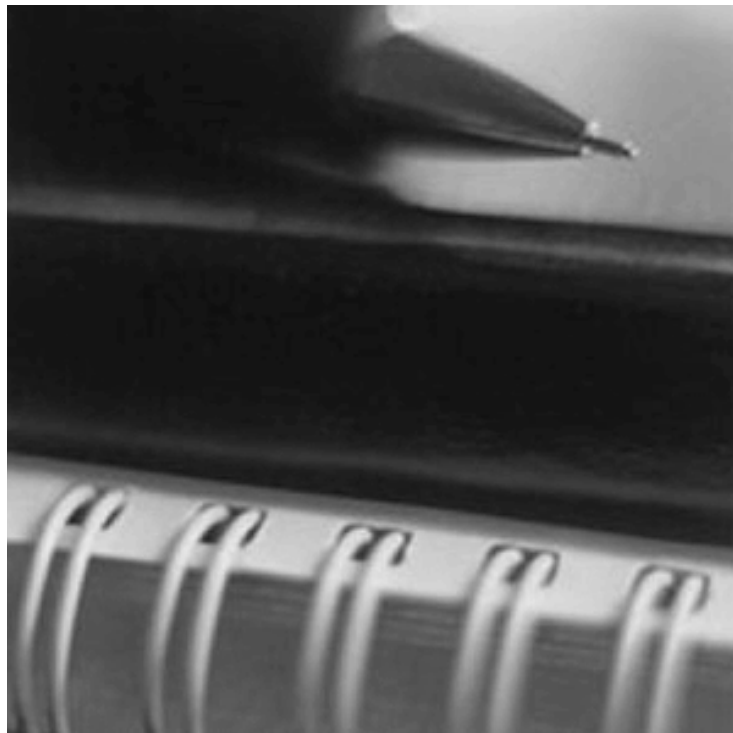


# LEARNING AND TEACHING GUIDES

## Developing Skills in Critical Reflection Through Mentoring Stories

Angela Tomkins



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## Developing Skills in Critical Reflection Through Mentoring Stories

### Introduction

*"We do not learn from experience. Experience has to be arrested, examined, analysed, considered and negotiated in order to shift it to knowledge"*

Aitchison and Graham cited in Stroobants et al (2007:30)

A central aspect of the process of Personal Development Planning (PDP) is the ability of students to be able to explore aspects of their learning, reflect on how and what they are learning and, on the basis of this reflection, to plan for positive change. This guide has been produced to help students to understand this process of critical reflection through the development of their mentoring skills. It supports trainee mentors by encouraging them to 'capture' and investigate peer mentoring experiences with a view to enhancing their personal and professional development in this context. This notion of 'capturing' opportunities as expressed by Aitchison and Graham suggests that:

*"We do not learn from experience. Experience has to be arrested, examined, analysed, considered and negotiated in order to shift it to knowledge."* cited in

Stroobants et al (2007:30)

To enable this process to take place successfully the following factors should be considered:

- A theoretical framework for explaining the reflective process and developing the skills of reflective thinking and writing.
- The opportunity for active engagement in the learning process.
- Tools and techniques for encouraging and developing the reflective process.

A central focus of the guide is the significance of storytelling and how stories, developed within peer mentoring activities, can be developed to demonstrate the links between reflection, learning and 'learning through storytelling'. Further, the guide describes 'catalysts' for learning in the form of learning inventories. The techniques used in this guide can be applied to a wide variety of contexts that, when used thoughtfully, will

improve critical thinking skills so that students may be more effective in developing skills in analysis and argument.

On completion of the guide students should be able to:

1. Make more sense of learning experiences in a peer mentoring context so that they may be able to understand themselves, their skills and their personal attributes more clearly.
2. Prepare 'critical stories' which demonstrate reflective learning and critical thinking skills within the context of peer mentoring.
3. Develop 'critical stories' for use in employability contexts.
4. Build on such knowledge for future development and growth.

## **Structure of the guide**

### **Part One The Theoretical Framework for the Approach**

Section A An Introduction to a Theoretical Framework for Reflective Learning and the Role of Storytelling in this Process

Section B Experiential Learning – Opportunity for Reflective Practice in the Peer Mentoring Relationship

Section C Tools and Techniques to Support Reflective Practice

### **Part Two Outline of Activities**

Stage 1 Story Finding. Setting a personal and professional development goal for mentoring.

Stage 2 Storytelling. Describing and deconstructing. What is happening in working towards achieving the personal and professional development goal within the peer mentoring context?

Stage 3 Story Expanding. Searching for meaning in developing this goal.

Stage 4 Story Processing. Working with these meanings to clarify the learning that is taking place.

Stage 5 Story Reconstruction. Identifying new learning and its application for future action.

