

**Using an arts-based approach to develop critical reflection in initial teaching trainees**

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**Abstract**

This paper outlines a small-scale Case Study, which took place in England, involving six School Direct Primary teacher trainees acting as participants. Important assessment points, evidencing progress against the Teachers' Standards, are 'Units of Learning'. These contain sequences of lessons, planned and evaluated by the trainees, assessing impact on both pupils' progress and their own professional development. The final element of each Unit is a critical reflection and it was felt this needed support. At the start of the project, the reflective elements of the Units of Learning were analysed and, using an online forum, participants shared their understanding of the term 'critical reflection'. Responding to this, a teaching session, using both flipped learning techniques (Flipped Learning Network: 2014) and Loads' 'Cut up and Collage' (2010) approach was designed to support their developing understanding: an approach that could also be applied in different context. It was hoped improved reflection about practice would lead to change and identifiable progress from 'novice' to 'competence'. Subsequent Units of Learning were analysed following the intervention and participants' opinions canvassed to assess how their reflections had developed. Findings revealed some improvement in critical thinking, with participants becoming more reflective about their personal and professional identities as teachers.

**Key words:** trainee; school direct; critical reflection; teacher-educator; arts-based research; novice; expertise.

**Background to the research**

The purpose of this project was to support School Direct (SD) Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) primary trainees in developing mechanisms through which they could reflect critically on their practice. Dewey (1933) states that 'while we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn to think well, especially acquire the general habit of reflection'. A key aim was for us to develop more insight into the trainee experience, potentially leading to greater understanding of how to link trainee needs to postgraduate course aims (Race, 2016; Biggs, 2003). This shared reflective experience was a guiding principle of the research.

A key ambition for our ITT course is to create reflective teachers who are well suited to their future professional practice. Two of the core aims are identified as being to:

- Develop trainees' professional identity as reflective teachers
- Enable trainees to develop professionally and lead change

In our roles as SD Course Lead and SD Placement Lead, we were in a position where we had the opportunity to introduce innovations and implement change to support these aspects of the trainees' development on the days that they received training from the University.

The PGCE primary education SD course at our institution is a collaborative course co-delivered with SD partner schools and split in terms of training responsibilities with 25 days centrally at the university and the equivalent of 35 days of training within placement schools. Brown et al. (2015:5) identify an issue with school-based training which can be considered to 'privilege practical components to the detriment

**Citation**

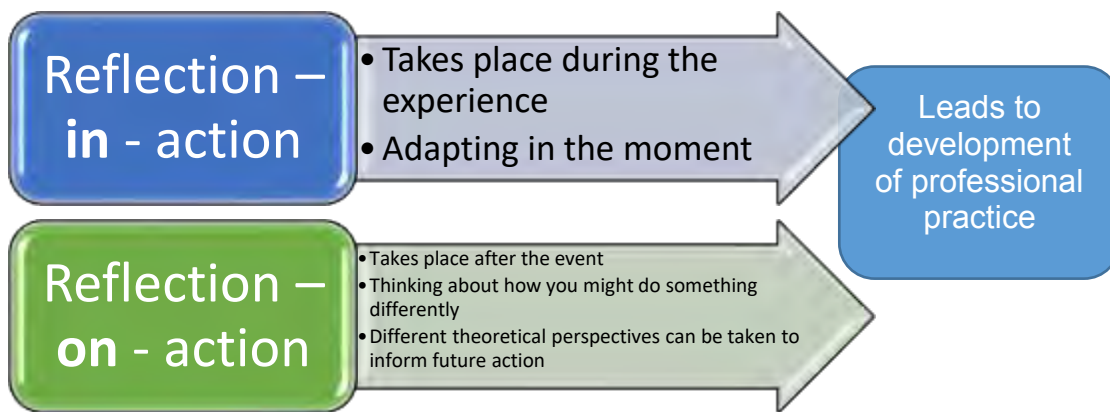
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of theory and analysis'. As a consequence of this conception of teaching 'in craft-based, technicist terms' (ibid), we identified a potential problem for the trainees in prioritising time for reflection, yet, as practitioners, it is imperative that we 'reflect deeply' and 'make imaginative leaps' as a result of reflection on our practice (McCune: 2009:23). This reflective process should not focus solely on functionality and the procedural aspects of the teaching role but should be 'liberating' (Wallace: 2010:468), allowing space to consider the meaning and significance of the role (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Van Manen, 1991; Walkington, 2005). The stated intention of our study was therefore to elevate practice through supporting the development of a personal philosophy and ethos as teachers.

