

0500

From pledges to practice: exercising educational influence to promote creativity

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Background

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This paper explains how I hold myself accountable for my professional learning as I seek to influence the development of more creative pedagogical practice in initial teacher training (ITE) and in primary school education, and is part of my emerging doctoral programme. Through the research, I seek to describe, analyse and reflect upon my personal values and practice and generate a personal living theory of practice (McNiff, 2008; Whitehead, 1989 and 2008; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). The paper specifically examines the potential influences on policy and pedagogical practice of my close involvement in a learning forum at York St John University.

Research Questions

Focus of the enquiry

This paper offers an account of the learning forum 'Creativity – a key to unlocking children's potential?', held at York St John University in January 2010, as part of the North of England Education Conference (NEEC 2010). I was a co-convener of the conference, which was attended by a diverse range of delegates, presenters and participants. I am interested in examining whether my involvement has influenced the promotion of creativity in the organisations and spheres of education represented at the forum. Delegates were asked to make 'pledges' as to how they would seek to promote creativity for children in education in their spheres of professional educational influence. Key questions therefore arise:

- Is there any evidence that these pledges have influenced, or are likely to influence changed practices to unlock children's potential?
- Is there evidence that the values represented in the pledges have or will be borne out in practice?

The paper therefore explores my practice as a learning forum facilitator and how, in that role I can demonstrate the realisation of educational influence and the transformation of my own and others' learning and educational practice.

Methods

Research Methods

My preferred research methodologies constitute a systematic enquiry into how I can improve my practice and exercise educational influence through action research, specifically my own and that of others who were potentially influenced by the NEEC 2010 creativity learning forum.

The works of Whitehead (1989 and 2008) and Whitehead and McNiff (2006) relating to a living theories approach to action research, and McNiff's work (2008) on the transformational nature of educational relationships form the basis of the research methodology. This approach involves 'the living theories methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge' (Whitehead, 2008: 1).

Frame

Theoretical framework

The paper draws upon the work of key theorists to provide a theoretical framework to guide my enquiry:

- Notions of creativity in education including Craft (2005), Wyse and Dowson (2009) and Fisher (2004).
- Can creativity be 'taught' or 'enhanced' by teachers and their pedagogical practice, e.g. Howard-Jones (2008)?
- Tensions and dilemmas in creativity in education: Craft (2005, 2008), Loveless (2007).
- The role of central government in directing education: Bottery (2000).
- Contemporary and influential notions and models of the primary phase curriculum including Alexander (2009).

These conceptual frameworks allow me to reflect critically on and test the validity of my own provisional theories. Through the experience of engaging with and making sense of my practice I aim to offer explanations for any emergent knowledge claims, recognising that my provisional thinking may change as new evidence is generated. This then, as Whitehead (2008: 1) argues, 'includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge from creating living educational theories in enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?"'

Evidence base

The evidence base includes:

- Notes, video, audio interviews, photos and rapporteurs' reports from the forum.
- Pledges made by and follow up surveys/interviews with attendees.
- Evidence of changes in practice as a result of NEEC 2010

My evidence base demonstrates the values-based knowledge and practice of the participants with a focus on promoting creative opportunities for children. It acts as evidence of my educational influence in participants' learning. For each individual, the validity of the evidence may be tested against the values that informed the practice. This accountability and validation of the evidence base underpins the educational significance of the research.

Research findings

Contribution to knowledge

The educational significance of the research lies in the capacity of all participants to explain their accountability for their practices. 'The living theories methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge' (Whitehead, 2008: 1) engages all those involved with their values, responsibilities and accountabilities in their spheres of educational influence.

Examining individual and institutional values and accountabilities is also potentially a transferable model for following up conference presentation/participation, beyond evaluation of the event itself but towards investigating the transformational influence of such learning opportunities.