REFLECTION REVISITED: PERCEPTIONS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN FASHION LEARNING AND TEACHING

Author Biography

Alison James is Head of Learning and Teaching at The London College of Fashion. Her research interests include auto/biography, identity and narrative construction in creative arts education.

Address:
London College of Fashion
20 John Princes St
London W1G 0BJ

e-mail a.james@fashion.arts.ac.uk

Abstract

Led by Schön and others, reflective practice has been widely explored in the last twenty years; however the kinds of practices focussed on have primarily been those in written format. The inclusion of Personal Development Planning activities (also known as Personal and Professional Development, or PPD) in higher education courses has reinforced both the importance of reflection and of textual expression. Core modes of learning in the creative arts are not text based, however, and the tension between writing and practice is familiar territory for debate. In Spring 2006, a small scale research project was conducted at The London College of Fashion (LCF) with staff and students on fashion courses. Its main goal was to examine perceptions of critical reflection, whether this is taught, how expressed, the extent to which it is measured and student responses to it. In addition, it considered the presence of the emotions in the fostering of reflective practice. This paper reports on both the project methodology and findings and raises questions about the ways in which critical reflection is currently stimulated in fashion learning which may have some resonance for other disciplines also.

Keywords
PPD, critical reflection, non-textual, emotions, fashion, perceptions

Introduction

In the last twenty years, the language and practice of reflection have become embedded in both the documentation and learning experiences of students on courses at all levels of education. In higher education the assumption that students will critically reflect is expressed (to a greater or lesser extent) in guidelines for staff and students alike, as well as reiterated in individual units and through assessment. With the introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) following the Dearing Report (1997) and recent interest in the adoption of e-portfolios to support PDP, reflective practice continues to be prioritised in degree education. PDP and e-portfolios is seen as ' a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development' (QAA guidelines for the HE Progress File, 2001).

Argyris and Schön's (1974) concept of espoused theory versus theory-in-use provided the spur for a re-examination of some accepted beliefs about how critical reflection is fostered in fashion teaching and why it is important. The desire for a closer look at local practices was further driven by a College-wide review of Personal and Professional Development (PPD) at The London College of Fashion (LCF) which took place in 2005-06. (PPD is the College term which encompasses Personal Development Planning (PDP); PPD will be used hereafter to avoid confusion with two such closely resembling acronyms.)

The creative arts context

Since the 1970s, creative arts education in the UK has been gradually reshaped, moving from the relative freedoms and autonomy of the art school tradition, where technical ability, imbued with an aesthetic vision, was acquired. Restructuring of the curriculum and the elaboration of quality assurance systems have led to the creation of courses more closely resembling 'traditional degrees'. These commonly include elements of cultural, theoretical or contextual studies, with greater emphasis being placed on written work, to ensure parity of

award across disciplines. To fulfil PDP requirements, students are also expected to provide written evidence, whether this be in the form of a reflective statement, skills checklist, learning log or other kind of document. Debate continues, however, as to the different, or unique, nature of an arts degree – as opposed to one in mathematics, geography or engineering, say -, whether in fashion, media, or fine art, for example. The particular ways in which students learn in the creative arts and the outputs they produce have also been delineated by staff and students in the sector. The most familiar defining aspects of this include visual or kinaesthetic learning preferences, and the use of problem based or practical learning situations. The focus (within courses) on work related opportunities, with live briefs, simulations, competitions or placements, continues to increase, as does the number of students with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia. The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act Part 1V in 2002 reinforced the need for all HE institutions to review their teaching, learning and assessment delivery so that students with specific learning difficulties were not disadvantaged by any aspect of the learning environment.

This mix of factors has led to a familiar dilemma in creative arts education – the need to retain the characteristic and special features of the disciplines while also catering for an element of homogenisation within delivery structures. While efforts continue to reduce writing as a problem, e.g. through learning support services, it has become a culturally and politically determined part of learning on degree courses and cannot be avoided, however alien it may feel to some as a form of expression. At the same time, institutions are also examining how they can provide alternative or accommodated forms of assessment which are not dependent on significant levels of text production. The tensions that are experienced in terms of achieving the right balance between cultural theory, creation and writing are relevant to reflective practice in the creative arts in general, and, in this case, in fashion education in particular.

Questioning the teaching of reflection

The study, which operated with one researcher on a lean budget and timescale, dealt with three main questions, allied to the reconsideration of PPD. Preliminary enquiries concerned the ways in which students were prepared on courses for engaging with PPD and what it meant to them. As reflection is a fundamental ingredient of PPD – a process of evaluating where you have come from, how well things are going, what might be affecting progress, how to address difficulties and where to head for next – it was important to ask three questions:

1) whether students were explicitly taught how to reflect and whether or not this is necessary

2) Whether reflective strategies currently used in fashion learning are sufficiently effective and comprehensive for 'capturing' the process and results of critical reflection

3) What additional techniques or approaches might help students if the answers to one and two suggested scope for development.

In asking these questions the study sought expressly to determine the extent to which teachers and students were using non-textual modes of reflection as part of their learning. This was not with the aim of rejecting writing as a reflective practice, but rather to verify the perception that evidence of reflection alongside the creative item is mainly required in written form. As text production is problematic for many learners on fashion courses the status of text as the most effective medium for critical reflection seemed to merit review.