## Literature Review

### Critical reflection

Schön (2003:66) posits the notion of 'the artful teacher' who lays a lack of learning at his own door rather than at that of the pupil. He identifies two aspects of reflection on practice (Figure 1): 'Reflection-in-action' during the event, which Leitch and Day (2000:180) explain as being 'the tacit processes of *thinking* which accompany *doing*'; and 'Reflection-on-action' after the event, when the reflective process goes beyond the immediate procedural and functional aspects and can be underpinned by theoretical perspective and pedagogical approaches.



**Figure 1.** Based on Schön's model of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (2003).

Critical reflection is about 'the taking of initiatives' (Greene: 2000: 15); the consideration of Melville's 'road not travelled' (2013) and the other options that might have been taken. It is about posing alternatives and interrogating practice rather than accepting things at face value (Hilsdon, 2010). Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) developed a five-stage model of skill development, which was applied by Berliner (2004) to teacher development. Alexander (2010:3), in The Cambridge Primary Review, states that in developing increased reflective ability, there is an inherent and conscious intention to move teachers from Berliner's stage of 'novice to expert'. He maintains that an expert has 'deep reserves of tacit knowledge ... [which are] apparently effortless ... although able to fall back on ... analytical approach' (ibid: 10). Bruner (1960) had similarly argued that thinking can be both analytic and intuitive and that while logical steps are identified for the former, the latter may well involve 'implicit perception' (Eaude: 2014:7). Pollard (2005:5) states 'the more expert a teacher becomes, the more his/her expertise is manifested in sensitivity to contexts and situations, in imaginative judgements in-the-moment sourced from tacit knowledge'. This acknowledgement of different routes to reflection and to expertise informed our intention to support the trainees in becoming more critically reflective about the impact of their pedagogical choices and their emerging philosophy as trainee teachers.

### The challenges faced in becoming critically reflective

The drive to become a critically reflective practitioner has been in the ascendant (Hatton and Smith: 1995) since the late 1980s. The Teachers Standards (DfE, 2011) now require teachers to be 'self-critical' and to encourage pupils to reflect on their own progress. Pollard (2005:5) claims that 'the process of reflection

