information myself, as our lecturer was ill on the week when this topic was scheduled. This meant that I was stuck somewhere between Kolb's second and third stages, reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation, following an assimilating learning style (McLeod, 2017). I have not had an opportunity for active experimentation in this area yet. However, it had one benefit too: it made me a more independent learner.

In terms of CV Writing, I have learned that a CV should be a personal document highlighting the important qualities for the job, as well as showing studies and qualifications. Moreover, I came to see that CV writing is indeed an independent and active process, just like my learning: it should be done by myself, and written in my own words. It should be easy to read – and to achieve readability, there are some formal stylistic requirements or conventions to follow: for example, all the work experience must be listed in reverse chronological order. However, the content is more important, and this means a focus on skills. According to Monsters.co.uk (Monster, n.d.) “your skills are vital”.

In terms of skills that I myself managed to acquire during this course I can mention here reflective and academic writing. These are actually transferable skills, because I can apply them to the writing of official reports and records, which are essential in responsible pedagogical and pastoral work. Following specific stylistic conventions is a matter of discipline, and this is also transferable to general bureaucratic tasks.

In finding ways to show off these transferable skills I found the website LiveCareer (n.d.) very useful, with its very specific pages on different types of CV and different aspects within CVs that could be emphasised.

Both the websites (Monster, n.d.; LiveCareer, n.d.) mentioned above also offer advice on cover letters, which can make a huge difference in how employable I might be. I was particularly interested in this part of the module, as I shall now explain.

3. Cover Letter

Again, there was no lecture on this topic, and so I read the PPT slides myself at home and spent a long time accessing the various links on Moodle. The slides contained a lot of useful advice on many aspects of cover letters: their purpose, their content and their style. I learned that a cover letter will supplement a CV, and will summarise why I`m suitable for the job I am applying for. As LiveCareer (n.d.) notes, “It shouldn’t just be a reiteration of [my] CV. Instead, [I] should use it to showcase [my] personality, accomplishments, and skills that specifically apply to the position. “.

Cover letters tend to follow a fixed format and order of information. Naturally it should begin by addressing the person who will be interviewing me or who will make the decision to hire me or not. It is always a good idea to find out the names of such personnel in advance, to address them personally (but formally) at the start. Then the purpose will be reflected in the content. First, I need to introduce myself, and then persuade the company that I would be an asset to it – a good cover letter should ensure an invitation to an interview. Apart from listing my qualifications and skills, it could also contain information that is more usually requested at an interview – anecdotes about my proven capabilities in past situations. Here, I found from following one of the links on the slides that I could follow the STAR method (where I describe Situation, Task, Action, and Result) (Milkround, 2021). Of course, I must be able to provide evidence to support my claims here. As for style, I learnt that this must be formal and unemotional.

4. Public Speaking

During this lesson, I learned about the process of public speaking. At first, in class, we followed examples of effective public speaking on video, such as Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford Commencement Address. However, watching such videos really only gave us inspiration. The actual process of planning a focused speech accompanied by PowerPoint slides was something that could only be learned by doing it.

I learned how to use academic writing in a presentation, and I acquired the practical or technical skill of putting words in order in slides. However, the most important element was actually delivering the presentation and talking about myself in front of the class. I was nervous before my talk, but very relieved after it, and having this experience made me feel brave and improved my confidence a lot. It was also the only area in which I was able to move to Kolb's fourth stage, active experimentation, with a mixture of converging and accommodating learning styles: as McLeod (2017) suggests, I was working with practical and technical applications, but these were new challenges, and I had to trust my feelings.

Conclusion

Based on my experience in this course I have learned how to improve and manage my time, write a cover letter, and personalise my CV. Moreover, I had the experience of Public Speaking and built up my confidence in talking in front of people. However, when looking at Kolb's model, I could see that I need to progress to the stage of active experimentation in areas apart from time management and public speaking.

Of course, I have faced a number of challenges that are not connected to the specific subject matter of the topics. One of them is purely linguistic, since the materials contained a lot of formal, academic, technical or even subject-specific vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. Here I have relied on an intuitive working method, very close to Kolb's accommodating learning style (McLeod, 2017).

With these new resources, including both knowledge and skills,, I will bravely move on to my next course.

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