

0483

## Challenging the metaphor: Reflection - mirror or kaleidoscope?

Liz McKenzie

*University of Plymouth, Plymouth, United Kingdom*

### Background

Lakoff & Johnson (2003) suggest that metaphor pervades our existence, structuring our perceptions, thoughts and actions. Saban (2006) similarly considers how metaphors structure our view of the world, although Stevens (1996) cautions that metaphors may either illuminate or obscure our understanding. Therefore we need to choose our metaphors carefully. The metaphor of reflection implies a mirror image, however evidence from the literature and research findings presented in this paper, suggest reflection involves multiple sources of information and an outcome that is subject to re-evaluation and change. Consequently the metaphor may not provide the illumination it promises.

Models of reflection commonly represent the process of reflection as a recursive cycle (eg. Kelly, 1966; Kolb, 1984; Boud et al, 1985) and frequently incorporate comparison of one's own interpretation of events with those of others. Kolb (1984) notes the contribution of all components of experience, including other people, while Boud et al (1985) include consideration of alternative points of view. Jay & Johnson's (2002) three-stage typology includes a 'Comparative' dimension which involves consideration of others' views and Manouchechri (2002) similarly describes a 'Confronting' stage in which the individual seeks alternative ways of interpreting the event. Others, such as Brockbank & McGill (1998) and Bolton (2005) have stressed the importance of input from others for extending reflection beyond immediate practice, to consider the wider socio-political context. These views suggest that reflection is more complex than a simple mirror image, leading l'Anson et al (2003) to propose a process of multiple refractions. References to the use of different viewpoints suggest a process involving successive interpretations of experience, to obtain the best fit with the evidence available. Therefore, rather than a static 'mirror image' of reality, this suggests a dynamic image, constructed from a series of reflections, akin to a kaleidoscope. Just as the picture in a kaleidoscope changes as the mirrors cast different patterns of the pieces, so the interpretation of experience is constantly changing as further sources of information are added, leading to previous understandings being subjected to review.

### Research Questions

Does the metaphor of reflection provide the illumination it promises or should we reconsider the metaphor in the light of theoretical and empirical evidence about the process?

This paper uses the literature and empirical findings to examine the metaphor.

### Methods

The research used a mixed method design, following the participant selection model of the Explanatory design outlined by Creswell & Plano Clark (2007), with questionnaires used to select individuals for interview. This paper draws on findings from the questionnaires responses of 127 trainee teachers for the post-compulsory sector and semi-structured interviews conducted with fifteen trainees.

Interviews were analysed to identify themes relating to the trainees' experience of reflection.

### Frame

The paper takes reflection as a means of constructing understandings of experience. It uses the work of Kelly (1966) and Berger & Luckmann (1966) to examine constructivist and constructionist elements in existing models of reflection. This view of reflection challenges the adequacy of the metaphor beyond those noted by Bolton (2005), leading to the suggestion of a kaleidoscope as an alternative.

### **Research findings**

The findings show that while most individuals engage in discussion with others to get a different perspective on events. Reflection is experienced as an 'ongoing circular process', with different stages and levels, in accordance with models outlined above. The views of others are valued to provide 'different angles' from which to evaluate experience. Individual preferences for engagement with reflection are apparent, with some preferring to reflect alone, without input from others. Findings are discussed in relation to theoretical explanations of personal and social constructions of reality, drawing on the work of Kelly (1966) and Berger & Luckmann (1966). As a result the paper concludes that we need to reconceptualise reflection to provide a richer model which will enable trainee teachers and other professionals to maximise its use.