

# Reflective Learning Workshop

(Handout 08/12/06)

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## Programme for the Session

I give the programme for a day session – shorter sessions will cover less, but much of the material is in the handout or available. I will not necessarily work in the order of the list below. The workshop is largely drawn from 'A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning', Jenny Moon, 2004 and 'Learning Journals – a handbook for reflective practice and professional development' (2006) both published by Routledge Falmer, London. If I have not made it available at your workshop, e-mail me for the resources section of the books.

### **Developing an understanding of reflection**

- Defining reflective learning
- Emotion and reflection
- Learning and reflection

### **Factors that affect the quality of reflection**

- Depth of reflection – an exercise
- The learners' conception of knowledge

### **Introducing reflection – a two stage approach**

### **Assessment issues**

### **Exercises to stimulate reflection / Learning journals as 'containers' for ongoing reflection**

## Developing an understanding of reflective learning

### Defining reflection

### **Some vocabulary for reflection:**

Reflection and reflective learning are similar; reflective writing is the representation of reflection and reflective practice is a term used in academic practice in many different ways

### **A common-sense definition of reflection**

Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and emotions that we already possess (based on Moon 1999).

### **When reflection is used in an academic context we add:**

- in the academic context, there is likely to be a conscious and stated purpose for the reflection, with an outcome stated in terms of learning, action or clarification. In this context, it is likely to be preceded by a description of the purpose and /or the subject matter of the reflection. The process and outcome of reflective work is most likely to be written and to be seen by others and both of these factors may influence its nature.

## But where do the views of reflection in the literature fit in?

The literature on reflection is very diverse. You might feel that you are reviewing many different human activities that happen to have the same name – reflection – or is there a common idea lurking there, or an explanation as to how the ideas could fit together? The theoretical or applied views of reflection in general theoretical accounts of reflection in the literature seem to be more concerned with the ways in which reflection can be applied in order to produce a particular outcome. A few, like Dewey adopt the common-sense view and focus on reflection as a process. In the literature, many different outcomes of reflection are described and this different focus largely explains the vast diversity of the literature and the manner in which it has been complicated. From evidence of the literature, the following can be outcomes of reflective processes

- learning and material for further reflection;
- action;
- critical review;
- personal and continuing professional development;
- reflection on the process of learning or personal functioning (metacognition);
- the building of theory;
- decisions / resolutions of uncertainty;
- problem solving
- empowerment and emancipation;
- unexpected outcomes such as images, ideas (that could be solutions to dilemmas)
- ?emotional development ? in different forms?

(based on Moon, 1999)

Although 'learning' is deemed to be an outcome of reflection in its own right, we could say that all of the outcomes in the list are concerned with how we use learning and knowledge to achieve other purposes

## Emotion and Reflection

The role of emotion in reflection and learning seems to be a source of confusion in the literature. Texts about teaching and learning rarely do more than mention emotion and then sometimes only in its role as a block to learning. However, some would suggest that recognition of emotion is central to the process of reflection (eg Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985).

Emotion seems to be intimately involved in all psychological activity (Damasio, 2000) and not only reflection, though we may pay more attention to it in this mode. It is probably involved in the process of reflection in different ways –

- 'Emotional intelligence' – as the ability to manage the emotional states of others (ie – limit its meaning)
- **as part of the knowledge which is involved in reflection – eg** 'I know that I feel uneasy about this situation and therefore I will need to take it carefully and manage my feelings';
- **it is involved in the process of reflecting - eg** a feeling of unhappiness will tend to colour the manner which we reflect.
- **an outcome of reflection – arises from the process of reflecting - eg** I reflect on how it was when I was on holiday in a wonderful place – and as a result, feel more positive and optimistic about things
- **a potential inhibitor or facilitator of reflection – eg** I am feeling as if everything is flowing along nicely- and this helps me to reflect on my behaviour round my difficult parent more easily.
- **As a trigger for reflection**
- **and as the subject matter of reflective learning 'emotional insight' – eg** After an intimate talk with a friend, I somehow seem to see a difficult situation at work more clearly and can handle it better. I am not conscious of learning anything in particular.

(Moon, 2004).

## Learning and reflection

These are ways in which reflection might be involved in or enhance the process of learning:

