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Using videotaped extracts of lessons during interviews to facilitate the eliciting of teachers' thinking. An example with music schoolteachers' perceptions of creativity.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores methodological issues regarding the eliciting of teachers' views regarding creativity, with particular reference to the use of videotaped extracts of lessons during in-depth semi-structured interviews. The paper draws on a doctoral study focussed on English music schoolteachers' perceptions of creativity. Various research designs and results from previous studies were examined and the implications highlighted (Odena, 2001a). A qualitative research design was piloted with three teachers and subsequently refined (Odena, 2001b). It was then used to allow six final participants to reflect on their own ideas. Between three to five hours of music lessons on composition and improvisation were observed and videotaped for each teacher. Final interviews with participants were transcribed and the process of analysis was assisted by a software package for qualitative research (i.e. NVivo). The study exemplified the complexities in defining the term 'creativity'. It is suggested that the use of videotaped extracts of lessons for the purpose of discussion with participants during the interviews, proved beneficial in exploring the teachers' perceptions. This method may have relevance for both researchers and practitioners interested in teachers' attitudes.

SUMMARY:

Background of the study

The educational reforms and the production of new curricula in many European countries in recent years (EURYDICE, 1997) have re-opened the issue of creativity and its

interpretation, especially in music education. Currently music teachers are expected to teach pupils how to create and develop musical ideas. The word creativity is frequently used in policy documents and its meaning is not always defined (e.g. Catalan Autonomous Government, 1992; Scottish Office Education Department, 1992; Department for Education and Employment, 1999). In addition, teachers have their own perceptions of creativity and these perceptions somehow influence the pedagogic approach and assessment of such activities.

Previous studies focussed on the teachers' perceptions of creative pupils, or analysed the process of creativity of various individuals and the environment in which this seemed to occur. The author however, has argued elsewhere (Odena, 2001a) that the enquiry on music teachers' perceptions of creativity would benefit by broadening the approach of previous studies and examining all four fields: Pupil – Environment - Process - Product. These themes for enquiry are nevertheless abstract constructs drawn from the literature and they lack the clarity of everyday language. If we were to ask teachers about these four fields we may well be at risk of imposing our theoretical constructs on their personal views. The issue then is how to make the teachers' own views clear.

Methodology: how to make teachers' perceptions explicit?

The focus of this paper seeks to illustrate a methodology to facilitate the eliciting of teachers' thinking. Several issues that arose during a study of English secondary music schoolteachers' perceptions of creativity are discussed. In this study, six participants were observed during composition and improvisation activities that were videotaped for a number of weeks. They were interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the study, and invited to complete a 'Music Career Path' adapted from Denicolo and Pope (1990). In the final interviews teachers were presented with extracts of their own taped lessons and asked to comment upon them. The taped extracts were the starting point from which teachers explained their views on musical creativity. This enabled an explanation of the participants' perceptions in their own words. The intention was, moreover, to explore further the 'why' of their ideas about creativity. This video technique draws upon work by Silvers (1977), who used video in a study of children's culture, and Lennon (1996), who used recorded lessons in a qualitative study of piano teachers' thinking.

In the case reported here the video recording process was completed in two steps: first several 'first-generation' tapes were produced videotaping lessons with each participant; and finally some extracts from these tapes were edited into a 'second-generation' tape to be viewed by both teacher and researcher during the interview. The aim of these interviews was to concentrate on 'conversations with purpose' as outlined by Burgess (1988), giving a voice to the teachers to let them reflect on their own words on the extracts selected from their teaching. This posture was similar to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call 'naturalistic' because of the relevance of any potential issues arising during the research exercise. The intention was to gain some insight into the teachers' implicit theories and beliefs about creativity. In particular, the interviewer looked at the explanations by participants of what took place during the lessons with composition and improvisation activities in terms of the creative pupil characteristics, the environment, the processes of creation, and the creative products. Some issues considered further in the paper are the selection of participants, confidentiality and interpretation and analysis of data using the software package for qualitative research NVivo (i.e. the latest version of NUD*IST or Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising).

Conclusions

It is suggested that the methodology used, facilitated the eliciting of insights into the teachers' thinking. It is apparent that centralised production of new educational guidelines in some European countries does not lead to the harmonisation of the teachers' thinking. Teachers have their own attitudes and ideas and these ideas can influence their practice. Research into the views of educators, in a wide range of areas (e.g. assessment, multiculturalism), and further study of the factors related to variations in their perceptions is needed. It is hoped that the methods presented here may be of use for both researchers and practitioners interested in the elicitation of teachers' thinking.

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