Conceptions of critical reflection and their relation to fashion learning

The study did not have the scope to revisit the decades of literature and research on theories of reflection; however, among innumerable definitions of what reflection is, several contributions were important for clarifying the basis of the study.

Significant contributions to research into reflective practice have been made by Dewey (e.g.1933), Schön (e.g.1985), Boud (e.g.1995), Kolb with the experiential learning cycle and many others. Their work informed the shift towards student-centred learning and has resulted in widescale incorporation of reflective activities in curricula as tangible evidence of meta-cognitive development. Particularly prevalent in nursing, health care and teacher training, the primary instruments and approaches adopted have been text-based evaluative statements, learning logs, diaries and various self-auditing tools and checklists. These are used in a similar way by practitioners and educators in the creative arts.

Before considering any specific definitions or illustrations, the concerns expressed by Moon (2005:4) with regard to critical thinking may usefully be applied also to reflection. The following extract pinpoints the importance of clarifying concepts:

> "Critical thinking" is like a number of words in higher education that sound "good" and sit comfortably in, for example, the vocabulary of the Institutional mission statement. In mission statements vagueness may not matter, but when students are told 'through the use of critical thinking' they should analyse something, a more precise definition does matter. How can they develop something if they do not know what it is?
>
> (Moon 2005:4)

Achieving a precise and shared understanding of what critical reflection is, is both essential therefore and also much more complex than at first seems, given the variations that abound. The Oxford English Dictionary provides the most succinct definition, that of 'serious thought or consideration'. Dewey more poetically describes reflection as:

turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant

about it shall be overlooked – almost as one might turn a stone over to see what its

hidden side is like or what is covered by it.

(Dewey 1933:57)

Earlier in the same work he offered an alternative definition of reflective thought as being:

Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of

knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to

which it tends

(Dewey 1933:18)

A lengthier alternative provided by Joy Amulya from the Center for Reflective Practice at MIT

(2004) appears to synthesise positions from key texts in the history of reflection, extending to

four pages, including Schön's idea of reflection-in-action. Amulya is not alone (see also

Brockbank and McGill, 1998) in highlighting the role of the emotions in reflection as part of

learning 'breakthroughs': 'By locating when and why we have felt excited or fulfilled by an

experience we gain insight into the conditions that allow our creativity to flourish' (Amulya

2004:1). Emotion, as shall be emphasised, is an essential ingredient in reflective practice

that has an impact on individual development.

In his address to the 1987 meeting of the American Educational Research Association,

Schön emphasised the 'artistry' required and demonstrated by the teacher in unlocking

learner potential, drawing on emotional, intellectual and perceptual dexterity with some

spontaneity. He also reiterated his key concepts of reflection-in-action, or analysing while

engaged in an event or experience, and the aftermath – reflection-on-action, or unpicking

and re-processing that event. Of particular interest to students in creative disciplines is his

model of The Ladder of Reflection (Schön 1987:114, in Service Learning 2001), whereby

under the guidance of a coach/tutor/practitioner, the learner can design something, then describe that design, then reflect on that description. By moving between these stages the learner can adjust each aspect of that activity – from the design, to the appraisal of that process. He had previously articulated the relationship between student and tutor in terms similar to the process evoked by The Ladder:

'In the passages back and forth among the languages of appreciation, performance and theory of designing, student and studio master pass, in the reciprocal reflection-in-action, from one domain of attention and form one level of description to another'

(Schön 1984: 2)

Boud (1994:3) both situated reflection-in-action in the central circle of a three circle model of experiential learning and also emphasised 'attending to feelings' as part of any revisitation of experience. His model provides one basis among many for an argument for systematic organisation of reflective practice, something which PPD structures could usefully provide.

The experiential model of learning 'on the job' has value for reflective practice but is not synonymous with it. Kember (1995:49) cites Reid, Boud, and Mezirow' views that while the territory for reflection is experience, experience alone does not suffice for learning. The complex elements, ideas and activities that make up reflective practice are what make the difference, converting information into knowledge. The use (or not) that we subsequently make of this knowledge will, of course, govern the extent to which it will impact on our life decisions and beliefs.

Interpreting the term 'reflection' with academic colleagues has sometimes resulted in the suggestion that a single definition may be insufficient as its meaning is governed by the purpose to which it is put. With Moon's earlier warning in mind, these purposes would have to be clearly established nonetheless. Drawing on the viewpoints cited, a definition of reflection was constructed for the study to be used in comparison to those offered by

participants. This described reflection as deep, critical, analytical thinking, involving 360° consideration of experience and emotion, not simply a forward and back action. It suggested that subjects for reflection would include personal history, generic skills, discipline knowledge, technical expertise and professional aspirations among other elements, as well as questions of "who am I? Where am I going?" and "How do I feel about it?. It would involve not simply judgement of performance but awareness of context, any transferability of understanding and any impact on self conception.