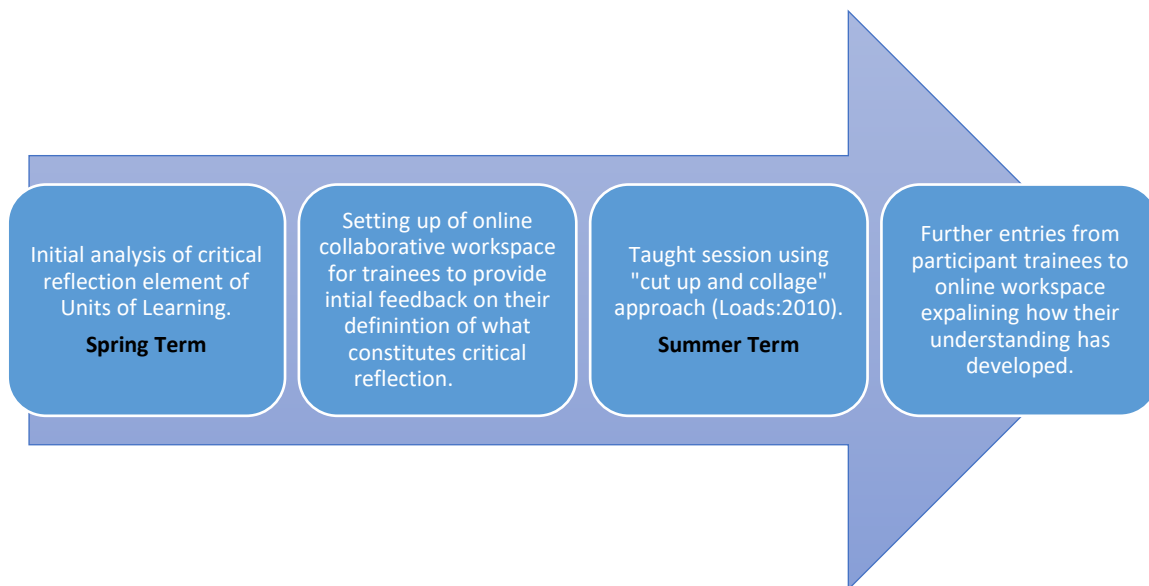
... feeds a constructive spiral of professional development and capability'. Brookfield (1995:1) identifies the potential danger of 'teaching innocently' and the assumption that teacher-educators are constantly aware of what they are doing and that the trainees (or students) understand them perfectly, stating that 'at best, teaching this way is naïve' (Ibid). This lack of perception about our own teaching and its lack of criticality can crucially lead to poor pedagogy and demotivated trainees. Brookfield (1995) continues that this process of critical reflection needs modelling before it can truly be assimilated by trainee teachers and that by engaging in this modelling, the 'culture of secrecy' where 'reflection is doomed' (ibid: 250) is broken down and we earn the right to ask trainees to engage in the process with us. This empowers the trainees as professionals as, 'without this habit, we run the continual risk of making poor decisions and bad judgements' (ibid: 3). As Leitch and Day (2000) suggest, a measure of true critical reflection therefore is whether we are then implementing change in both our practice and ourselves as a result of the habit.

Osterman (1990:139) states that 'critically reflective teachers – teachers who make their own thinking public, and therefore subject to discussion – are more likely to have classes that are challenging, interesting and stimulating for students'. Critical reflection is consequently crucial, not just for those we teach but for ourselves to avoid ensuing pessimism about our perceived lack of success. There is a need therefore to search out existing paradigms so that they can be questioned and confronted and improve decision making (Hilsdon, 2010). Van Manen (1991:511) claims this 'connotation of deliberation' about practice and alternative courses of action leads to a more dynamic relationship between teacher and pupil. Hatton and Smith (1995) assert the need to be aware that our actions are firmly situated in existing social and political contexts and, as Dewey (1933) suggested, we need to be prepared to hunt for answers and not expect instant gratification.

Walkington (2005) and Brown et al. (2015) recognise that it is a challenge to ensure that trainees have the opportunity to explore their identities as teachers and that the school-based nature of the training (particularly for SD trainees) does not lead to a focus on their functional day-to-day competency. However, as Brown et al (2015) also point out, there are disparate models of what a teacher or teacher-educator should look like. Britzman (2003:48) acknowledges this potential 'problem of conformity in teacher education' and that individual schools are trying to mould what a teacher should look like. This could be considered a significant aspect in school-based teacher training and one that needs to be challenged so that 'teacher education [can] be structured more dialogically to take into account the myriad forms of negotiation that position pedagogy and the teacher's identity' (Britzman, 2003:49). An extra challenge arises when the prevailing political view is one that regards teaching as being a craft and that 'it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman' Gove (2010).

### **Aims of the Research**

The stated intention of the study was to support our SD trainees in their move towards competency as critically reflective teachers, thereby enabling them to develop professionally. To do this we used 'Units of Learning' as a means of assessment to establish their present levels of reflection. The Units of Learning are one of the means by which the SD trainees in our institution are assessed for Qualified Teacher Status. These Units are sequences of lessons which have been planned (with all that entails) by the trainees and which they then evaluate to assess the impact on both the pupils' progress and their own professional development. The final element of the Unit of Learning is a critical reflection on their practice and it is this that was found to need support during the reconnaissance (Lewin, cited in McNiff, 2016). By adopting the principles of a dialogic teaching approach (Alexander, 2017), ensuring opportunities for reciprocal and supportive discussion in our Units of Learning taught seminars, we aimed to model the reflective process and question any preconceived assumptions. The ultimate aim was one of praxis to assess the trainees' current understanding and to implement action to develop their criticality.