- a) Reflection is part of learning – where there is new material of learning. It seems that reflection is involved in meaningful learning where the learner is seeking to make sense of new material for herself, linking it to what she knows already and if necessary, modifying her prior knowledge and understandings to accommodate the new ideas. An example here is when a student is trying to understand a new concept in ecology – such as population – and she needs to relate it to her field knowledge of biology. Rote learning does not involve reflection, is not flexible and does not enable the learner to grow in her capacity to work with knowledge.
- b) Reflection is associated with situations where there is no new material of learning – where we make sense of ideas (knowledge and understandings) that we have already learnt. The term 'cognitive housekeeping' captures some of the essence of this sorting out of ideas (Moon, 1999). The result of this reflective process is often the development of new ideas – in other words, more learning. An example here is where a student needs to evaluate her study skills over the past semester. She needs to recall difficulties and achievements and to relate them to the study ability that seems to be demanded by her level of work. It is not a straight-forward process, but one of moving around in different ideas.
- c) We learn from the representation of learning. When we represent learning in writing (for example), in a sense it becomes new material of learning and we can reinforce the learning or check our understanding of it, using it as a feedback system. The use of learning journals is an example of a method in which this mechanism is exploited.
- d) Reflection also facilitates learning by enhancing the conditions that seem to favour learning (Moon, 1999a). These include:
  - ◆ the provision of 'intellectual space' (Barnett, 1997), it slows the pace of learning,
  - ◆ the development of a sense of ownership of learning which has long been recognised as an important basis of learning (Rogers, 1969).
  - ◆ the development and improvement of the process of learning to learn. Students who achieve well are more often students who are aware of their own learning processes – their weaknesses and strengths (Ertmer and Newby, 1996).
  - ◆ In addition, reflective – or personally expressive writing seems sometimes to be more effective as a medium for learning (Elbow, 1973) and problem solving (Selfe and Arbabi, 1986).
  - ◆ Reflection probably helps the emotional side of learning in a general manner. In simplified terms, it could be said to support the development and maintenance of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995)
- e) We are suggesting that there is a form of non-verbal learning that we might call 'emotional insight' that seems to be supported by reflective activity
- f) Reflection engages the learner with the 'messy-ness' of learning as a process. The learner learns to cope with ill-structured material of learning.

## Factors that affect the quality of reflection

## **Depth of reflection – an exercise**

Some learners know what it means to reflect. Some do not. The best way in which to help a learner to understand reflection may not be to try to tell her – but to show her examples and ask her to work with them. This exercise (Appendix 1, 2) has the following purposes.

- it is relevant to you in helping you to understand the factors that are involved in reflection;
- it is relevant to your students as an exercise to help them to start with reflective writing;
- it is helpful as a means of demonstrating the deepening of reflection;
- in effect it act as a means of developing tools for the evaluation or assessment of reflective work.

## **The learner's conception of the structure of knowledge (epistemological development)**

In this part of the workshop, we work with ideas developed by a number of researchers about the development of their students' conceptions of or understandings of knowledge. Perry (1970), King and Kitchener, (1994) were researchers in this area. We work with the material of Baxter Magolda (1992) because her model for the development was simple and she provides many quotations from students in her book. You will see that there are factors in common between the ability to reflect deeply and the attainment of a relatively sophisticated stage in understanding of the nature of knowledge. This exercise may help you to understand why your students sometimes have difficulties with reflection (Appendix 3)

## **Practical issues in reflection**

### **Helping students to learn to reflect**

I said above that initially students may not understand what you want them to do when you ask them to write reflectively. Eventually they start writing, but it is a common observation that the reflection is very superficial. The following material is a two stage approach to presenting and then enabling students to deepen their reflective writing. Choose whatever exercises or approaches suit you or your group.

### **The first stage – presenting reflection:**

#### **What is reflection?**

Students need to know that they all can reflect, but that it may not be a habit that some use in a conscious manner. It can be helpful to give them a simple definition. For example, that reflection is a form of thinking that deals with more complex or unstructured issues in a considered manner. It may be a matter of 'making sense of ideas, or 're-ordering thoughts'. If students do not understand what it is to 'be reflective', it can be useful to almost trick them into being reflective for a moment. Do this by asking them, for example, to think and talk about what they have learnt most from recent experiences – such as from the past year of being in higher education. They are likely to be reflective.

In this discussion, it may be helpful to use the map of reflective writing (see Appendix 1) as an indication of the kind of events that might be involved in the process of reflection.

#### **Consider why reflection is being used to facilitate this area of learning?**

The response to this issue will depend on the purpose for the work in which reflection is involved. The answer might include the following:

- the idea that we use reflection in order to learn from situations in which there is no curriculum – but where we have to make sense of diverse observations, ideas and data as well as personal research (eg by asking questions).
- the idea that reflection is used to make sense of unstructured situations in order to generate new knowledge. It is important to be clear that the activity might be introducing the *skill* of reflective learning or *generating knowledge* by using reflection to make sense of something.

### **Consider how reflection differs from more familiar forms of learning**

We tend to use reflection when we are trying to make sense of how diverse ideas fit together, when we are trying to relate new ideas to what we already know or when new ideas challenge what we already know (ie taking a deep approach to learning). Reflection is the process we use when working with material that is presented in an unstructured manner – not organised and purified as in a traditional curriculum.

### **The issues around the use of the first person – ‘I’.**

Most students will have learnt that they should not use the first person singular in an academic environment. They can be confused if they are suddenly being encouraged to use ‘I’. It may be helpful here to talk about the manner in which knowledge is constructed with the involvement of the individual knower. The use of the first person can be an acknowledgement of this process.