However, while the importance of reflective practice is recognised by the many, aspects of its adoption still present dilemmas in need of resolution. Over ten years ago Kember et al (1995:49) suggested that studies were primarily concerned with the *concept* of reflection rather than how to assess whether it has taken place and its actual quality. While work in the latter field may have expanded since then, teachers are still wrestling with the concept of what reflection is and how it should be manifested. With public/private considerations it is not always unproblematic to ask to see a student's learning journal, which they may consider a personal document. The question of how much of a journal to assess, if at all, and how to give marks for quality is a continuing dilemma. How far a textual explanation or supporting document should be required for a final product and how far the item can be considered to be sufficiently indicative of reflective process without additional comment is another quandary. Some staff and students remain unconvinced also, of how much good consistently reflecting does in the long term. Schön (1987) himself noted that he could only indicate to a student what to do, rather than explicitly show them how, while Amyula (2002:3) asks the question, 'Why name reflection, why not just let it happen?' Once again we can return to Moon's assertion, that a learner needs to explicitly understand what something is, in order to be able to do it themselves, or in their own way.

One thing that the literature appears to point to which is of interest in the creative arts is that, to date, little research appears to have focussed on engagement by students in critical

reflection which takes non-textual forms. In fashion this focus is surprising given that reflection in terms of visual analysis is clearly central to creative learning e.g. through the crit, and as Schönian reflection-in-action through the act of making. Discussions with fashion tutors did reveal, as shall be shown, a belief that reflection underpins everything they do, that it is at the heart of creative practice – generating ideas to meet a client brief, identifying inspiration for a commission, producing ingenious and attractive design solutions. Initial mark making, adjusting sketches, sample production, material experimentation, mood and story boards and prototypes all embody reflection. So what does it look like, where and how is it occurring and how, specifically, do teachers foster it in students, when they also suggest that critically reflective ability is often dormant or lacking in many students entering higher education?

The Research Project and Background

In the Spring of 2006, a small-scale qualitative study was undertaken with staff and students on fashion courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level at LCF. The three questions at its heart have already been set out. In addition to the close relationship between PPD and reflective practice also referred to, this study was interested in reflective practice which went beyond skills and knowledge acquisition to include personal identity. Brockbank and McGill's position on the importance of the emotional aspect of learning was also useful:

> 'We maintain that the emphasis on cognition in Higher Education has neglected the emphasis of conative intelligence and affective intelligence. While projects and practicals have redeemed the doing part of higher learning, the denial of emotion in learning remains in place for most academic endeavours. We will show that emotion holds the key to a higher level of learning, through reflective dialogue. We hold that emotional intelligence is an essential attribute of a teacher in higher education and that such qualities are needed to ensure the survival of higher education as a sector which offers genuine opportunities for level 3, constructivist, reflective learning.'

While many on fashion courses would contest the view that conative intelligence has been neglected, this statement begged the question whether affective intelligence had been similarly abandoned. Rather, the personal and emotional are integral elements of fashion education which has at its core individual vision, passion and creativity as well as technical expertise.

Facilitating reflection on fashion courses

As indicated earlier, my primary line of enquiry addressed staff and student perceptions of how reflection is fostered within fashion education in HE. It originated from the suspicion that while reflection is much talked about and aimed for in fashion learning, the explicit and systematic teaching of reflective skills does not figure predominantly in curriculum delivery. Rather, it is a tacit and intuitive undertaking, with the expectation that students would have either acquired the skills to reflect effectively prior to commencing a degree, or would accumulate such skills and ability through a process of osmosis. (To check whether this was the case, the study aimed to identify current approaches used, which of these were non-textual and explore alternative techniques. While it generated thoughts as to the value of the latter, it did not have the time or funding to elaborate solutions to each of the issues.) The major themes of discussion were

- The extent to which critical reflection is explicitly taught on fashion courses
- Staff/student definitions of what critical reflection actually is and their perceptions of how it is engaged with through formal learning
- Modes and subjects of, beliefs about reflection
- Any emotional aspect of critical reflection

A sub-topic was whether reflective activity is measured and assessed on courses.

Methodology And Data Collection

Student Questionnaires
As already stated, the initial investigation into students' perceptions of reflective practice was linked to their experience of PPD, with two questionnaires used. The first asked students about their understanding of what PPD was. 80 students from BA Honours Degree and Foundation Degree (FdA) courses in fashion design completed it. Findings from this first questionnaire helped lay foundations for a second questionnaire on learner reflective practices and preferences, which was completed by 22 students from the same programmes. This questionnaire asked students to indicate on a scale of 1-10 (1 being disagree and 10 agree) whether they felt they were explicitly taught to reflect on their courses and to respond with the same scale to a range of statements asking about their preferences in terms of mode of reflecting – writing, talking to people, visualising things, or being active. The questionnaire also asked them to indicate how useful they found their learning logs and whether they would like to explore other modes of reflection.

Staff Interviews

Semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour were held with seven members of academic staff to explore ideas of reflective practice and the ways in which this might be facilitated on fashion courses. Participants included five course directors from the Honours Degree and Foundation Degree (FdA) Portfolios, with fashion expertise in design, management, technology, buying, merchandising and marketing. The Learning Support service was represented, as were Cultural and Historical Studies. Areas of discussion included defining critical reflection, outlining the purposes of student reflection, describing how students reflect on their programme, whether they explicitly taught students to reflect, how and where this happened, whether it was measured or assessed and whether or not emotional considerations formed part of critical reflection on courses. Respondents were also

asked to say whether or not they considered themselves to be critical practitioners and finally, to draw what it looked like when they were engaged in critical reflection.

