

Reflective Journal

***** All the names used within this Reflective Journal are fictitious. They are pseudonyms used to protect the identities of individuals represented within this text. *****

15 May'03

Maggie is a lecturer who has had 'issues' with the AVCE ICT students. She teaches two out of the twelve AVCE modules. It is the first time she has taught AVCE and throughout the year, she has struggled to teach the group. She commented that these students are 'unteachable'. She has openly admitted that they are "thick". Most of the students think that Maggie is 'not a good teacher'. She has no patience with the weaker students. The students claim they do not understand programming and that she 'does not explain anything'. See students feedback (appendix).

24 Jun. 03

Where do I start? What a day? Maggie marked Peter's assignment. Peter is dyslexic. He finds it difficult to understand computer-programming concepts. Although he has had additional help in class during the year, he claims not to understand the logics of computer programming. As a direct result of this lack of understanding, his attendance for Maggie's classes has been quite erratic.

Maggie claims that Peter's assignment features 'high quality programming codes'. That there is no way Peter could have written the assignment without considerable help. A Viva was arranged so that Peter could give some oral explanation of work and hence prove his understanding of programming. Present for the Viva were Peter tutor, Maggie and myself. Peter became increasingly frustrated when asked to explain a piece of code. He started sweating profusely and became very red in the face. Peter failed to successfully explain the codes. His tutor suggested that Peter loads his codes on a computer screen and uses the screen to attempt another Viva. This we all agreed would happen tomorrow.

I felt Peter was humiliated throughout the Viva ordeal. Peter agreed that he received some help on-line from the Internet. He supplied detailed hardcopy evidence of chat-rooms conversation. He admitted that he does not like programming but that he has worked hard to put the assignment together.

How do I feel now? Frustrated but not angry. There was nobody to be angry with. I respect Maggie's values. I feel very stressed. I have never felt that much stressed before. I feel that as a team leader I have failed Peter. I knew throughout the year that Peter was having difficulties with programming. In fact, I knew that most of the AVCE students were having difficulties with the way Maggie teaches programming. I have raised this concern with the Principal, Vice principal and my Head of Centre. I was so stressed and frustrated by the situation that I thought of looking for another job. Could I have handled the Viva more delicately, given Peter's dyslexia?

I went to university and met with the Tuesday Group. I explained the events above. I explained that whilst achievement figures are a concern, this isn't the main concern. Foremost of my concern is the students' recognition for their effort. They are not the brightest buttons in the world. They deserve more understanding. The group felt it would be a pity for me to give up on the students as it is obvious that I am passionate about them. I felt a lot better talking to the Tuesday group about the events of today. I value their comments as I felt they were detached from the situation and as such could offer impartial advice.

25 Jun. 03

Peter had agreed to attend another Viva at 10:00 today. He did not turn up. I feel he has shot himself in the foot as he has missed a good opportunity to explain his work. I feel from yesterday's incident that Maggie thinks that I want her to simply 'pass' the AVCE students. I feel I should clarify this with her. So I asked her what her perception of me was regarding the AVCE students – not just Peter. She responded that she feels that I want her to 'pass' our AVCE students. I explained that this is not the case but that I do want fairness in the treatment of all the students and the way in which she grades their assignments. Maggie explained that she doesn't like the AVCE syllabus/award and that she is glad she is not teaching on this programme next year. I did not tell her that under no circumstances would I have her teaching the AVCE next year.

I noticed that at present the achievement for the AVCE is 58%. Previous years achievements have been above 70%. I'm increasingly worried that the reason for the low achievement lies firmly at Maggie's door. I'm beginning to feel a bit panicky. I showed these projected achievement figures to Maggie and the AVCE tutor. They both went to the computer room where some AVCE students were working and started chasing more assignments.

What leadership skills did I use today? I feel less stressed today.

27 Jun'03

Today is Friday. The end of a turbulent week. Went to St John's Cathedral for some quiet time-out at lunchtime. Although I am a Catholic and go to church most Sundays, a weekday visits to The House of God are not a regular activity of mine. But today I needed to 'come away' from my work so that I can reconnect with my spiritual source. Mark's Gospel (Mark 6:30-34) springs vividly to mind: **"You must come away to some lonely place, all by yourselves and rest for a while"; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves** (Mark 6:30-34).