### **Give examples of reflective writing – good and poor.**

Students find real examples of reflective writing, learning journals, even published work (fiction or biography) helpful. ‘The Park’ (Appendix 2) provides an example of reflective writing to which we will refer again later in this section. They are both sets of several accounts of the same event, written at different levels of reflectivity. Both examples provide some criteria that attempt to distinguish between the levels of reflection. At this stage of presenting reflection, it will be sufficient simply to present the accounts without the criteria and use them as a basis for discussion. Students can be asked which are the most reflective accounts and why and they can be asked for the bases on which they make their judgements. An important issue to stress is that reflection is not simply description of an event.

### **Generate discussion of students’ conceptions of reflection**

It is useful at some stage (perhaps as a spin-off from another activity) to encourage students to talk about what they think reflection is. This will provide an opportunity for misconceptions to come to light (eg due to cultural differences). For example, some students will consider that they only use reflection when something has gone wrong – deciding what could be done better next time. Some students from overseas will not have a word for ‘reflection’ in the sense used here, in their first languages and may need much more thorough discussion.

### **Enable practice on reflective writing and provide opportunities for feedback**

Students can be asked to reflect on their own performance in some activity (for example - in giving a 5 minute talk). They talk and then write a reflective account of how their performance went, weaknesses and strengths, assessment against their expectations, relationships to presentations given before etc. The impact of the activity can be increased if they are asked to write a descriptive account of their performance before they write reflectively. It is important not to give them the impression that reflection is simply evaluation of weaknesses or weaknesses and strengths.

### **Give a starting exercise that eliminates the blank page.**

Blank pages are threatening to many (thought exciting to some). It is a good idea to get students started on their reflective work by getting them to do some reflective writing before they know they have really started. This will mean the development of some structure such as questions that will stimulate reflective writing.

### **Have other tools available to help students to get started.**

There are plenty of exercises to encourage reflective writing. The use of these exercises in occasional class situations can help students to expand the areas in which they are thinking and to begin to deepen their reflection. Examples of activities are in Moon 1999 and Moon 1999a).

### **Expect to support some students more than others**

Some students will need much more support than others and they will not necessarily be the less able students. It may be possible to develop a system of peer support.

### **Be open about your need to learn about this form of learning and how to manage it**

Demonstrating that it is not only students who need to learn to reflect can be very helpful for staff and students. Staff might write a learning journal about the process of helping students to learn reflectively – and share elements of it with the students.

## **The second stage, deepening reflective work**

The deepening of reflective activity depends partly on developing awareness of the constructed nature of knowledge – understanding, for example:

- that events can be conceived of differently according to the frame of reference;
- of the role of emotions in guiding our conceptions of events or people;
- that different disciplines rely on different structures of knowledge and have different ways of working with knowledge.

### **Use examples to demonstrate deeper reflective activity**

We suggested the use of material such as 'The Park' in 'presenting reflection'. The focus now would be on the more sophisticated and deeper levels of reflection in each and the use of the associated criteria.

### **Introduce a framework that describes levels of reflection**

A newly developed framework (The Generic Framework for Reflective Writing) has been constructed resulted from staff work and with students' reflective writing (Appendix 3).

### **Introduce exercises that involve 'standing back from oneself'.**

Ask students write about their own processes of doing a complex activity using a semi-objective and critical stance. They might, for example, be asked to talk about and assess their own skills in their processes of learning something.

### **Introduce exercises that involve reflection on the same subject from different viewpoints of people / social institutions etc.**

Students could be asked to reflect (or talk / present) on an event in a shop from the point of view of the supervisor, customer, counter assistant, onlooker and so on. The aim is to help them to recognise that it is legitimate to have different frames of reference for the same event.

### **Introduce an exercise in reflection on the same subject from viewpoints of different disciplines**

In terms of different disciplinary standpoints, students might be asked to describe a child's pet dog from the point of view of practitioners in sociology, psychology, medical sciences, English, art and so on.

### **Introduce an exercise that involves reflection that is influenced by emotional reactions to events**

Students can be asked to describe a real or imaginary event and to write fictitious reflective accounts at periods after the event, each account illustrating a change of emotional orientation to the event. The important point here is that emotional state of a person influences the manner in which a subject is viewed. If the state changes, the view may change and completely different accounts may be written

at different times. This may need to be taken into account in making judgements or writing reflective accounts.

### **Collaborative methods of deepening reflection –eg critical friends and group, activities etc.**

Some of these methods involve small group or pair work. The groups will need to have common ideas about methods by which to deepen reflection and to see themselves as peer facilitators. The groups or pairs may work together over a period, learning how best to help each other by prompting and asking questions, querying frames of reference and so on.

### **Second-order reflection**

Second order reflection is represented in any technique that requires a student to look through previous reflective work and write a reflective overview. A convenient way to do this is the double entry journal. Students write only on one page of a double spread or on one half of a vertically divided page. They leave space blank until at another time, they go through the initial material writing generating further comments that emerge from their more coherent overview of the initial work.

