

Introduction and comments on reflective practice



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A reflective approach is a crucial component for professional development within the education sector as it promotes personal growth and the development of skills required for a continuing healthy practice. As Hillier, Y, (2002) suggests, a reflective practitioner will actively participate, analyse, identify and examine specific problems or assumptions one encounters when teaching. This approach also helps the practitioner to discover the solutions: by stepping back and exploring specific incidents, problems or experiences permits a deeper reflection of possible solutions. The basis of this word 'reflection' involves the self, and an ability to distance oneself to gain a more objective understanding and to use this as a source of learning. As Fairbrother, P, and Hibbert, C (1993) suggest, developing our experience and knowledge and being willing to rethink and revisit our teaching approaches, will permit us to become responsible educators. Therefore, by implementing a reflective practice, I have a clear ethos and can strive towards working pro-actively and effectively, leading to an appreciation and understanding of new insights for the continual improvement of my own teaching practice.

The factors which affected my decision to engage in the TQFE at Stirling University were firstly my lifelong passion and commitment to my two subject areas: Computer Multimedia and Film and Media, and a deep-seated desire to spread my enthusiasm and share my experiences and skills. Participating in the TQFE will enable me to help students broaden their horizons and assist them in discovering their own potential. Unfortunately, I suffer from dyslexia and during my time at school I never received help or support; this left me feeling quite 'thick' and useless. To circumvent this feeling, I taught special needs within the local ATC, where I could hide my

dyslexia easily. However, following this, I broke my neck, and was then diagnosed with a progressive neuro-muscular disease. Flying in the face of adversity, I drew strength and purpose from those bad health experiences and became determined to study. I was accepted on an HND course, where I received help and encouragement from my lecturers. This enabled me to continue along the educational path and embark on a degree programme, and finally the TQFE course. This was my desire: to give back to students of today what I had received from the lecturers in the FE sector back then. My expectations of the TQFE were drawn directly from particular lecturers delivering the HND course who had experienced the TQFE programme, and my own FE experience. An important aspect of the TQFE programme that it would complement and consolidate this knowledge and experience, by equipping me with the tools that are central to the critical reflection process. Additionally, I believe that the TQFE will allow me to see things from beneath the 'common sense' boundary and investigate those invisible dimensions that are present in every day teaching practice, Brookfield, S, (1995). It will also prepare me to share my passions, knowledge and experience with students at a 'higher level' and enhance my ability to progressively develop, using a reflective practitioner approach to teaching.

I will continue with a reflection on two short logs of teaching practice taken from two sessions of the New Start Programme on Video Production. This will provide certain elements of a reflective critical analysis, used as a tool to explore how I am developing within my own teaching practice. The log extracts are both taken from my teaching of the 'New Start Programme' on

video production YCNSF to a class of 10 young adults aged 16-19 and of mixed gender.

Log 1

I was to teach students about camera angles and movements. As an advocate of the circle of communication, where students can see me and I them, I assumed this circle would permit a free, relaxed two-way communication. Whilst speaking to students on different camera shots, with the help of handouts, I could see that students were not grasping my points and their expressions revealed a lack of comprehension. They looked tense, unsure of me and some showed signs confusion and boredom, such as 'heads on desks'. The logic that had underpinned my ideas was flawed and the approach was not working. I thus implemented the 'double-loop reflective process' whereby I identified the error and then analysed how it could be rectified, replaced and rethought. By employing alternative ideas and strategies I changed my approach. I replaced the governing variables, which at the time meant that the students did not understand what I was trying to convey, and rethought my actions in conveying this information. Applying this theory contributed towards a preferred result. Argyris, C & Schon, D, (1978). My main error was in adopting an oral communication method. Although from my perspective this made the lesson sound immediate and exciting, from the

students' perspective I may have seemed a 'mad lecturer' telling them something that they just did not understand. Before the students fled out the room and were lost forever, I changed tactics. I thought that by using the white board and visual aids in the form of drawings to illustrate my points on

camera shots, and by repeating and clarifying, the teaching point would be conveyed more clearly. Whilst this seemed straightforward to me, it was obvious the class did not share my thoughts, and still the students did not understand. Somehow I had to convey this teaching point so that the students could understand how to use a camera effectively. I had to think on my feet and fast. Referring back to my TQFE Learning and Teaching module, I realised I had adopted the 'transmitter of knowledge' approach and had to act quickly to save this lesson and my credibility. Again I swiftly changed tactics. I took Rowntree's approach, which is not just about transferring my knowledge but encouraging student participation within the learning process itself Rowntree,(1985). From a direct, hands-on direction I got all the students up and involved with cameras in hands. The demonstration began with heightened enthusiasm from me and I immediately found myself circled by students; I was taking on the role of a director, with students as the crew. I simulated this approach and it worked! The enthusiasm from the students changed and became quite overwhelming; their interest and commitment levels sharply increased. In extracting a crucial pedagogic task from this log, it was a critical lesson for me in terms of teaching practice. I had tried to see the lesson through the eyes of the students. By constantly re-thinking my approach to achieve the desired affects, the tasks were finally accomplished.