2nd July'03

Second viva for Peter. Supervised by three independent lecturers. Good news. Peter passed the programming unit. He is over the moon. He is ecstatic.

Went over assessment criteria with Kevin. Kevin is a new tutor. He is new to AVCE. He teaches Spreadsheet Design. We went over how to mark assignments to the AVCE criteria.

Feedback from Kevin: He is pleased with the way I explained the marking. He feels more confident in marking to the exam board standard. What leadership qualities did I use? I was preparing the environment for Kevin to be able to mark his module according to the exam board criteria. I hope that in time he grows in confidence

Received flowers from Shelley and Eileen. They are AVCE ICT Year 2 students. They have passed their AVCE ICT. They are both graded DE for their double award 'A' levels. Not brilliant grades, but for vocational 'A' level ICT, DE is a pass. It is an achievement.

4th July'03

College Staff Training Day. All team members attended the Teaching and Learning (T&L) Strategies Training session. An excellent session. Was made aware of Teaching and Learning (T&L) Strategies that work. Looked at how Solihull College has increased their students' achievement from 81% to 94% through T&L strategies that work. Learnt about the use of 'Spectacle Analysis'. This is a form of 'Analytical Thinking' – centres around the idea

in which a person looks at solving a problem through different 'pairs of spectacles', to get to the top level of Bloom's Taxonomy. Aimed at improving students' analytical and problem solving skills. Each pair of spectacles is a "way of seeing" the whole scenario. Every pair of spectacles is a "way of NOT seeing" the whole scenario. There is a need to use a number of pairs of spectacles so as to make critical judgements i.e. connections/links between various aspects of the scenario - something to do with the left and the right side of the brain and the way it works in making decisions and judgements. A very useful session which has increased my awareness of various T&L methods that could be used to improve the learning of level 2 (GNVQ) and level 3 (AVCE) students. I could use this new awareness with new tutors and lecturers on the team

8th July'03

Attended a three hours training for programme area leader on Managing teaching and learning. Included in the session were: assessment and verification process; the use of Information Learning Technology within our programme area and Teaching and Learning in the classroom - a fresh look at inducting new teaching staff. The session on assessment & verification - malpractice - dealing with plagiarism and dealing with students copying each others' work proved useful. It was good to be aware of the college stance on plagiarism.

For me the impending College inspection, the use of the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) questions and how to prepare for the inspectors gathering of information relating to 'How well is the ILT used?' has more impact. Use of mindmap (ILT) to get students to make more use of ILT.

What leadership skills did I learn/improve/become more aware of ?

Development issue

Inform malpractice: Make staff more aware of malpractice

Use of ILT: Useful for Managing Inspection and ILT; raise staff awareness of use of mindmap

Teaching and learning management: mainly for new staff; appropriate use of documentation for planning (Scheme of work; lesson plan) and recording (Record of work; evaluation /review/reflection of lesson) the delivery of teaching and learning; inducting new staff into delivery of teaching and learning. This will be useful for the new staff starting in September'03.

17 July'03

Lunchtime discussion with Mary (team leader of New Start) and Jane (Newstart tutor). There is no such thing as 'disinterested students', but there are 'disinterested teachers' said Mary. Mary runs the New Start Centre where under-16s, who have been failed by the school system, are 'taken on'. We discussed the characteristics of New Start students. We concluded that Maggie shows the characteristics of a disaffected teacher.

18 July'03

Met Nita. Nita is a new member of staff starting in September 03. She is highly intelligent but is low in confidence and self-esteem. Nita will be teaching ICT. She completed her teacher training last year and has had limited teaching experience. Nita felt overwhelmed by the 17 hours of teaching for Sept. She felt she had to stay at College everyday until 7pm to prepare her lessons. Together we looked at ways to plan ahead using schemes of work and course outlines. The programme area leader training on 8th July (above) proved useful. I reassured her that she has the team support. At the end of the day, Nita felt less pressured and less panicky. She said she felt a lot more reassured and encouraged. I was glad I could help but I could see that building up Nita's confidence and self-esteem is going to be a long haul. I will need to enlist the help of the rest of the team to fully support Nita.