**Figure 2.** Research Timeline.

The timing of the taught, reflective session and associated activities was designed to be far enough into the course for trainees to have moved beyond initial concerns mainly related to 'doing' to a point where trainees are thinking more about and reflecting upon effectiveness (Hobson et al., 2009). Consideration was also given to trainee feedback where they had expressed concerns that time and space for dialogue related to developing deeper reflection skills could be limited or difficult to prioritise within their schools (Brown et al., 2015).

### **Methodology and Research Design**

A case-study approach (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:317) was identified as an appropriate mechanism through which to gather the data due to the integral involvement of a small number of researchers and participants and the small-scale nature of the project. Coe et al. (2017) state that the strength of the case-study lies in the fact that it can 'probe and drill down' (114) into the practice being researched: it can be about 'exploring ... describing ... or explaining' (115). The 'case' being studied was our approach to developing critical reflection in the SD trainees and what impact this would have. The nature of the data gathered was qualitative and therefore the research sits within an interpretivist paradigm (Coe et al., 2017). The reason for this approach was, as Wellington (2000:16) states, due to our aim 'to explore perspectives and shared meanings and to develop insights into situations'.

Our main questions were:

- What do the trainees understand by critical reflection?
- How can an arts-based research method support them in developing this understanding?
- Does this developed understanding then support them in moving from novice towards competency?

### *Participants*

The SD cohort for the year comprised of 30 trainees. The six research participants for the case-study came from a self-selected volunteer group (Cohen et al., 2011) who had all agreed to be part of the process by responding and contributing to the online collaborative workspace. The selection of the final six research participants from within this initial group of respondents was made with the explicit aim of having a representation of trainees from a range of SD partner alliances and schools. The process of selection also recognised the need to minimise any bias accrued from aspects of support from the HEI by ensuring that research participants worked with differing link tutors and school based mentors. We acknowledge that

the sample of six participants is not representative of our primary SD cohort due to the nature of the initial self-selection (Wellington, 2000).

As leaders of the SD placement module and of the SD course, and as Link Tutors for some of the research participants, we acknowledge the power relationships that might have influenced the trainees' responses (Cohen et al., 2011), particularly as critical reflection was a key element of the Units of Learning final assessment of the course. Attempts made to minimise this included anonymising responses and returning to the participants throughout with the right to withdraw (BERA, 2011). A trusting relationship was also relied on with both participants and interested observers (Tickle, 2001), anonymity for the trainee participants was preserved throughout the research and any data were duly destroyed at the close of the research period. We recognise that this research is not generalisable, in part due to the size of the sample and in part due to the differences between SD training routes across England and across different HEIs and other providers (Brown et al., 2015:17). Bassey (1981) however, states that 'reliability' is more important than generalisability to the practitioner as this explores the identification of new practices and new ways of working (Bell, 2005). We feel that this reliability means that some of the approaches used would be transferable to other environments.

#### *Data Collection*

Data were collected through written and verbal responses from the trainees alongside observation of a taught, reflective activity. Written responses were gathered using an online journaling activity (Shiel and Jones: 2004) Prompt questions were supplied allowing participants to use their own words to explore their understanding of critical reflection as they were considered more reliable in allowing the trainees to give tentative answers (Kemmis et al., 2014). This method allowed responses to be condensed by producing a simple schema in the form of a synopsis. A synoptic summary of the responses was provided for the participants' approval as an accurate representation (Greene, 2000) of their thoughts. Both visual and verbal responses were gathered during the taught, reflective session using an arts-based research method (Leavey, 2009). Additionally, to ensure triangulation of the evidence, increasing validity and reducing subjectivity (McAteer, 2013), an interested observer (Whitehead and McNiff, 2005:11) and a participant observer (Guest et al., 2012) contributed to data collection in the session to engage with the trainees and to gather responses.