Workshops

Earlier in this paper reference was made to the three questions underpinning the project's enquiry; the third of these was about testing out alternative modes of reflection with students to see whether or not these could be considered useful and incorporated into teaching and learning activities at a later date. There was also a need to explore in a little more time than that available for completing a questionnaire, some of the conceptions and beliefs that students held about critical reflection in a more social, interactive setting. A general invitation was extended to students (including those who had returned questionnaires) to attend one of two workshops entitled "Making Reflection Real". A maximum of 30 participants, 15 in each, was specified; in total, 21 students from Foundation Degree, BA Honours, Postgraduate Certificate and MA courses attended. These workshops revisited the key project questions and gave students the opportunity to explore definitions of reflection, their own preferences and experiences and use of different techniques to engender reflection.

Project Findings

Student Questionnaires

In relation to the first questionnaire on PPD, while several of them listed the learning log (or journal), or composition of a reflective statement among useful PPD activities, many also suggested they would like more systematic explanation and assistance in developing the skills to produce these. Others also answered that they felt the learning log was really designed for their teacher's benefit – 'I hold things in my head more'. When offered four definitions of what PPD was, ranging from a basic instrumental statement about doing well on a course, to an overarching definition which encompassed 'whole person' learning, the

majority of respondents identified the latter statement as being the most appropriate. This sense of holistic learning, which has already been outlined in the study's earlier definition of critical reflection seems also to have common ground with it.

In relation to the second questionnaire, the majority of students situated their response between 4-7 (8 responses at 5) for whether they were taught to reflect on their course, while opinions as to the usefulness of the learning log were divided. A mixed response across the scale was noted in terms of a need to use images or activity as part of reflective practice, which seemed surprising among visually oriented learners. A strong response (15 respondents at 9 and 10) was made to the statement "I need to talk to people in order to reflect" and also to a statement asking students whether they would be interested in exploring alternative modes of reflection. These indications suggested that additional investigation with staff and students would be appropriate.

Staff Interviews

Definitions and conceptions of reflection

Staff offered divergent and varied interpretations of what they understood by critical reflection, although the basic idea of looking back to go forward was common to several responses. Elements of definition ranged from focussing on weakness, performance, 'making time for me', knowledge acquisition, to a particular kind of thinking. One saw reflection as the 'ability of the learner to re-interpret information', another thinking and musing over one's actions in order to go beyond recounting events. In another example, conceptions of reflection specifically related to how students were handled working relationships, for example on team projects.

The impression appeared to be that while critical reflection is a course requirement, it is not necessarily taught. One member of staff was suspicious with the terminology of reflective learning, preferring instead to use strategies of 'description', 'deduction' and 'speculation',

drawn from the material culture methodology of Prown (1982) and Steele (1998). This was one instance where a generic definition of reflection, established for the study, was felt to be useful in terms of clarifying obstacles to discussion. Furthermore it made it possible to suggest that the three preferred terms used instead, had elements in common with components of reflective practice.

Beliefs about reflection

Staff were clear that they themselves were highly reflective and that their approaches were effective for them. Statements included 'I'm never not reflecting – I'm a parent', 'I reflect all the time – all through the night', and one which indicates the power of terminology 'I used to be a permanent worrier. Then I did my PG Cert and realised I was a reflective practitioner'. They also had clear views as to how students saw reflection. The staff member working with students on all fashion related programmes in a learning support capacity commented that 'they don't see it for the valuable activity I see it. As they find it tedious, they tend to treat it superficially.'

Perceptions concerning the explicit teaching of reflection

Explicit teaching here meant activities such as tutors deliberately introducing students to terminology, trying out strategies of and resources for reflection as part of the learning experience, rather than assuming acquisition by osmosis. In discussion, it appeared that the enabling of critical reflection was implicit, i.e. embedded in the workshop environment through question and answer, feedback, discussion and critique, learning from example or by doing, or using industry as models. Two staff members said that they explicitly offered a session on the process of reflection, one lasting one to one and a half hours in a unit of ten weeks duration. Another gave a large cohort lecture followed by a seminar and small task. In conducting the latter the staff member noted some fundamental confusion among students with regard to terminology – for example the difference between a 'reflection' and a 'rationale'.

Several voiced the view, almost guiltily, that they don't teach it explicitly and that maybe they should. Another said that she did not teach students to reflect in a metacognitive way, but more simply invited their responses to things. Another commented that the prime message for learners in enabling reflection should be that there is no one answer and you should 'do what is inside you'. While these approaches are all appropriate and effective tools for teaching, there remains some room for debate as to how far they constituted explicit enabling of reflection, due to the levels of subjectivity and uncertainty in relation to what this was still expressed by staff and students. (A counterargument expressed was how difficult it can be to untangle reflection – and, in fact, should we? These are both valid points, however if untangling reflection is not a wise activity then what the purpose of reflective activity within a formal learning experience is needs to be reviewed and reformulated.)