23rd July'03

Last day of work before summer holiday. Just learnt that 2 lecturers will not be able to teach on the AVCE ICT courses. They agreed four months ago to teach on the AVCE courses and it appears they also knew three weeks ago that they could not commit themselves to teaching on my programmes. I felt let down. Shabbily treated through poor communication. Finding ICT lecturers at this late stage in the year is not easy. The Times Educational Supplement will confirm this. I decided to 'sleep over' this dilemma.

26th July'03

Telephoned Kevin regarding extra teaching that had become available (see 23rd July entry). Kevin agreed to pick up the two modules, which means he will be teaching GNVQ Intermediate and AVCE ICT. He has not taught GNVQ level students before and I will need to ensure he gets all the support he needs to work with these students. They are a lot less academically gifted than AVCE students are and I made sure Kevin was made aware of this. Again, I will enlist the help of the team to support Kevin.

9th September 2003

Today I welcome Annia and Nita into the AVCE and GNVQ ICT. They are new tutors and lecturers to the GNVQ Intermediate and AVCE ICT students respectively. Although inexperienced in tutor roles, I believe Annia and Nita will bring fresh ideas and breathe new life into the team. I welcomed them into the team. I explained to them their tutor roles as well as their lecturer roles. I reassured them that as a team we are there for them, to support them.

18th October'03

Meeting with Annia to discuss her progress so far. I started by asking her how she is finding her new roles so far. She is enjoying and learning most aspects of her teaching and tutoring. I congratulated her on her tutor roles. She is working well tutoring the GNVQ Intermediate students some of whom can be quite difficult to manage and keep track of their attendance. I also spoke positively about her teaching. She expresses her weakness as 'finding it difficult to be as firm as you [Daisy]' and the fact that she is 'not an experienced tutor'. I explained that everyone has different ways of affirming our firmness and that she will improve with experience.

19th October 2003

'*Discover the power of your hidden Intelligence*' was the title of an article in my weekend paper. (see appendix L). The article is about the discovery of four new types of intelligence which expert psychologists claim to determine how successful we are. I took the quiz, hoping for a laugh and to prove that such 'nonsense' is not to be believed. I scored mostly 'C's. I turned the page over to find out that the interpretation of my 'mainly C score means that I have RELATIONAL type of intelligence. "*You're a sociable spirit with excellent people skills and your intelligence is based on understanding people around you. You empathise with others...and adapt to the needs of those around you. You interact well with people quickly grasping their needs and limitations. You are capable of helping others and showing them solidarity in a team situation and you encourage dialogue, never imposing your own views but allowing others to express themselves. You crave harmony and dislike any kind of conflict.*" It was like reading about myself. I could see my personality in each and every sentence this Emotional Intelligent type. Scary? Yes and No. Yes, I felt a bit scared. I could see immediately the weakness of having this type of emotional intelligence and the next part of the profile confirmed my thoughts. "*Your weak point - naivety, trusting others too much, trying to please everyone too much of the time.*" On the other hand I did not feel scared. I know that my strengths of being able to respond well to others and creating a good team spirit far outweigh my weaknesses and moreover, knowing

my weaknesses I am in a better position to step back if I feel I'm putting too much trust in someone.

23rd October 2003

Annia wrote to a parent whose son has been missing classes. The student has had repeated verbal warnings about non-attendance and is now on Stage 1 disciplinary (verbal informal warning). Annia showed me the letter she's drafted. She felt she was being too harsh. Together we discussed how to put our points across in a professional but less harsh manner. I emphasised that she has done a good job in the first draft by introducing the main points of concern. That my input was merely to share my experience of writing similar letters in the past. I feel Annia felt empowered.

24th October 2003

Today is my head of centre's last working day at the college. She has been working at the college for the last 15 years. Earlier this week, I asked her to comment on what she perceived were my standards and values that I claim to drive the team forward. Today I received her email response containing her comments. (see appendix E).

20th November 2003

"Am I not a good tutor then?" Annia said. I was updating her on two of her tutees who have been missing several classes and who are already on disciplinary stage 1. Annia is not in work on Tuesdays and I as 'bumped' into the two regular absentees I took the opportunity to have firm words with them about their continuing absences from their classes. Besides Annia is not an experienced tutor - a fact she herself has acknowledged (18th October'03 entry). My response to Annia's question: "Of course you're a good tutor. The GNVQs are not for the faint hearted and you have proved that you can cope with the demands of tutoring such a difficult group of students. As far as the two students in case are concerned, you've done all you can to get them back on track with their studies, but they are choosing to ignore your concerns. So I believe a firmer approach is what's needed." Also as the team leader I felt I present a more authoritative figure - a bit like being the headteacher.

