

0170

## EMPATHY AND THE 'i- FACTOR' : A CREATIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTION IN TEACHER TRAINING

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### Background

Societal pressures and new technologies have given rise to a fresh look at the school curriculum in England, resulting in what is now known as the 'creative curriculum' (DfES, 1999; DCSF, 2009). An upsurge of interest in creativity as inclusive, everyday problem-solving and critical thinking has been forecast in the writings of Claxton (2005), Gardner (2007) and Craft (2006). Preparing the next generation workforce with the ability to synthesise ideas from disparate sources, to think laterally and to engage in meta-thinking, or thinking about what you are thinking, are some of the skills that Gardner (2007) views as essential. In order to enable children to learn in a new way, teachers will also need to take ownership of innovative ways of delivering the curriculum and of engendering creative ideas in facilitating learning. At such times of change, initial teacher education (ITE) courses will need also to engage in creative and new ways of training which meets the needs of tomorrow's teachers. Such an approach will need to embrace new pedagogies which model the facilitation of learning and to provide more creative, open-ended modes of learning. Changes such as these need to consider the implications of how to approach the teaching and learning process in Higher Education(HE) ITE courses.

### Research Questions

The thinking behind this research project derives inspiration from the notions of 'reflection-in-action' (Schon, 1983) linked to Dewey's ideas of problematic situations which require reflection in order to move forward. Working with training teachers on a Secondary music PGCE course, the author encourages them to engage in a reflective process which involves thinking about their own feelings, and *empathising with learners* (Gardner, 1991) to help them to develop their own view of what teaching is about; that is their developing identity as a teacher. Combining the cyclical models of reflection of both Kolb (1984) and Gibbs(1998), the author develops her own model of reflection derived from *affective* aspects of empathy with learners and a developing sense of identity as a teacher through evaluation and reflection, as well as drawing on more traditional views of learning in Higher Education (Prosser et al, 1999; Biggs, 2007; Ramsden, 2003). The reflective teaching process represents a cycle of continuing evaluation and reflection. However, here training teachers' engagement and empathy with the learning process and with their own feelings about what is happening requires them to problematise their own practice and to critically appraise their own actions and thinking. The i-factor here represents both this progressive sense of identity as well as their ability to reflect on their own practice through the use of the 'first person' in academic writing and through lesson evaluation and reflective accounts of their developing professional skills.

### Methods

The '*Model of learning and reflection*' put forward here views knowledge as ontological, that is, " a way of knowing about or understanding oneself". This supports a view that learning is as much about 'being' as it is about 'doing' and that it is one in which there is essential engagement and collaboration with others; a way of knowing about or understanding oneself (self-knowing) in the context of relationships with others in a similar social situation. This kind of learning is holistic and dependent on critical reflection. The 'others' here are seen to be the pupils and learners with which teachers engage as well as with colleagues who 'model' the teacher role. This kind of learning is holistic and dependent on critical reflection.

The research data is sourced then from the three areas outlined above:

- 1. lesson evaluations
- 2. reflections on the synthesis of University training and experience already gained in the classroom in the first placement school.
- 3. reflection through academic writing on their own practice.

### **Frame**

The analysis of the data is 'interpretivist' requiring the researcher and reader to construct their own meanings from the data presented here through observation and interpretation (Denscombe, 2007). This view accepts that people construct their own meanings and is consistent with the theory of knowledge put forward which suggests that through reflection people will understand more about the situation and also more about themselves. In ontological terms, such methodology can be viewed as 'elaborate fictions' used to explain and justify our behaviours to both ourselves and others.

### **Research findings**

The findings are analysed through a framework which is derived from the theoretical viewpoint here, that empathy and affective aspects of reflection allow students to develop their sense of identity as 'beginner teachers' and that they are able to empathise with those around them, particularly with learners, in order to improve and enhance their understanding of the teaching role and teacher's skills. Previous research has used a variety of typologies or model frameworks either to analyse data or to help students to reflect using these types or levels of reflection. The analysis and interpretation of the data in this research, while helping students to use aspects of empathetic reflection and feelings and adopting useful aspects of Kolb and Gibbs' models to steer their evaluations, will be derived from an analysis of the degree to which empathy and i-factor thinking helps their progress in becoming an effective teacher and the degree to which this also enables a more creative approach to their pupil's learning.