## **Assessment issues in reflection**

### **Appendix 1 An Exercise on Reflection**

The aim of this exercise is to enable participants to see what reflective writing looks like, to recognise that reflection can vary in depth and that there is more potential for learning from deeper rather than superficial reflection. The exercise is developed in response to the observation that students, who are asked to reflect, tend to reflect rather superficially. In the exercise there are four accounts of an incident in a park. They are recounted by Annie, who was involved in the incident herself. The accounts are written at different depths of reflection.

### **Instructions for use of the exercise**

The procedure for the exercise is described as a group process, though it can be used individually. The process works best when it has a facilitator, who is not engaged in the exercise. It takes around an hour. It is important that the pages are not leafed through in advance, other than as instructed - and the exercise works better when people follow the instructions. In particular, they should not begin the discussions until everyone has read the relevant account. The facilitator needs to control this. The groups can be told that there are four accounts of an incident, and that they will be reading them one after the other, with time after each session of reading for discussion about the reflective content of the account.

- ◆ The exercise is introduced as means to demonstrate that there are different depths in reflection and that deeper reflection probably equates with better learning.
- ◆ Small groups are formed (no more than six in each).
- ◆ The groups are told to turn to the first account and read it quietly to themselves considering what features that they think are reflective.
- ◆ When it is evident that most people have read the first account, the groups are invited to discuss the account and identify where and how it is reflective. They are given about seven minutes for each discussion session. They may need less time for the earlier accounts.

- ◆ After the discussion session, the participants are asked to read the next account in the sequence (and they are reminded not to turn pages beyond the account in hand).
- ◆ After the last account has been read and discussed, groups are asked to go back through all of the accounts and to identify features of the reflection that progressively change through the accounts. For example, the accounts change from being 'story' to focusing on issues in the incident. In the later accounts there is more recognition that there are multiple perspectives etc. The groups are asked to list (eg on flip chart paper) the ways in which the accounts 'deepen'.
- ◆ In a plenary, the groups share their lists (as above) and discuss the whole exercise. It is at this stage that the participants can be referred to the Framework for Reflective Writing which provides a general guide to features in deepening reflection. The accounts are not intended to accord directly with the stages described.

If the exercise is used with staff and if they are likely to want to use it later with their own students, it is worth having spare copies available (participants tend to want to mark / underline text on their copies in this exercise).

## **The Park (1)**

I went through the park the other day. The sun shone sometimes but large clouds floated across the sky in a breeze. It reminded me of a time that I was walking on St David's Head in Wales – when there was a hard and bright light and anything I looked at was bright. It was really quite hot – so much nicer than the day before which was rainy. I went over to the children's playing field. I had not been there for a while and wanted to see the improvements. There were several children there and one, in particular, I noticed, was in too many clothes for the heat. The children were running about and this child became red in the face and began to slow down and then he sat. He must have been about 10. Some of the others called him up again and he got to his feet. He stumbled into the game for a few moments, tripping once or twice. It seemed to me that he had just not got the energy to lift his feet. Eventually he stumbled down and did not get up but he was still moving and he shuffled into a half sitting and half lying position watching the other children and I think he was calling out to them. I don't know.

Anyway, I had to get on to get to the shop to buy some meat for the chilli that my children had asked for for their party. The twins had invited many friends round for an end-of-term celebration of the beginning of the summer holidays. They might think that they have cause to celebrate but it makes a lot more work for me when they are home. I find that their holiday time makes a lot more work.

It was the next day when the paper came through the door – in it there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in hospital and they said that the seriousness of the situation was due to the delay before he was brought to hospital. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying unattended for half an hour before someone saw him. By then the other children had gone. It said that that several passers-by might have seen him looking ill and even on the ground and the report went on to ask why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong. The article was headed 'Why do they 'Walk on by'? I have been terribly upset since then. James says I should not worry – it is just a headline.

## **The Park (2)**

I went to the park the other day. I was going to the supermarket to get some meat to make the chilli that I had promised the children. They were having one of their end-of-term celebrations with friends. I wonder

what drew me to the playground and why I ended up standing and watching those children playing with a rough old football? I am not sure as I don't usually look at other people's children – I just did. Anyway there were a number of kids there. I noticed, in particular, one child who seemed to be very overdressed for the weather. I try now to recall what he looked like - his face was red. He was a boy of around 10 – not unlike Charlie was at that age – maybe that is why I noticed him to start with when he was running around with the others. But then he was beginning to look distressed. I felt uneasy about him – sort of maternal but I did not do anything. What could I have done? I remember thinking, I had little time and the supermarket would get crowded. What a strange way of thinking, in the circumstances!

In retrospect I wish I had acted. I ask myself what stopped me - but I don't know what I might have done at that point. Anyway he sat down, looking absolutely exhausted and as if he had no energy to do anything. A few moments later, the other children called him up to run about again. I felt more uneasy and watched as he got up and tried to run, then fell, ran again and fell and half sat and half lay. Still I did nothing more than look – what was going on with me?

