

## **LATE FRIDAY**

### **Holding the space: An inquiry into the value of keeping Reflective Journals for trainee teachers**

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#### **Paper**

*'My journal is a true space. And in writing and recording I am managing for myself a better understanding of how to deal with things and manage my emotions.'*

(Jess, trainee teacher, journal entry)

The practice of keeping reflective journals in education and social care contexts is not new. However, in the increasingly crowded and pressured curriculum for training post-graduate teachers where every day, every hour and every minute must be justified, space for reflection is at a premium. Such pressure reflects our troubled world and yet, paradoxically, the issues for schools arising from those troubles suggest that the need to create and value time and space for reflection can rarely have been stronger.

My research and experience with trainee teachers keeping reflective journals has shown their value in exploring teacher identity. As they write about their autobiographical beginnings (Clandinin, 2013) they discover who they are and who they may become as they embark on the journey to becoming a teacher. The reflective space of the journal opens up opportunities to attend more deeply to dilemmas, ethical thinking, the social and political implications and the relational responsibilities inherent in professional practice. Journals provide the opportunity to release the imagination, to look at things as if they could be otherwise, taking a reflective/reflexive turn to view a situation through the eyes of another person, often writing in narrative, story, fictional or poetic forms. In this way the writer travels to the worlds of others (Lugones, 1987). In reflective journal writing we are finding out what we need to say and how to say it in ways that develop deep insights, raise questions, and often surprise us by revealing what we know and what we need to know. I believe reflective writing *is* reflective thinking. Such writing is an act of exploration, what it means is not necessarily known

beforehand and put into the text, rather it is discovered by *being written*. We can surprise ourselves; as we travel with our stories, as we think with them perhaps something emerges that was not anticipated. Such writing generates new insights. As trainee teacher Lottie, reflecting on a story she had written in her journal commented, ‘I was shocked!’

My presentation will include examples of reflective writing, and reflections on the process and experience of reflection. I hope to prompt discussion about the uses and value of critical reflective writing and its place in teacher education. I am particularly interested in justifying the place of critically reflective writing in an increasingly technical-rational climate. I have taken a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin, 2013) in my research, which includes the creation of stories, and discussions with teachers about the use of narrative and poetry as reflective tools. I am also exploring perceived differences between handwriting and word processing. The practice of narrative inquiry is relational and I welcome dialogue with colleagues who are also working with reflective journals to enable scholarly support and reflection (Clarke, Dyson and Hutchinson, 2019).

**Question: How can the gentle activism of reflective writing support educators in a troubled world?**

**Key words:** Reflective journals; narrative approaches; teacher identity; thinking through writing; teacher education

**References:**

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Lugones, M., (1987) Playfulness, “world”- travelling and loving perception. *Hypatia* 10 (2): pp. 22-43.