

0316

**Raising achievement, developing knowledge, focusing on understanding, capturing learning and above all, enhancing confidence: a process of learning and teaching to enhance students' knowledge, skills and understanding.**

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## **Background**

The main aim of the research is to ascertain the effectiveness of learning and teaching in a higher education institution, using a relatively simple means of assessment, the 'Individual Reflective Practice Log' (IRPL). The IRPL is a structured tool for recording presented information involving the fact (what was taught), feeling (personal reflections), application (how this information can be used in other situations) and evidence (supporting work of other authors' opinions). At the end of each lecture students complete their IRPL for electronic submission the following week. The IRPL is then marked and returned with formative feedback to support subsequent submissions (feedforward). The feedback within 24 hours (Race 2009) is recorded electronically as an MP3 audio file (Rotheram 2009) to support learning and teaching prior to the next submission. The students' practice of teaching, choreography and performance is also recorded on video in the lecture and is immediately available to support reflection and enhance learning and teaching.

Students' experience of Dance, prior to embarking upon a Bachelor Arts in Physical Education with Qualified Teacher Status (BAPEQTS) course is demonstrated as varied. Current interest in the subject, as an activity fostering creativity, suggests there is a need to ensure that dance experience at University within PE courses is an enjoyable, motivating and enthusing experience where students can achieve. Hall (2008), in the first ever English Government Review of Dance, identifies a dearth of teachers of this subject in schools, suggesting young people's experiences might also be quite diverse. This paper demonstrates a process of learning and teaching which raises achievement, develops knowledge and focuses on understanding, learning and developing confidence.

## **Research Questions**

This paper aims to demonstrate a process of assessment using Information Communication Technology (ICT) to support and engage students' learning in a Higher Education environment, whilst enhancing their individual confidence in the knowledge, skills and understanding of a subject.

## **Methods**

The sample includes students (n=104) pursuing the attainment of BAPEQTS degree at a University in the North of England, UK. The collection of data uses a mixed method approach with pre and post questionnaires requiring quantitative and qualitative responses, this baseline data is supplemented with individual and focus group semi-structured interviews.

Underpinning any research on reflective practice and assisting them in their attainment of the highest standard possible (Seban 2009), Urich (2009) purported considerable research focusing on Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE), but little on the effectiveness of reflection. The research undertaken with the IRPL addresses this issue and demonstrates the positive impact in supporting trainee teachers' attainment and therefore the effectiveness of reflection in PETE. Barmack (2009) points to the underpinning of educational reflection in the work of Dewey (1933) while other authors provide a variety of educational interpretations of reflection and reflective practice (Race 2009; Procee 2006; Moon 2004a; Rodgers 2002; Schon 1987, 1983; Kolb 1984 a, b). Leijen et al (2008) writes with specific reference to dance and articulates Procee's (2006) interpretation as based upon Kant's (Guyer, 2004, 1998) focus on understanding and judgment. The factual element of the IRPL provides the foundations upon which students' observations of practical experience are used to inform their

interpretation and perception development (Lesnick, 2005; Schön, 1983, 1987). The process of practical experience is reiterated by Nielsen (2008) who identifies that by teaching a subject (in Nielsen's research music) there is opportunity to think 'outside the box' and remove preconceptions of practice and enhance professional development.

### **Frame**

The theoretical framework underpinning any research on reflection and the specificity of understanding and judgment identified by Kant (Guyer 2004, 1998) and the simplicity of Kolb's (1984a) Experiential Learning Cycle are, primarily, the basis of the IRPL. Schon (1987) captures the essence of the IRPL in a statement articulated in a Higher Education Academy (HEA) report (2008),

"The paradox of learning a new competence is this; that a student cannot at first understand what he needs to learn, can learn it only by educating himself, and can educate himself only by beginning to do what he cannot understand."

Particularly important to this quote is the process of learning and the understanding of this, for example, learning takes place by participating in an activity that is not clearly understood, therefore the nature of trial and re-trial. With reference to the IRPL, subsequent submissions are based upon feedback, primarily feedforward, in a similar way to the 'Kempian theory of a writing feedback loop' (Irvin 2008) which supports future submissions of work, in this case the formulation of the IRPL. Moon (2004a; 1999) demonstrates in her work the significant correlations between authors' understanding of reflective practice and the positive gains by students who do engage in reflection.

### **Research findings**

Some reports highlight that physical education teachers lack the confidence and ability to teach Dance in schools (Rolfe ) particularly male physical education teachers (Gard 2008; 2003a, b; Keyworth 2001; Kirk 1999; Flintoff 1994), although the majority of teachers with responsibility for Dance are physical education teachers (Connell 2009; Hall 2008; YST 2008). The use of the IRPL is demonstrated as having a significant impact on individual student's confidence and their ability to teach this subject; affirming the vision of the Government (Hall 2008) and other authors (Hillier 2007; Jasper 2007; Burns 2008, 2007) for teachers, both male and female, who are skilled in the pedagogy and content of Dance. The results demonstrate exceptional attainment and positive responses to this process of learning and teaching. Students' attainment was tracked to demonstrate how their work improved with regular formative feedback (feedforward). As a result of their learning and increased confidence through the experience in this dance module they have also produced extensive dance booklets exploring a variety of themes to encourage and motivate young people.