One staff member further observed that she did not know how she would fit teaching reflection in, as timetabling would make it 'a nightmare scenario'. This chimes with Helen King's (2004) observation that in a pressurised environment HE tutors are far more likely to pay more attention to content than delivery strategies. This pressure is due to constraints on hours available for teaching and the amount of subject matter that staff still wish to cover in the time they have, in order to fulfil the goals of their courses. In many cases, when staff are hard pressed to include all appropriate topics and meet all assessment points, they resort to transmitting the subject matter, rather than looking at delivery strategies which encourage deep learning. This will inevitably affect initiatives to introduce the explicit teaching of specific skills within subject areas which, unless staff are themselves convinced that this will result in more effective learning and improved assessment performances, will appear another burden. With this in mind, the task of persuading colleagues to set aside time within the curriculum to explicitly teach critical reflection is not likely to be easy.

Whether reflection was measured or assessed

While on some programmes, such as BA Fashion Management, a reflective statement was included in a third year unit and formally assessed, more common practice was to incorporate reflection into stated learning outcomes (not necessarily allocating specific marks for its quality). A common staff view was that the proof of effective reflection was in the final product or outcome. In some cases effective reflection equated with practical achievements such as success with industry contacts. In one case the recommendation was made that students should only include their latest work in a portfolio, the idea being that the latest is, by definition, the best. While this may indeed be borne out by example, it does not allow for the possibility that earlier ideas may in fact be stronger, or that reflection might ever be about stasis rather than change – sticking with a choice after re-evaluation.

Systematic models of the stages of reflection, or of evaluation of reflective practice, such as Boud's, referred to earlier, or Schön's Ladder were not mentioned, nor did they appear to be used by staff to discern the quality of reflection in more depth. There was also variation in terms of the privacy versus publication debate; on one course international students write their journal in their own language but translate a couple of pages as proof of engagement. In others students can staple together pages if they do not wish these parts of their journal to be for general attention. For these reasons staff felt it was, at times, difficult to measure either the quality or the impact of reflection. In addition staff felt that reflective practice is quite elusive and hard to pin down, for example where it happens and how far it is possible to determine that one reflective moment has led specifically and directly to another, equally specific, learning breakthrough or decision.

Modes and subjects of reflection

Staff listed use of notebooks 'all the time', and double entry journals to note down both gut reactions and later evaluations of these as tools for their own use. They also saw themselves in some cases as 'practical reflecters' e.g. in the way they would construct an aesthetic

environment, at home or work. Staff also saw themselves as quite sophisticated in terms of their reflective cross referencing between different elements of their lives, a capability which they felt many students were lacking. In other examples, innovative teaching strategies designed to shake up students ideas in a variety of ways were also seen as conducive to reflection.

In terms of use with students, one member of staff emphasised the importance of reflecting visually as explored through a conceptual sketch book. Another described the use of photographs to elicit reflection on how students felt about things. Written approaches were varied and included use of online learning logs involving diary style entries, reflective evaluations and dialogue with other learners, paper based journals, PPD-style self-assessments and activities focussing on forward planning and target setting, as well as reflective statements accompanying major projects. Staff using online learning logs considered them to be highly productive vehicle for reflection, although evaluation of success seemed largely oriented towards volume of activity.

The learning journal also had unexpected uses; one staff member mused that she learned a lot about herself and the team through reading the learning journals of her students. Written reflection seemed to be more prevalent with students of fashion management using visuals to back up text, rather than the reverse. The opposite was true of a fashion design course. The course director of the management course voiced some concern that while students have to be 'very grounded' in writing down their reflections that sometimes the writing appears 'watered down or doctored' and that students are often more 'polite' than they might usefully be when things go wrong. This may also point to a perception that many reflective documents are composed after the event or with a specific reader in mind and are thereby inauthentic in some capacity. This suggests that additional work with students as to the nature of and audience for their reflective writing might be helpful.

While for the most part reflective tasks were text based, some of these tasks had a low word count such as the 'Look Book ' used on one BA fashion design course as an alternative to the dissertation. This is a portfolio including a statement of intent, CV and reflective statement amounting to 3,000 words, but which has, nonetheless, a strong visual emphasis. In producing the Look Book, the staff focus is on enabling students to explore how individuals work, because "they speak differently to us". One such portfolio explored both artistic and design skills through the theme of enjoying one's failure – a charting of what had been a difficult academic journey which resulted in a particularly successful portfolio. The interviewee felt that the third year was the most relevant time for students to reflect as by then they had a more developed, whereas first years 'haven't got to grips with the point of reflection'. The view was also expressed that students shouldn't be 'reflecting properly' in their first year as they don't know where their talents lie. This is an unusual view – the idea that you can choose NOT to reflect – which does not take into consideration any sense of subliminal or unconscious reflection and also seems to counteract any kind of reflective activity already engaged in either prior to embarking on a degree course or in other aspects of life. Furthermore it seems to conceive of reflection as a fixed or unbending imposition. It also does not allow for the possibility that for particular events students may already be reflecting quite effectively e.g. social, as opposed to educational, decisions.