#### *Data analysis*

To provide a structure to the analysis of the findings we have adapted Berliner's (2004) summary of Dreyfus and Dreyfus' model (Figure 3) to enable us to consider what, if any, movement towards becoming more critically reflective practitioners had been made. Our focus was on the initial three stages of the model as, given that our study considers ITT trainees, we felt that a move beyond competency could not be expected. This is not intended as an indication of cognitive development rather as a framework through which aspects of a trainee's understanding of practice can be explored to identify any indicators of more advanced stages beyond that of novice.

Stage of teacher development	Experience	Knowledge Developed through:	Understanding Learned through:	Procedures Applied through:	Behaviours Demonstrated through:
Novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of limited practical experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Commonplace" environment</li> <li>4 aspects:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher</li> <li>Subject</li> <li>Pupil</li> <li>Classroom</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meaning of terminology</li> <li>Facts</li> <li>Features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Context free rules</li> <li>Generic processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually rational approach</li> <li>Relative inflexibility</li> <li>Deliberate actions</li> <li>Limited skill</li> </ul>
Advanced Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing practical experience couples with verbal knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Episodes</li> <li>Critical Incidents</li> <li>Case Knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Derived from actions</li> <li>Developed without direct help</li> <li>Context-bound, becoming situated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similarities across contexts recognised</li> <li>Rules becoming conditional and strategic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing sense of what is important</li> <li>Insightful approach</li> <li>Greater flexibility</li> </ul>
Competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shapes experiences – in control, makes decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application of case knowledge to range of situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliberate analysis</li> <li>Reflection on successes and failures</li> <li>When to move on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decisions about relative importance / what to notice</li> <li>Plans devised</li> <li>Reasoned actions towards longer goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conscious choices</li> <li>Setting priorities</li> <li>Elimination of errors</li> <li>Taking responsibility</li> <li>Rational actions</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.** Adapted from Berliner's (2004) application to teacher development of Dreyfus and Dreyfus' 1986 Stages of skill development model (focusing on the first three stages).

#### *Arts Based Research method*

An arts-based research method was used to support the exploration of identity through 'attent[ion] to processes' (Leavey, 2009: 3). Loads (2010:410) maintains that art workshops provide a forum where we are free to 'explore who [we] are as teachers and what teaching means to [us] ... revealing tacit knowledge through the creation of ... visual artefacts'. This approach therefore seemed well suited to exploring professional philosophy and ethos as opposed to simply procedure and functionality (Walkington, 2005). Prior to the session, the trainees were also asked to read three articles focused on reflection (Brookfield: 1995; Reflective Writing Support: University of Greenwich; Hilsdon, 2010). These articles were used alongside other resources for a 'cut up and collage' exercise (Loads, 2010). The principle being that, provided with different elements; for example, a variety of paper, stickers, pens, glue, scissors and the articles, the trainees would select what they felt to be pertinent words or phrases and create a collage representing their understanding of a concept. The concept in this case was what critical reflection signified to them in their teaching role. This would enable them to explore and represent ideas, which they were not necessarily yet able to articulate clearly. The collages have an implicit authenticity in their representation of teacher identity (Burge et al., 2016) and are 'characterised by a sense of surprise, leading to insights and deep reflection.' (ibid:730). There was a concern about 'merely substituting novelty and cleverness for substance' (Eisner, 1997:9) but the focus on discussion around the images would enable a move from pure exploration towards critical reflection. This could be manifested in the questions about the images produced; for example, 'why have I chosen this image?' and 'what might it represent?'