Eventually I went on I tell myself now that it was really important to get to the shops. It was the next day when the paper came through the door that I had a real shock. In the paper there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in the hospital and the situation was much more serious because there had been such a delay in getting help. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying, unattended, for half an hour or more. At first, I wondered why the other children had not been more responsible. The article went on to say that several passers-by might have seen him playing and looking ill and the report questioned why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong.

The event has affected me for some days but I do not know where to go or whom to tell. I do want to own up to my part in it to someone though.

## **The Park (3)**

The incident happened in Ingle Park and it is very much still on my mind. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situations.

Reading the report, I felt dreadful and it has been very difficult to shift the feelings. I did not stop to see to the child because I told myself that I was on my way to the shops to buy food for a meal that I had to cook for the children's party – what do I mean that *I had to* cook it?. Though I saw that the child was ill, I didn't do anything. It is hard to say what I was really thinking at the time – to what degree I was determined to go on with my day in the way I had planned it (the party really was not that important was it?). Or did I genuinely not think that the boy was ill – but just over-dressed and a bit tired? To what extent did I try to make convenient excuses and to what extent was my action based on an attempt to really understand the situation? Looking back, I could have cut through my excuses at the time – rather than now.

I did not go over to the child and ask what was wrong but I should have done. I could have talked to the other children - and even got one of the other children to call for help. I am not sure if the help would have been ambulance or doctor at that stage – but it does not matter now. If he had been given help then, he might not be fighting for his life.

It would be helpful to me if I could work out what I was really thinking and why I acted as I did. This event has really shaken me to my roots – more than I would have expected. It made me feel really guilty. I do not

usually do wrong, in fact I think of myself as a good person. This event is also making me think about actions in all sorts of areas of my life. It reminds me of some things in the past as when my uncle died – but then again I don't really think that that is relevant - he was going to die anyway. My bad feelings then were due to sheer sadness and some irrational regrets that I did not visit him on the day before. Strangely it also reminds me of how bad I felt when Charlie was ill while we went on that anniversary weekend away. As I think more about Charlie being ill, I recognise that there are commonalities in the situations. I also keep wondering if I knew that boy....

## **The Park (4)**

It happened in Ingle Park and this event is very much still on my mind. It feels significant. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situation.

It was the report initially that made me think more deeply. It kept coming back in my mind and over the next few days - I begun to think of the situation in lots of different ways. Initially I considered my urge to get to the shop – regardless of the state of the boy. That was an easy way of excusing myself – to say that I had to get to the shop. Then I began to go through all of the agonising as to whether I could have mis-read the situation and really thought that the boy was simply over-dressed or perhaps play-acting or trying to gain sympathy from me or the others. Could I have believed that the situation was all right? All of that thinking, I now notice, would also have let me off the hook – made it not my fault that I did not take action at the time.

I talked with Tom, about my reflections on the event – on the incident, on my thinking about it at the time and then immediately after. He observed that my sense of myself as a 'good person who always lends a helping hand when others need help' was put in some jeopardy by it all. At the time and immediately after, it might have been easier to avoid shaking my view of myself than to admit that I had avoided facing up to the situation and admitting that I had not acted as 'a good person'. With this hindsight, I notice that I can probably find it more easy to admit that I am not always 'a good person' and that I made a mistake in retrospect than immediately after the event. I suspect that this may apply to other situations.

As I think about the situation now, I recall some more of the thoughts – or were they feelings mixed up with thoughts? I remember a sense at the time that this boy looked quite scruffy and reminded me of a child who used to play with Charlie. We did not feel happy during the brief period of their friendship because this boy was known as a bully and we were uneasy either that Charlie would end up being bullied, or that Charlie would learn to bully. Funnily enough we were talking about this boy – I now remember – at the dinner table the night before. The conversation had reminded me of all of the angonising about the children's friends at the time. The fleeting thought / feeling was possibly something like this:– if this boy is like one I did not feel comfortable with – then maybe he deserves to get left in this way. Maybe he was a brother of the original child. I remember social psychology research along the lines of attributing blame to victims to justify their plight. Then it might not have been anything to do with Charlie's friend.

So I can see how I looked at that event and perhaps interpreted it in a manner that was consistent with my emotional frame of mind at the time. Seeing the same events without that dinner-time conversation might have led me to see the whole thing in an entirely different manner and I might have acted differently. The significance of this whole event is chilling when I realise that my lack of action nearly resulted in his death – and it might have been because of an attitude that was formed years ago in relation to a different situation.

This has all made me think about how we view things. The way I saw this event at the time was quite different to the way I see it now – even this few days later. Writing an account at the time would have been different to the account – or several accounts that I would write now. I cannot know what 'story' is 'true'. The bullying story may be one that I have constructed retrospectively - fabricated. Interestingly I can believe that story completely.