On an FdA course, reliance on a reflective sketchbook was stressed. While this contained written material it was felt students automatically adopted a reflective process through considering their content – 'why did I put that in? Now I did, why is it there?'. Important in feedback from this tutor was that there are differences in reflective practice between their conceptual sketch book and written work – because they don't always make the connection. This resonated with later project findings concerning differences between what students 'say' when asked to write something as opposed to draw it. The tutor view was that more could be done to help students make these connections, which echoes earlier commentary on explicit teaching approaches.

An opposing view from another tutor was that students tend to write their reflections as they assume this is what is required. Efforts to encourage them to use different paper or make collages are sometimes seen as more time consuming and anything which appears extraneous to immediate academic goals is not pursued ('will I get a mark for this?'). The same tutor also commented that a great deal of reflective material is generated by students in tutorials but not logged.

As can be seen from these examples, the scope of what is reflected on is often framed by the aims of the course or unit. Staff and students identified topics for reflection as being personal performance, professional or industry relevance/experience, technical skill, the efficacy or success of particular design approaches or equivalent. However, feedback provided from students in workshops, as we shall see later, provided an interesting amplification of reflective practice in terms of their emotional engagement with their learning, along with huge supra-curricular questions such as 'who am I?'. In relation to questions about the emotions, staff universally agreed that they were an important part of reflective practice on their courses but that managing them was not systematically taught – this was learned 'on the job', in pairs or groups, as a byproduct, rather than strategically

Student Workshops

This section will look at student responses during two workshops on meanings and modes of reflection. As questionnaire respondents had emphasised the importance of talking for reflection, workshop content included discursive techniques and skills for active listening, as well as word association, visualisation and drawing to express what critical reflection looked like for them. Mind mapping was used to explore ways they reflected, and a small amount of writing was included to test out reflective grids or produce attempts at 'raw' reflective text.

Definitions and conceptions of Reflection

As with the staff group, students offered extremely varied interpretations of what constitutes reflection. Their definitions also mirrored the idea of looking backwards and forwards on experience, on reflection as to do with course performance and about learning from mistakes.

Beliefs about Reflection

A view that has been encountered quite commonly, and has also been expressed by one of the staff participants in this study, holds that students do not like engaging in reflective practice, that they find it a 'turn off' and irrelevant to what they have come into HE to do, namely study fashion through diverse routes and get a job afterwards. While at LCF, as in many other institutions, the notion of degree education in fashion as simply vocational training would be rejected, the strength of the employability agenda is such that it may overshadow perception of any activity which does not seem to directly progress this.

'Reflection is difficult because objectivity is difficult'. So commented one student, thus highlighting an important aspect of critical reflection which is not that it is essential for all the facts to be right for critical reflection to take place. Rather, it is the impact of how that experience made someone feel (which may have little or nothing to do with the event itself) which may constitute the learning experience.

Perceptions concerning the explicit teaching of reflection

How far students felt they were taught to reflect seemed to depend on their local situation, ranging from an FdA course where students felt this clearly took place, to postgraduate courses where all students were already expected to be effective critical reflectors.

Measuring and assessing reflection

As with staff, understanding of reflection as assessed was primarily in conjunction with a learning outcome or journal. Insistence on reflection for assessment did seem to affect the intrinsic motivation of some learners who resented it or failed to appreciate the value of the process for them.

Modes and Subjects of Reflection

The difficulties that students had with critical reflection appeared to relate much more to other factors – namely, what it was, how one did it, and the fact that the reflective processes and products they were required to evidence were not always those the learners themselves would have chosen. In several responses it was not the act of reflecting that they objected to but the fact that they were expected to write down and submit it in a particular format. More than one student voiced the opinion that they didn't learn much from their journal - and felt it was more for staff benefit. In the words of one student 'I want to reflect, but not in the ways you want me to'. (Other learners also had made assumptions about their tutor's preferences in terms of format for reflection, submitting this in written format even if this had not been specified.) Where students felt they had a genuine choice in determining what they would reflect on, how and who would see it, several of them remarked on a sense of liberation.

Responses to modes of reflection varied, from those students who found learning logs useful, to others for whom models of reflection such as the logbook are too prescriptive and those for whom writing for an audience is inhibiting. Responses to questions which asked students about their reflective preferences revealed varying levels of confidence in their

ability to express themselves reflectively in writing, while many were keen to find other formats for their activity. Kember may have been being ironic but made an obvious point when he observed 'One might suspect that there is a possibility that students can reflect without putting it in their journals' (Kember 1995:55). Not surprisingly for the field they are studying in, visualising came up several times as a preferred means of reflection, much more strongly than in the initial questionnaires. Other preferred reflective contexts were photography or visual imagery, meditation, prayer, walking, music, art, discussion. Most of the activities tried out were new to participants, with the exception of mind mapping. Participants noted the fragility of any reflective expression, being as it is dependent on state of mind and the kinds of stimuli used to encourage reflective activity.