"This is what I'm not good at." said Annia. "I am not as firm as you are. You have more authority than me and they do seem to take more notice of what you say."

Reflection: Perhaps I need to go back to Annia tomorrow and ask her how she would like me to deal with persistent non-attendance to back up what she has already done. Did my action, of speaking to the students about their non-attendance make Annia feel inadequate?

21 Nov'03

I did not go back to Annia (re above). I think it is better to leave things this way for the time being. As the team leader, it is my duty to respond to issues of non-attendance, which if not tackled effectively will impact on retention, and inevitably achievement of students.

4th Dec'03

I observed Nita's lesson today as part of the Performance Review process. I gave her feedback. I took the opportunity to enquire how she is finding her teaching and tutoring roles so far. Nita, as I said before, lacks confidence and has a low self-esteem. She started by saying she is rubbish at teaching and that her tutees do not like her. I know that to be untrue. I pointed out how her tutees attendance is one of the highest in the whole college and that this is because she is doing an excellent job following up each and every absence. Nita is also a grade 1 (excellent) lecturer. She is thorough and puts in a lot of time and effort preparing and researching her subject. I praised her for this and the smile on her face

confirmed that the point I made has been absorbed. I wish I could have captured this facial expression on video.

11 Dec'03

Received email from Jack - reference: feedback on my draft dissertation. (See Appendix M)
Jack wrote:

"I do like the clarity of your ideas and the well formed structure of your draft. I also like the way you engage with the ideas of others." I find responses like this are extremely encouraging and motivating. Getting the approval of my draft dissertation makes me feel that I can now move my enquiry forward. Jack continued, "To show leadership as a team leader in Vocational Education should we expect you to show your influence with members of your team in enhancing the students' learning in their vocational education programmes? ...if your influence as a leader is felt through conversations...you might bring the voices of your colleagues and students into your account of your educational influence through your leadership".

23 Jan'04

Today I had my first and hopefully my last racial harassment at work from Maggie - a work colleague I've known for four years. The incident is clearly documented in Appendix C. How do I feel? Disbelief. Shocked. Hurt. I have known Maggie for four years. She was part of our team last academic year and we have had our differences which I've partly documented in my Reflective Journal. (see 15th May'03 to 2nd July'03 and 17th July'03 journal entry). I feel hurt because I thought I had a good working relationship with Maggie and that no matter what her personal problems were, I did not warrant being called 'a stupid black bitch...to f*** off'. She did not refer to the other colleague by the colour of her [white] skin why did she have to refer to mine in such a derogatory way? I do not have 'issues' about the colour of my skin - in fact I am proud to be black but it is the reference to it in such a derogatory way that hurt and shocked me.

Jack's email of 11 Dec'03 (see appendix M) is now starting to make a bit more sense "...in working with [YY¹] a mixed race educator ... he stressed the importance that acknowledging that 'whiteness' speaks in post colonial forms of theorising about leadership to consider issues of racial identity." Jack was not sure that acknowledging my racial identity is important in my account of my leadership and until now I agreed with him. It is not the first time Jack and I had this discussion about including my racial identity. We discussed this when I studied the MEE module last year. But now, after this racial harassment incident I am beginning to take a different stance on acknowledging my racial identity in my dissertation.

6 Feb'04

Meeting with [ZZ²] a manager of a Racial Equality Council (REC). After hearing the events of 23 Jan'04, he concluded that this was a clear case of racial harassment. He referred me to a Law Centre for legal advice.

26 Feb'04

Today I met a legal advisor from the Law Centre regarding the 'Maggie Incident'. I explained the events of the 23 Jan over again. I still feel hurt reliving the events of that day. Being called 'stupid' is bad enough, being called a 'stupid black bitch' is even worse because to me, this sends the message that the colour of my skin - it being black - puts me in a category of inferior people/race i.e. not only are you stupid, you're also black'. For me, using the swear words is unprofessional and ill mannered and shows lack of self respect.

¹ YY is a pseudonyms.

² ZZ is a pseudonyms.