## The deepening of reflection entails:

The following shifts:

- from description to reflective account
- from no questions to questions to responding to questions
- emotional influence is recognised, and then handled increasingly effectively
- there is a 'standing back from the event'
- self questioning, challenge to own ideas
- recognition of relevance of prior experience
- the taking into account of others' views
- metacognition - review of own reflective processes

## The Park: comments on the quality of reflection (towards a concept of depth in reflective writing).

**The Park (1)** *This piece tells the story. Sometimes it mentions past experiences, sometimes anticipates the future but all in the context of the account of the story. There might be references to emotional state, but the role of the emotions on action is not explored.*

*Ideas of others are mentioned but not elaborated or used to investigate the meaning of the events.*

*The account is written only from one point of view – that of Annie.*

*Generally ideas are presented in a sequence and are only linked by the story. They are not all relevant or focused*

*In fact – you could hardly deem this to be reflective at all. It is very descriptive. It could be a reasonably written account of an event that could serve as a basis on which reflection might start, though it hardly signals any material for reflection – other than the last few words*

**The Park (2)** *In this account there is a description of the same events. There is very little addition of ideas from outside the event – reference to attitudes of others, comments.*

*The account is more than a story though. It is focused on the event as if there is a big question to be asked and answered.*

*In the questioning there is recognition of the worth of exploring the motives for behaviour – but it does not go very far. In other words, asking the questions makes it more than a descriptive account, but the lack of attempt to respond to the questions means that there is little actual analysis of the events.*

*Annie is critical of her actions and in her questions, signals this. The questioning of action does mean that Annie is standing back from the event to a small extent. There is a sense that she recognises that this is a significant incident, with learning to be gained – but the reflection does not go sufficiently deep to enable the learning to begin to occur.*

**The Park (3)** *The description is succinct – just sufficient to raise the issues. Extraneous information is not added. It is not a story. The focus is on the attempt to reflect on the event and to learn from it. There is more of a sense of Annie standing back from the event in order to reflect better on her actions and in order to be more effectively critical.*

*There is more analysis of the situation and an evident understanding that it was not a simple situation – that there might be alternative explanations or actions that could be justified equally effectively.*

*The description could be said to be slightly narrow (see The Park (4)) as Annie is not acknowledging that there might be other ways of perceiving the situation – other points of view. She does not seem to be recognising that her reflection is affected by her frame of reference at the time or now. It is possible, for example, that her experience with Charlie (last paragraph) – or her question about knowing the boy have influenced the manner in which she reacted. It might not just be a matter of linking up other events, but of going beyond and checking out the possibility that her frame of reference might have been affected by the prior experiences.*

**The Park (4)** *The account is succinct and to the point. There is some deep reflection here that is self-critical and questions the basis of the beliefs and values on which the behaviour was based. There is evidence of standing back from the event, of Annie treating herself as an object acting within the context. There is also an internal dialogue – a conversation with herself in which she proposes and further reflects on alternative explanations. She shows evidence of looking at the views of others (Tom) and of considering the alternative point of view, and learning from it. She recognises the significance of the effect of passage of time on her reflection –eg that her personal frame of reference at the time may have influenced her actions and that a different frame of reference might have led to different results. She notices that the proximity of other, possibly unrelated events (the dinner-time conversation) have an effect either possibly on her actual behaviour and her subsequent reflection – or possibly on her reflective processes only. She notices that she can be said to be reconstructing the event in retrospect – creating a story around it that may not be 'true'. She recognises that there may be no conclusion to this situation – but that there are still things to be learnt from it. She has also been able to reflect on her own process of reflecting (acted metacognitively), recognising that her process influenced the outcome.*

**Exercise devised by Jenny Moon, Bournemouth University**

## **Appendix 2 A Generic Framework for Reflective Writing**

**Jenny Moon, Bournemouth University**

There are four 'levels' of depth of reflection described below. They do not necessarily accord directly with the accounts in exercises such as The Park or The Presentation – but provide a general guide.

### **Descriptive Writing**

This account is descriptive and it contains little reflection. It may tell a story but from one point of view at a time and generally one point at a time is made. Ideas tend to be linked by the sequence of the account / story rather than by meaning. The account describes what happened, sometimes mentioning past experiences, sometimes anticipating the future – but all in the context of an account of the event.

There may be references to emotional reactions but they are not explored and not related to behaviour.

The account may relate to ideas or external information, but these are not considered or questioned and the possible impact on behaviour or the meaning of events is not mentioned.

There is little attempt to focus on particular issues. Most points are made with similar weight.

The writing could hardly be deemed to be reflective at all. It could be a reasonably written account of an event that would serve as a basis on which reflection might start, though a good description that precedes reflective accounts will tend to be more focused and to signal points and issues for further reflection.

### **Descriptive account with some reflection**

This is a descriptive account that signals points for reflection while not actually showing much reflection.

The basic account is descriptive in the manner of description above. There is little addition of ideas from outside the event, reference to alternative viewpoints or attitudes to others, comment and so on. However, the account is more than just a story. It is focused on the event as if there is a big question or there are questions to be asked and answered. Points on which reflection could occur are signalled.

There is recognition of the worth of further exploring but it does not go very far. In other words, asking the questions makes it more than a descriptive account, but the lack of attempt to respond to the questions means that there is little actual analysis of the events.