While it is natural for specific topics for reflection to be stipulated as part of the curriculum, an awareness of the additional foci that students prioritise may also be beneficial to their professional practice. For example, in workshops, students' reflections were preoccupied with learning

- how to convince, look the part (voice, speech, accent, dress etc.)
- how to get things and ask for what they need
- how to enjoy life
- how to relate to other people
- their own psychological weaknesses or blocks

These kinds of topics are highly personal in orientation, compared to many reflective exercises which have a particular employment context or skills focus (will this help my prospects? will this get me exhibited?) even when they purport to be open ended. There appears therefore to be an opportunity here for constructing reflective activities which serve this personal, introspective avenue of contemplation, for those who want it. This suggestion may attract resistance from some staff and students who believe that allowing for personal

and emotional issues within the subject will somehow dilute the impact and seriousness of the discipline or professional preparation, as if the personal and emotional can ever be entirely extricated from professional experience.

Drawing Reflection

It became apparent in workshop activities that depending on the medium used for reflection, different responses or aspects of a situation would be expressed e.g. writing or verbally expressing a reflective statement compared to when they drew it. At the end of the workshops, and also the staff interviews, participants were asked to draw what critical reflection felt like for them. All were somewhat thrown by the request but graciously acquiesced. Many voiced concern that their ability to draw would detract from what they wanted to express. They then discussed what their drawings signified. Such a technique has been used (with different subject matter) extensively by Webb, Webb, Bessette and Rowe (2006) at Kennesaw State University to derive data on perceptions held about teaching, learning and leadership. While drawings contained common motifs of people, direction and movement they also, more significantly, revealed much more immediate, emotive symbols of reflective practice – abstract depictions of mess, tangle, loss, uncertainty, the unknown. These were notably different from any earlier verbal discussions of what constituted reflective practice, and what they did/found when they reflected. In some ways, using drawing as a means of eliciting real feeling about what was going on in their lives got closer to the truth than translating those feelings into written words. There is therefore an argument for incorporating both into reflective activities. It would be interesting to investigate how far this approach can be used further for exploring ideas and feelings which relate to whole-person learning.

Brookfield's Critical Incident Questionnaire

At the end of the workshops Brookfield's (1995:115) Critical Incident Questionnaire was used as both a reflective and evaluative tool. Rather than use good or bad as categories of

judgement, Brookfield's questions asked students when they had felt most engaged or distanced in a learning experience, what had been most helpful or affirming, what actions that had puzzled them and what had surprised them the most. Among the many responses students made they remarked that they had mainly

- felt most involved when talking, discussing or listening
- felt most distanced when writing in the grid exercise
- found active listening and considering the emotions most helpful
- found the drawing exercise puzzling – as much for the things they had discovered about each other, for example similarities in depictions; they had also found defining reflection puzzling due to the diversity of interpretations and possibilities
- been both surprised and struck by finding many of them were experiencing similar emotions – self doubt, feeling lost, the same concerns. Many noted how they had found people feeling certain things that they never would have suspected, or sharing the same view

Students were also asked if they wanted to make any additional comment about the activities they had tried, and they did so in an extremely positive manner, including 'Inspiring, calming, understood and wanted to learn more', 'Inspiring, encouraged me to think more and discover myself', 'Very insightful, a lot of students need this support on a regular basis', 'Good opportunity to find new ideas and ways of seeing things', 'it encourages me to think and to discover myself', 'There should be an element of reflection on all courses'. The last of these student comments appears to be telling; the perception being that reflection *isn't* included already in all courses, which all course directors would no doubt refute.

Reflection On Results

As already stated, this was a small scale, preliminary investigation, which constituted a 'toe in the water' approach to some big questions which would benefit from much deeper, more systematic handling. The nature of the enquiry may appear open to criticism due to the asymmetric nature of enquiry methods, or sample size, or lack of statistical weight. However, as an exploration of staff and student views of reflective practice certain pre-project perceptions appear to have been borne out. One is that staff and students do not share a common conception of what reflection is, which will therefore affect how they reflect and what they think it is for. Another, that reflective strategies do not appear to be taught as a matter of course, although this depends on programmes and individual staff. Both staff and students comment on this fact and either say they ought to do more (staff) or that they would find it beneficial (students). Reflection is clearly a highly valued activity on these courses, which are producing successful graduates; however the opportunity to interrogate the actual nature of that reflective practice and its relationship to successful learning, is not being exploited. Assumptions about the quality of reflection are subsumed into the products of learning – a great outcome correlating to great reflection. This is not, necessarily, a reliable assumption. Non-textual modes of reflection are obviously used on courses involving physical activity and production, through the use of sketch, visual and practical work, and yet modes of recording it for assessment still appear to have a strong textual orientation. Where textual reflection is not used, the process and effects of reflection may only seem indirectly visible. A reliance on written reflection above, or in addition to, all other forms is a corollary of the target driven, highly accountable climate of higher education in the UK, which insists on tangible evidence that proves reflection has happened and is explicitly captured. As a result staff may rely on a series of written instruments such as self-assessments or skills checklists which may illustrate componential reflection (a particular skill or area) but are of limited scope and do not tell the whole story.

