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Visual Reflection

It can make sense to **'harness the power of the arts as a vehicle for recording, to help explore educational experience'** (Hickman 2008:23).

Artists and designers have a visual intelligence, an **'intelligence of seeing'** (Riley 2008:166).

It was hoped that a 'collaged' reflection would offer a **non text-based tool** to convey information and a medium through which feelings and ideas could be expressed. A way for the trainee teachers to capture the **'ideas swirling around** in their heads'.



Reflective practice is a well-established and integral part of teacher training programmes. This **action research project** investigated the effectiveness of a visual form of reflection by PGCE students training to be Art and Design teachers in the post-compulsory sector.

An **'emic'** approach...

In arts education, it is common for researchers to engage actively and creatively with their respondents and this can be a strength in terms of 'getting on the inside' (Hickman 2008:18). This project was a collaboration between the 'researcher and the researched'.

Methodology:

Questionnaires established student opinion prior to the visual reflection exercise. **Emerging themes** at this stage were a preference for visual recording, together with an awareness that a 'visual' expression of learning could be open to interpretation if not accompanied by explanation.

After creating the 'collaged' reflections, students explained their symbolism and representation of ideas to the whole group. This was captured on video and followed by further questionnaires and focus groups which explored the student experience in the form of quantitative data. A typical comment was :

"This was a good experience for me, as it used a language which I am comfortable with - visual language"

Conclusions...

Visual reflection offered an alternative and creative way for students to consider their learning and development. The exercise was a successful attempt to

move beyond 'ritualistic reflection',

wherein reflection provides little more than spurious 'evidence' of reflection in order to meet the 'requirement to reflect' (Ash and Moore 2002: 5). The experience may also be described as an effective example of

'intra-professional verbalised reflection'

(ibid 2002: 8) - reflection carried out in the company of others in the same 'community of practice'. As a result, it is recommended to other educators looking for ways to develop their learners' reflective thinking and practice.