Values versus racial identity? Is this an issue? Is it important to acknowledge my racial identity in my dissertation? Does my racial identity impact on my leadership? It does. No it doesn't. Am I experiencing a living contradiction?

Could I use this data/evidence to illustrate my living contradiction? How do my values manifest themselves? Do they manifest themselves in my racial identity? I am confuse.

01 March'04

I have just under one and a half months to complete and submit my dissertation. I am feeling quite tense and confused about interpreting the evidence I have gathered so far to validate my claim to knowing my living standards of practice. There are many questions in my head. How do I know I have improved in my leadership practice as a team leader? I need evidence of this to show I've moved on. What evidence do I choose from the bank of evidence I've gathered? How do I know I have had some influence on the practice of the lecturers as teachers-educators? What have I learnt about myself as a team leader and as an educator? How do I know I have created my own living educational theory?

So many questions and yet so few answers. Where do I start? How do I start?

10 March'04

Interviewed three prospective students with Annia observing the process. She took copious notes. As a tutor, Annia must participate in the recruitment of prospective students. For that she must be 'trained' and supported in the process. Today I was 'preparing the environment' for this process. In two weeks' time Annia will interview a prospective student on her own. I will create another opportunity for her growth.

11 March'04

The students received their results today for their January'04 exams. Jane and Lindy are two low ability students whom the team expected not to do well. Their exam results are outstanding, with Laura scoring a C grade and Lindy a D, well over and above the predicted U (ungraded) result. I telephoned both girls to congratulate them on their good results. I believe we should celebrate success.

15 March'04

Nita toothache last Friday. She had dragged herself to work last Friday despite the severe tooth pain. She had phoned for an emergency dental appointment. I had sent her home. I telephoned her at home to enquire about her bad tooth and to make provision for class cover if she was still suffering from her toothache. Nita was out, so I spoke to her mum. I told her mum that Nita is a hard worker and that she is doing quite well in her teaching and tutoring roles. I am aware that one of the causes of Nita's low self-esteem is the lack of her family's belief in her ability. I am aware that some of her family members are in the habit of 'putting her down' at any given opportunity. So I purposely and consciously wanted to celebrate the fact that Nita's hard work is being recognised and appreciated by our team, our students (her tutees) and by me.

16 March'04

Nita came to work today with a huge smile. The first thing she said was 'My mum said she had a long chat with you yesterday. She said you said I'm a hard worker. She said you must have been talking about the wrong Nita.' Now this response did not surprise me. But what I did notice was the smile on Nita's face. To me the smile said that at last somebody

believes in her ability. I reiterated to Nita that she is a hard worker and that the team values her efforts and as a result her students are benefiting too.

17 March'04

Nita's students are complaining. The group wants to have a 'chat' to me about Nita. They do not want her to be their tutor any more. They feel that Nita is treating them like children. 'She starts talking to us, then the minute another student wants her attention, she doesn't finish talking to us,' said one student. 'She is on the phone to my dad all the time, even when I am a little bit late,' said another student. 'At school it was strict, but here it is even stricter. One of the reasons for coming to college was not to be treated like this,' said the same student. I explained to the students that Nita does care for them in her own ways and that she is still learning, as she is a new tutor. I explained to them that I understand how they feel and that I will think the best way to approach their complaint to Nita.

I got Nita on her own later. She was partly aware that her tutees were having 'issues'. I asked her how she felt about the issues. Together, we discussed strategies to deal with the students including more focussed communication where full attention is given to students until the conversation is over. We agreed that if there are any distractions then she is perfectly entitled to tell the distractor to wait a while until she has finished with the current student. We also agreed for her to be a little more flexible with the students and to be prepared for a little 'give and take'. I also reassured her that students will 'moan' at anything and everything if they do not have their own way. That through experience, she will learn to know when 'to give a little and when to take a little'.

I later discussed the day's event with a critical friend. His response is recorded in appendix J.

19 March'04

Annia interviewed a prospective student. I observed the process but supported her throughout so that she did not feel she was on her own. This was her first interview and she was understandably nervous. But I felt she did quite well. She covered the main contents about informing the prospective student of the benefits of the programme and informed the student of the content of the GNVQ course. I gave her positive feedback to that effect and suggested she could consider more eye contact with student as improvement.