The third study question focussed on what could be done to support the development of reflective skills, if, as suspected, these tended not to be taught explicitly, or if there was any confusion around reflective practice and purpose. Introductions to conceptions of reflection and explanations of different kinds of reflective approach are clearly important components of units. However, introductions on their own are not sufficient, as experiences of first year student induction have often illustrated. Students would benefit from the integration of strategies for reflection into teaching which will be part of the fabric of diverse activities throughout their stages of learning. Moon (2005: 15) cites Lipman, Brookfield and Myers as advocates of the specific teaching of 'overt and well understood' concepts of critical thinking (for which one may substitute critical here critical reflection, even if they are not considered identical) in the subject classroom. Where this study deviates from Moon's position is in her assertion that writing is central to critical thinking in higher education. As already discussed through the Writing-PAD project, concentration on writing (written reflection for this study) above other formats may inadvertently penalise or exclude learners whose learning preferences are not being catered for. PPD is currently an activity which has the scope to be multimodal, but in terms of record generation is still highly text-based. There is clearly scope for a re-evaluation of PPD as an influential process in, or vehicle for, reflective learning, to include more non-textual activities. Students, as ever, need to inform any reconsideration of what is wanted from student reflection, how they would like to achieve their reflective aims, how the process will be measured, and how to respect privacy and flexibility on behalf of the learner. The workshops suggested that that students are open to learning how to reflect in different ways and see this as of significant benefit to their learning and self-view. In addition, student activity suggested that some non-textual techniques, such as drawing, are revelatory of distinctly different views of experience and feeling and may provide a useful complement in terms of evidence or record.

 Despite any structural limitations, and the many questions for the future that have been raised by this study, its findings have played an important part in defining the kinds of ways reflection is now being presented to students through their PPD and further workshops

provided. It has informed exploration of reflection for creative arts tutors studying for a postgraduate certificate in teaching, exploring still further their understandings of the concept and the ways in which they support students in developing reflective capability. Initial feedback suggests that findings from the study concerning definition, explicit teaching and format of reflection are being replicated elsewhere.

Conclusions

Bannister and Mair note wryly in their preface to The Evaluation of Personal Constructs (1968) that academic papers often end with "customary phrases about how many questions had been left unanswered and how much more work was needed". Unfortunately, so will this paper. It does appear that this initial study could be progressed in two directions, as pedagogic research into greater understanding of the effect of non-textual reflection on learning, behaviours and assessment, and as curriculum practice which experiments with different non-textual activities and explicit modes of teaching reflective practice which can be measured. Both will need to address fundamental questions relating to the shape and purpose of reflection in fashion learning, including the kinds of strategies that suit different disciplines and activities and how these can be taught, and how non-textual practices of reflection can be more systematically used and understood in the context of the discipline. Consideration should also be given as to how to measure the quality and effectiveness of reflection, particularly non textual, and to what end. Students and staff in this small project showed themselves to be open to reappraisal in terms of their assumptions concerning reflective practice and to experimentation in learning experiences. Buzzwords in fashion are creativity, innovation, groundbreaking, cutting edge. An element of all of those might be beneficial to enhance our understanding of how and why students and staff can view reflection differently.

Works cited

Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1974) *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness.* San Francisco. Jossey Bass

Bessette, H. (2006). *Revisualising Pedagogy: How Drawings Dcoument Complex Educational Phenomena and Promote Change.* Workshop delivered at Pedagocial Research: Enhancing Student Success. First PRHE Conference, 2-3 May 2006 at Liverpool Hope University, UK.

Brockbank A and McGill I, (1998) *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education.* Buckingham. SRHE and Open University Press.

Brookfield, S (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher.* San Franscisco. Jossey Bass

Dewey, J (1933). *How We Think.* D.C. Heath & Co. Boston & London.

Kember, D, Wong, F, Chung Lan L (1995) Assessing the level of student reflection from reflective journals. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 22, pp48-57

King, H, (2004) SEDA Research Project in Earth Science on what lecturers currently do to develop and enhance their teaching. Published in SEDA conference proceedings November 2004 Discussion Paper 37

Schön, D. (1983) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner.* San Franscisco. Jossey-Bass.

Steele, V.(1998). A museum of fashion is more than a clothes bag. In *Fashion Theory* vol.2. Issue 4. pp 327-336.

Websites

Amulya, J (2004). What is Reflective Practice?

http://crcp.mit.edu/documents/whatis.pdf Accessed 8 January 2007.

Boud D (1994). Conceptualising learning from experience: Developing a model for facilitation.

http://www.education.uts.edu.au/ostaff/staff/publications/db_13_aerc94.pdf Accessed 20 December 2006

Dearing R, (1997): Report of the National Committee for Inquiry into Higher Education: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ncihe/index.htm accessed Nov 2003.

Moon, J (2005) We Seek It Here…

http://escalate.ac.uk/2041. Accessed 8 January 2007

QAA Guidelines for the HE Progress File (2001)

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/guidelines/progfile2001.asp#pdpp

lan Accessed 8 January 2007.

Service Learning: Using Structured Reflection to Enhance Learning from Service (2001)

Annotated Bibliography http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/ Accessed 10 January

2007

Schön, D. (1987). Educating the Reflective Practitioner.

http://educ.queensu.ca./~ar/schon87.htm Accessed 8 January 2007

Schön, D. (1984).The Architectural Studio as an Exemplar of Education for Reflection-in-

Action. Journal of Architectural Education. Vol.38, No.1, pp1-9

http://www.jstor.org/view/10464883/ap050002/05a00030/0 Accessed 9 January 2007

Writing PAD project site. http://www.writing-PAD.ac.uk. Accessed 17 November 2006