The questioning does begin to suggest a 'standing back from the event' in (usually) isolated areas of the account.

The account may mention emotional reactions, or be influenced by emotion. Any influence may be noted, and possibly questioned.

There is a sense of recognition this is an incident from which learning can be gained, – but the reflection does not go sufficiently deep to enable the learning to begin to occur.

### **Reflective writing (1)**

There is description but it is focused with particular aspects accentuated for reflective comment. There may be a sense that the material is being mulled around. It is no longer a straight-forward account of an event, but it is definitely reflective.

There is evidence of external ideas or information and where this occurs, the material is subjected to reflection.

The account shows some analysis and there is recognition of the worth of exploring motives or reasons for behaviour

Where relevant, there is willingness to be critical of the action of self or others. There is likely to be some self questioning and willingness also to recognise the overall effect of the event on self. In other words, there is some 'standing back' from the event.

There is recognition of any emotional content, a questioning of its role and influence and an attempt to consider its significance in shaping the views presented.

There may be recognition that things might look different from other perspectives, that views can change with time or the emotional state. The existence of several alternative points of view may be acknowledged but not analysed.

In other words, in a relatively limited way the account may recognise that frames of reference affect the manner in which we reflect at a given time but it does not deal with this in a way that links it effectively to issues about the quality of personal judgement.

### **Reflective writing (2)**

Description now only serves the process of reflection, covering the issues for reflection and noting their context. There is clear evidence of standing back from an event and there is mulling over and internal dialogue.

The account shows deep reflection, and it incorporates a recognition that the frame of reference with which an event is viewed can change.

A metacognitive stance is taken (ie critical awareness of one's own processes of mental functioning – including reflection).

The account probably recognises that events exist in a historical or social context that may be influential on a person's reaction to them. In other words, multiple perspectives are noted.

Self questioning is evident (an 'internal dialogue' is set up at times) deliberating between different views of personal behaviour and that of others).

The view and motives of others are taken into account and considered against those of the writer.

There is recognition of the role of emotion in shaping the ideas and recognition of the manner in which different emotional influences can frame the account in different ways.

There is recognition that prior experience, thoughts (own and other's) interact with the production of current behaviour.

There is observation that there is learning to be gained from the experience and points for learning are noted.

There is recognition that the personal frame of reference can change according to the emotional state in which it is written, the acquisition of new information, the review of ideas and the effect of time passing.

**Material developed by Jenny Moon, (Moon 2004)**

## **Appendix 3 Baxter Magolda's Stages of Knowing**

This is based on Baxter Magolda, M (1992) *Knowing and Reasoning in College*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. Some of the material below is direct quotation.

### **Stage of Absolute Knowing**

In this stage knowledge is seen as certain or absolute. It is the least developed stage in Baxter Magolda's scheme. Learners believe that absolute answers exist in all areas of knowledge. When there is uncertainty it is because there is not access to the 'right' answers. Such learners may recognise that opinions can differ between experts but this is differences of detail, opinion or misinformation. Formal learning is seen as a matter of absorption of the knowledge of the experts (eg teachers). Learning methods are seen as concerning absorbing and remembering. Assessment is simply checking what the learner has 'acquired'.

### **Transitional stage**

There is partial certainty and partial uncertainty. Baxter Magolda describes the transitional knowing stage as one in which there are doubts about the certainty of knowledge – learners accept that there is some uncertainty. Authorities may differ in view because there is uncertainty. Learners see themselves as needing to understand rather than just acquire knowledge so that they may make judgements as to how best to apply it. Teachers are seen as facilitating the understanding and the application of knowledge and assessment concerns these qualities, and not just acquisition.

### **Independent knowing**

Learning is uncertain – everyone has her own beliefs. Independent knowers recognise the uncertainty of knowledge, and feel that everyone has her own opinion or beliefs. This would seem to be an embryonic form of the more sophisticated stage of contextual knowing. The learning processes are changed by this new view because now learners can expect to have an opinion and can begin to think through issues and to express themselves in a valid manner. They also regard their peers as having useful contributions to make. They will expect teachers to support the development of independent views, providing a context for exploration.

However 'In the excitement over independent thinking, the idea of judging some perspectives as better or worse is overlooked' (Baxter Magolda 1992:55).

### **Contextual knowing**

Knowledge is constructed and any judgement must be made on the basis of the evidence in that context. This stage is one in which knowledge is understood to be constructed, but the way in which knowledge is constructed is understood in relation to the consideration of the quality of knowledge claims in the given context. Opinions must now be supported by evidence. The view of the teacher is of a partner in the development of appropriate knowledge.

## **Conceptions of Knowledge Exercise**

The exercise is based on material taken from Baxter Magolda, M (1992) *Knowing and Reasoning in College*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. Some of the quotations are slightly modified to make better sense.