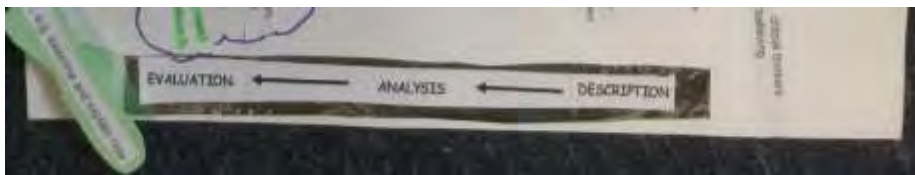
#### **Discussion of Findings**

##### *Creation of safe/non-threatening space*

The session was constructed with the specific aim of providing a safe and non-threatening space in which trainees could explore their thinking about critical reflection. In this case, we took a safe place to mean the creation of an environment, which would be inclusive and encourage all trainees to express and develop their opinions freely (Gayle, Cortez & Raymond, 2013). To further ensure this, trainees worked in self-selected groups in order that dialogic talk and its power to stimulate and extend thinking would enhance the process (Alexander, 2004). We were aware that this could result in trainees with similar

approaches working together and could potentially limit meaningful discussion, however, it was anticipated that the strategy would encourage an openness of expression and feel less threatening.

The provision of three different approaches, in the pre-reading, was intended to support differing levels of engagement. It was interesting to note that not all trainees had engaged with the pre-reading at all, claiming time constraints. One trainee commented about the Brookfield article, 'I read the first two pages and found them interesting but then got lost in the rest and I just hadn't the energy'. However, it became apparent during the course of the session that certain ideas from the reading, particularly relating to Hilsdon's critical questions (2010), had obviously resonated with them and were included in their collage (Figure 4). This lack of time and energy to engage with reading also validated our decision to provide a space outside the demands of school practice and allow time to reflect as a group on their practice and move towards becoming an increasingly critically reflective practitioner.



**Figure 4.** The 'evaluation-analysis-description' strip has been extracted from Hilsdon's Linear model of critical questions (2010:4).

The open nature of the apparently simple task of collaging, removing the pressure that trainees might feel to produce starting points of their own, enabled individual choice and the testing out of ideas from the trainees. Interestingly, all trainees became involved in the practical aspect immediately but at this initial stage, the discussion and the choices made appeared superficial. One trainee saw their first name in a newspaper and cut this out instantly to use. Interestingly, this was 'ditched' within a short space of time as they started to evidence a deeper level of engagement with the activity and made more thoughtful and negotiated choices. This deeper engagement was also indicated by the fact that in two instances groups discarded their initial collage and began again. This development was noted by one of the interested observers (figure 5) in notes taken during the session as feedback for the researchers.

taking the descriptive to the evaluative. The element of criticality (how they/we know) learning about the learning, giving a purpose to it. Using the language for a purpose, helping each other, social construction Vygotsky causal connections levels of language

**Figure 5.** Notes taken by the Course Leader (participant observer).

*Use of metaphor to express understanding*

Burge et al. (2010:730) suggest that these kinds of 'activities encouraged participants to explore unfamiliar metaphors and to respond to unexpected juxtapositions'. The initial response of nearly all the groups was to produce a reflective, mirror-like surface on their collage. This appeared to provide their safe route into the metaphorical possibilities. For one group, this then developed into producing two collages, both with 'mirrors' intending to show that the process of critical reflection was a two-way process between them and the pupils (Figure 6).





**Figure 6.** The teacher’s perspective is on the left and the pupils’ on the right.

Another metaphor included that of going on a ‘journey’ (Figure 7) with images ranging from footsteps, to paths, to a stair-lift going on a ‘never-ending journey’. Their expressed intention was that ‘the very good teacher will never stop reflecting on their practice ... if they have then they are no longer a good teacher’. This could possibly indicate a move towards the ‘advanced beginner’ and the increased development of thoughtful insight about their practice.



**Figure 7.** Extracts from collages showing a representation of a ‘journey’.

However, within this more obvious metaphor, the collage process also took their thinking on more unexpected routes; for example, one trainee wanted to ensure that it was understood that her use of crumpled tissue was to indicate that critical reflection is never plain sailing (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Collage with crumpled tissue.

Other collages showed similarities in their use of either a balance or the yin and yang symbol (Figures 9 and 10). These apparently represented the fact that critical reflection involves looking for both the positive and the negative and trying to understand, through deeper questioning, how and why certain approaches are more effective than others. There was also an understanding of the fact that what works



for one pupil may not work for another; indicating again a possible move towards the stage of ‘advanced beginner’ with a recognition that rules are conditional and that greater flexibility is necessary.