Brookfield, S, D (1995) p 92-94. From my perspective, I had turned round an unsuccessful teaching and learning experience into something quite outstanding. From the students' perspective they were now part of a learning process which involved full engagement and interaction. I derived a huge sense of fulfilment from this lesson, and it ended extremely well: the

students gained as much from the session as did I teaching it. I felt the need to make this a valuable learning and teaching experience while also making the topic relevant to the students. On reflection, as an activist educator, this was the appropriate approach for this subject, and it reflected my own personality and enthusiasm while implementing a student-centred approach, within a reflective practise, I believe is essential in order to facilitate this.

Hunt, C, (1997)

Log 2

This week I planned to generate small chunks of varied activities and to close the session on a high with a quiz. I decided to begin with a visual activity on pre-designed media using an overhead projector. In addition, I formulated visuals of shots and movements as a demonstration to consolidate the previous lesson on camera angles and movements. This time the students visually experienced shots and movements from a film, during which I facilitated an on-going discussion with open questioning techniques throughout, the visual demonstration. This idea generated student input as they remembered the names of shots they were seeing. By directly focusing the students' attention on the screen, they were completely engaged. This led them into the next activity: a group discussion to harness their imaginations and enable them to generate and express their ideas for their storyboard on

paper. Finally as a group they decided on their individual tasks as crew members. I was very pleased with the students' level of enthusiasm, their engagement and focus. However, on reflection, I realised that I had gone over the same ground as in the previous lesson, and thereby leading to

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repetition. Nevertheless, this was used to highlight and re-enforce the previous lesson. I feel I adopted the correct approach as it is important at this stage that the students fully understand the theory and practice of shots and movements. I do strongly support the idea in Weyers' (2006) literature, that varied information should be introduced so that it builds in complexity and allows students to see the construction of knowledge. There has to be some repetition, an overlap, as this allows students multiple perspectives on the same topic. One reason for supporting this approach is that it allows the students to construct their own understanding at their own levels of the subject - in this case camera shots and movements Weyers, M, (2006). On further reflection, I felt that during the group discussion, although it was focused and relevant to the subject, I did not give students enough thinking time to answer questions. I rushed them for answers. Brookfield (1999) provides an analysis of this error: my pace was too fast, I was limiting students' thinking time and it had become intimidating for them. This I fear was influenced by my exuberance and enthusiasm for the subject which spilled over into my teaching style.

To sum up my experience of my teaching practice, I realize that my actions and personality can help bored students back to life and fill to the brim with enthusiasm. I have also adopted ideas from Black and Williams who suggest "teaching and classroom activities must be made interactive" whereby I adapt my teaching methods, style, recourses to meet the student's individual needs. I strive to foster a stimulating, enjoyable classroom experience and encourage interactivity where we all feed off each other to heighten group energy, interest and most importantly enthusiasm. Black and

Williams, *Inside the Black Box* (1998). Initially, at the start of the first lesson, the students demonstrated some resistance to learning: clearly, they were not used to this level of emotional impact being thrust upon them. After ten minutes however, the students had become equally enthusiastic about the subject matter. I support Brookfield's literature on this matter: by generating interest and a passion for the subject it is possible to turn bad situations round. Moreover, by altering our approach or changing direction, not progressively to confuse students but to complement one approach with another, we can ensure positive outcomes Brookfield, S, (1995) p123-125. The planning of my lessons was influenced by my experiences from the TQFE here at Stirling University as well as by reading material. In particular, the workshop exercise on 'creating a class activity' proved invaluable. From the students' perspective, it has taught me how to formulate my imagination and ideas and enabled me to channel my chain of thought into concrete ideas. In addition, my highly positive experience as a student is a key influence that feeds into my teaching practice. The TQFE has proved that working with my peers, colleagues and engaging in group discussions have been invaluable sources of information, experience and support. I now find that I am using

those experiences, theories and approaches not only within my FE College but also outwith whereby I am applying them in the community through my own film academy.

In conclusion and as expressed in the first section, being a reflective practitioner creates a circle and enables me to collect the information to reflect upon. Being able to reflect on classroom experiences has

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demonstrated that altering teaching approaches and practices can dramatically affect the students focus, interaction and commitment. Within my subject areas of Media and Communications I see a diversity of students, abilities and commitment, from New Starts courses, access modules, HNC-HND to Highers and deal with a variety of subject areas. The rules of thought gained from the TQFE modules will indeed generate new ideas and engage me in new ways of thinking and working. The course has also encouraged me to examine the value of change and developed my capacity to make snap decisions and shift my approach. Inevitably, this leads to a continual improvement within my professional capacity as an educator. The TQFE experience has offered me a chance to investigate theory within an FE setting. Both positive and negative experiences have been witnessed, and some shocking episodes have occurred as bad teaching practice can have a dramatic effect on the students' learning experience and their future. However, the knowledge that I have gained from the TQFE may eventually help eliminate those negative teaching and learning experiences forever through education and the willingness for those lecturers to change. For all the reasons stated above, I consider myself

still a novice and I have much to learn but I will continue to learn from experience and of course keep on top of new developments in technology and the continuing theories yet to be discovered. I am excited by the journey ahead and I am proud of the fact that I have been taught by the very best that education can offer. I will take this TQFE experience with me whichever route I decide to choose.