### **Absolutist –knowledge is certain or absolute;**

I just like to listen – just sit and take notes from an overhead. The material is right there. And if you have a problem, you can ask the teacher and he can explain it to you. You hear it, you see it and then you can write it down (p 73)

I like getting involved with the class – by answering questions and asking questions. Even if you think you know everything, there are still questions you can ask. When the lecturer asks questions, you can try to answer them to your best ability. Don't just let the lecturer talk to you, have him present questions to you (p 73)

I have to see what I'm learning, and I have to know why. I have a good memory and it's very easy for me to memorise facts. The advantage is that it's kind of cut and dried. The information is there – all you have to do is to soak it up in your brain (p77).

I like teachers who will give you as much as you need and not just leave you with a little small idea and have you talk it out. I like it when they give you a lot of information. Then you can discuss it (p31)

In my opinion, the best way to learn is to listen in class and not be distracted (p34)

### **Transitional knowing – There is partial certainty and partial uncertainty**

My French teacher is getting away from the book exercises because everyone falls asleep. She's started getting us into group discussions using our reading, but she corrects our tenses and sentence structure. It's much more real, much more practical and I think that's what we need. People are glad to be learning something that we can actually use (p 39)

When you've got fifty other people in the room challenging your views every ten seconds, you learn to assimilate everything. You try to piece out what you think is the best out of a conglomerate whole. That's the best (p105)

I had a different teacher in the sophomore level of the subject, and I learned to interpret things differently. When you have someone else give you a different interpretation of the same subject, you're forced to go back and do comparisons. And I thought, well, why would this person teach this subject this way and be successful and at the same time there's a person teaching it in a different way but still being successful? It begins to change you a bit (p103).

We'd start a class having read the material and then the lecturer would walk in and say something completely wrong. A shout would break out from the back of the class and we'd just start knocking at each other going back and forth at the same topic for the entire class period. Doing that just ingrains in your mind that no matter how right you think you are, you've got to hear somebody else out because they're to some extent right too (p105)

I have a tutor this semester who puts an outline on the board, of things he's going to cover. That way, even if I don't have the clearest notes – at least I know what he intended to cover.

## **Independent knowing – Learning is uncertain – everyone has her own beliefs**

I've decided that the only person that you can really depend on is yourself. Each individual has their own truth. No-one has the right to decide 'this has to be your truth too' (p136)

I don't set anything that I feel in cement, which is what I did before. I've found that my foundations completely crumbled out from under me when I went on that exchange programme. I had to rebuild them for myself, which is the best thing that ever happened to me (p 137)

I want to be challenged. I am in a gender theory course that has a lot of women's studies students in it. There I feel challenged. My own politics are closely like theirs, but I don't have the background that they have. When I speak up, I have to really concentrate on what I think, communicate it effectively, and then when there's a discrepancy between what I think and what someone else thinks then I feel I can grow (p53)

It's funny. You read the same thing yet people see three different stories or three different meanings or interpretations. It helps you to reaffirm your own opinion, modify it or whatever is necessary (p50)

I guess I take everything in and then I go home at night and kind of sort out what I want and what I don't want. Some things, I guess – maybe because of my morals and values – will sit better with me and will seem like fact for me. And other things, I'm just like "I don't really think so". And I throw them out (p141)

## **Contextual knowing — Knowledge is constructed and any judgement must be made on the basis of the evidence in that context.**

As you hear other people's opinions, you piece together what you really think. Who has the valid point? Whose point is not valid in your opinion? And (you) come to some other new understanding. Even if it's the same basic belief, maybe (you will be) able to look at it from a more (multi)dimensional perspective (p173).

I spent time getting a general feel for the topic as a whole before I made any generalisations. And then, after that, I started piecing together any general ideas that I believed in or general principles that I then tried to defend...And if it seemed like I was going against that principle too often or disagreeing with it too often, then I would sit down and reevaluate. Like maybe I'd learned something new that changed my way of thinking. So then I'd have to sit down and reevaluate that and then possibly change my mind accordingly (p174)

It's super-subjective. It is largely a matter of weighing other people's opinions and their facts against what you, yourself, have previously processed (p59)

In some classes, particularly when you're talking politics, you have people that are super-fired up on the left and on the right. Those people who are totally impassioned by their thoughts and feelings help to offset each

other, so you can kind of arrive at something in the middle. You have then to take it in and let it process before you form a reaction (p59)

You can look at an issue from both sides and it's still history and you're still getting those facts and those different opinions about things and that's a kind of basis. But now you're taking that and working with it to come up with some sort of conclusion, or maybe not a conclusion and that's the conclusion in itself (p177)

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### **Thinkpoint:**

Harry stared at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original silvery white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze.

"What is it?" Harry asked shakily.

"This? It is called a pensieve", said Dumbledore. "I sometimes find, and I am sure that you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind."

"Er", said Harry, who couldn't truthfully say that he had ever felt anything of the sort.

"At these times", said Dumbledore, indicating the stone basin, "I use the pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one's mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one's leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form".

J.K Rowling *The Goblet of Fire*, Bloomsbury (2000:pp518 – 519)