**Figure 9.** Collage with image of balance.



**Figure 10.** Collage with image of yin and yang.

Figure 10 also represented the shape of a crown as the trainees explained that the result of effective critical thinking led to their empowerment as a teacher. This appears to resonate with Brookfield (1995) and his assertion that the lack of criticality can potentially lead to a disenchantment with the role.

Another interesting commonality between collages was the image of the process of reflective thinking as being a ‘puzzle’ that needs to be solved (Figure 11). One trainee explained; ‘It’s like a jigsaw where we need to identify the missing pieces’ indicating what might be deemed to be an ‘insightful approach’ at the ‘advanced beginner’ stage.



**Figure 11.** Two different representations of a puzzle.

Explanations of their collages provided an indicator of the level of expertise at which they were working. One collage (Figure 12) showing a picture of a class of children with the caption ‘it’s not my fault’ was intended to express the idea that if ever anything is amiss in a lesson it is the fault of the teacher. In discussing this further, trainees shared critical incidents that had occurred in the classroom. Tripp (1994:69) describes critical incidents as being those events, which can routinely occur in professional practice but are ‘critical in the sense that they are indicative of underlying motive and structures’. The recognition of these incidents and the perspectives that the trainees took on them suggested a further shift towards the advanced beginner stage.

Britzman discusses the fact that beginning teachers take on ‘the myth that everything depends on the teacher, when things went awry, all they could do was blame themselves rather than reflect upon the complexity of pedagogical encounters’ (1991:227). Another group had started with this perspective but then, through discussion, arrived at an understanding, more indicative of the ‘competent’ teacher, that there are elements outside our control that need to be taken into consideration. In their collage, these elements take the form of a mole and a worm, as they are initially under the surface but may subsequently emerge into the light of day (Figure 13).



**Figure 12.** It's not the children's fault.



**Figure 13.** Issues that emerge.

*Development of ideas: from journaling to collage and back again*

Prior to the session, contributions to the online journal suggested a more 'novice' like, procedural approach to an understanding of critical reflection. These tended to focus on the delivery of individual lessons and the performative aspects of their role (Figures 14 and 15).

My understanding of critical reflection is reflecting on your teaching as to what went well and even better if as areas for development.

**Figure 14.** Trainee quotation from journal.

Keep thinking about personal development and synchronising with the teacher standards. Keep on top of weekly diary entries to inform targets and areas of development, and setting goals to move forward.

**Figure 15.** Trainee quotation from journal.

Perception of the importance of critical reflection was also rooted in the day-to-day procedural aspects of teaching, rather than being about their own professional development (Figure 16).

It is a really useful way to develop and adapt my teaching. Being able to constructively look at areas for improvement can only be to the advantage of the children.

**Figure 16.** Trainee quotation from journal.

During the creation of the collages, there was a discernible shift in the focus of the accompanying discussions; this became increasingly apparent when the trainees presented their collages to the rest of the group, responding to questions explaining their choices. The collaging process encouraged the trainees to make links between specific incidents and start to generalise, moving from separate individual approaches that require specific, deliberate actions (novice stage) to the recognition of similarities across

contexts (advanced beginner) to possible indications of the competent teacher stage in considering the application of case knowledge to future situations. Each of the groups made reference to learning theory, principally Vygotsky (1978) and how it informed their decisions. They had also taken on board Schön's idea of reflection-on-action (2003). Observations confirmed that in the presentations, it was possible to identify those areas that were considered of key importance to the trainees (Figure 17).

meaningful words from TS 'feedback, advice, guide, reflect, emerging needs for yourselves (children and teachers), responsibility'. From reading – 'we teach to change the world'

**Figure 17.** Notes taken by the Course Leader (participant observer).

Contributions that were made to the online journal after the session demonstrated a shift in emphasis from the functional to the philosophical and critical (Figures 18 and 19). This was a significant development from the initial views expressed in the synoptic summary (Figure 20). This supports a tentative conclusion that this approach had supported the trainees in identifying how to make conscious decisions about their practice based on theory therefore starting to make a move towards competence and the making of 'conscious decisions'.

The theoretical perspectives, without knowing it, underpin the choices/decisions we make and it is these that we are reflecting upon in our critical reflections. We can also refer back to theory when considering how we can improve our practice during critical reflection is something has not quite worked as we expected.

**Figure 18.** Journal entry by participant trainee.

Having an idea of how you want to teach and to share knowledge, as well as how children learn. Having own teaching style, which is backed by theory. Critical reflection enables finding the best ways to bring the two together.

**Figure 19.** Journal entry by participant trainee.

Trainees' perception of critical reflection is about reflecting on practice to inform target setting for professional development. It is about looking at the bigger picture as opposed to individual lessons to try and think about what went well and what could have gone better. This reflective process is supported by the asking of questions and by discussion with critical friends; for example, school and university tutors. The main focus of the reflection is on how to adjust pedagogical practices in the moment, to have a positive impact on pupil learning.

**Figure 20.** Synoptic summary of participant trainee's view of critical reflection.

### **Conclusion**

The move from 'novice' to a 'competent' level of expertise can be indicated by a recognition in the trainee that the role of teacher is not just about an understanding of the day to day procedures that are followed

but about a deeper understanding about their own practice that guides their focus and the decisions that they take. Glaser (1996) refers to this as a shift from being *externally supported* towards being *self-regulatory*. This can be manifested by an ability to apply what is known, as a result of critical reflection, to the unexpected and by an increased flexibility in their teaching enabling them to respond in the moment (Schön, 2003; Berliner, 2004).

The context that the trainee finds themselves in and the opportunities it affords them have the potential to affect how far they progress beyond the 'novice' stage. If a trainee takes a 'procedural' approach working within an environment where they are not encouraged to go beyond this, it could be difficult for them to see the importance of developing the habit of critical reflection. Conversely, trainees in settings and with support that encourages them to engage in dialogic critique and to make conscious choices about their practice will be in a stronger position to go beyond simply adopting approaches and behaviours they have seen in others to a point where they make their own decisions, take risks and challenge themselves: a state of 'competence'. It therefore becomes increasingly incumbent on us as teacher-educators to allow the safe space to consider how we perceive ourselves as teachers and to find innovative and inclusive ways in which to do so. It is for this reason that the session was done towards the end of the training year as the trainees would be starting to make the transition from trainee to teacher and would therefore be ready to develop that personal ethos and philosophy and start to progress towards the 'competent' stage of teacher expertise. Since carrying out the case study, we have built workshop sessions with school-based mentors and University Link Tutors into the programme to facilitate a space for professional dialogue and reflection to take place. Specific reference to literature around critical reflection has also been provided in trainee documentation to enable this to be shared more readily with their placement schools.

When evaluating the efficacy of the approach used, it is important to remember that there are necessarily trainees on any training course who will arrive demonstrating the ability to be critically self-reflective. While it is hoped that such trainees valued the opportunity provided by a session like this, they would potentially be demonstrating these reflective qualities within their practice irrespective of the session and would already be moving towards a degree of competency. However, in the use of self-selecting groups for the activity, these naturally reflective trainees could act as the 'more knowledgeable other' (Vygotsky, 1978) for their peers and prompt them into discussions that they might not otherwise have had. For those trainees who find themselves generally engaged with activities which are focused on the procedural aspects of the curriculum and the narrower day-to-day view of what teaching might be, it is hoped that the arts-based approach has allowed them the opportunity to look more strategically and critically at their own practice and professional development. A key element for us therefore is to engage in a focused identification of these trainees so that we can support them in developing their ability to 'articulate their practical knowledge' (Berliner, 2004:206). In doing this, Berliner (ibid) maintains that they will be able to take ownership of their practice and become more self-regulatory, meaning that they have an increased sense of agency. The trainees can then move into their year as Newly Qualified Teachers and take the next steps towards increased expertise with critical reflection an embedded and natural part of their practice.

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