## Part 1

### Section A

#### **An Introduction to a Theoretical Framework for Reflective Learning through Storytelling**

Early theories on reflective learning indicated that 'perceived difficulties or conflicts amongst learners' (Dewey 1933) could appropriately be used as catalysts for the reflective process. As the theory of reflective practice has developed so too has interest in the relationship between reflection and subsequent action as explained by process models including 'single' and 'double loop' learning (Schon 1983, Kolb 1984, Gibbs 1988, Mezirow 1991, Argyris and Schon 2003). Most recently, academic attention has focused on innovative approaches for capturing reflective processes to enable effective personal development: (Stroobants 2007) This has been brought about by an increasing recognition that students benefit from being able to demonstrate the ability to reflect on their learning, to develop future actions from it and to apply this learning appropriately.

The reflective process is best supported when a number of considerations are woven into the process. In this illustration, final year undergraduates undertake a mentoring module and experience the role of the 'reflective practitioner' by focusing on their role as mentors to first year undergraduates. This is a sound example of 'active learning'. Students engage in a series of staged activities incorporated into the module design which provide opportunities to consider aspects of personal and professional development as they develop the knowledge and skills required for mentoring practice. Reflection is key to this process. Cottrell (2003) suggests that reflection is associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding and includes the following elements:

- Making sense of experience - involving learning.
- Standing back - gaining a better view or perspective.
- Repetition - going over something several times.
- Deeper honesty - critical stories can involve us having to be honest with ourselves.
- Weighing up - we need to take all factors into account, and going through several stages can help in this.

- Clarity - critical thinking involves achieving greater clarity and depth of analysis. Understanding this is crucial to reflective storytelling and can help to lead to transformative learning and new and deeper ways in gaining insights and understanding knowledge and the self.
- Making judgements - drawing conclusions and making judgements on events.

A central principle of the approach is the importance of seeking deeper meanings from experience. This 'deep learning' can be developed through the process of creating and sharing stories about practice. Storytelling provides a useful tool for capturing and developing the reflective process as it is unfolding within the peer mentoring process. The guide outlines an adapted model for 'learning through storytelling' based on the work of Drury and Alterio (2003) and includes a set of activities for developing stories which support students to enhance their knowledge, skills and attributes in this context. The skill of becoming a more reflective and critical writer (and thinker) therefore involves moving from description of events (what happened) to analysis of learning from that story. McDrury and Alterio (2003:38) reinforce the value of reflective storytelling and story writing by suggesting that:

*“When we tell stories and process them, using reflective dialogue, we create the possibility for changes in ourselves and others. Our capacity to express ourselves through narrative forms not only enables us to reshape, reassess and reconstruct particular events, it allows us to learn from discussing our experiences with individuals who may raise alternative views, suggest imaginative possibilities and ask stimulating questions.....Through dialogue shaped to explore experiences in depth multiple perspectives can emerge.”*

## Section B

### Experiential Learning: Opportunity for Reflective Practice in the Peer Mentoring Relationship

In designing the approach the following factors, adapted from Beard cited in, (© PDP book 2009 currently in print) were addressed:

- Creating a sense of a learning journey for students within the context of a peer mentoring relationship.
- Creating and sequencing an array of intellectually and emotionally stimulating activities.
- Using the notion of constructing or deconstructing activities within mentoring practice using the storytelling technique;
- Creating and managing a small learning community through collaboration with peers (typically between first and final year undergraduates).
- Creating and acknowledging feelings, values, ground rules, restrictions and allowing students to address change, success and failure.
- Developing functional mentoring skills alongside specific course content.
- Allowing quiet time for reflection.
- Allowing the story of the learning experience to be told by the learners in the form of reflective exercises and reflective stories.

A useful vehicle for reflective practice is the peer mentoring relationship. Raelin (2000) comments that there is great value in reflection on actual work practices and that it is not simply about gaining knowledge and skills but about reflecting from and learning as an outcome of that experience. He goes on to highlight the value of peer support where it can be seen as:

*“a shared and collective activity in which students discuss issues, problems and their solutions.”*

Peer support stimulates new ideas through collaborative learning and is a valuable means of confidence building, enabling students to share differing perspectives on

mentoring experiences. Such collaborative learning is a constructive means of building confidence and working with others and also provides an incentive to commit and to improve confidence.

## **Section C – Tools and Techniques to Support Reflective Practice**

### **Learning Through Storytelling**

Stories are a fundamental part of life used on a daily basis as a means of self-expression and as a way to make sense of life (Weick 1995). They are an integral part of our social lives and the way in which we communicate ourselves and indeed, our identity, to the world. Stories are also a natural and socially engaging part of life and have many functions including the opportunities inherent in them for thinking and for engaging minds in active listening (Gariulo 2006).

The links between learning and storytelling build on the work of Moon (2000) on critical reflection. Moon's 'map of learning' is a means of locating reflection through the process of learning (Moon 2000:148). It demonstrates the stages in the reflective learning process as a five stage model.

1. Noticing (memorised representation);
2. Making sense (reproduction ideas – ideas not well linked);
3. Making meaning (meaningful, well integrated, ideas linked);
4. Working with meaning (meaningful reflective, well structured);
5. Transformative learning (meaningful, reflective, restructured by learner-idiosyncratic or creative). A model developed by Mc Drury and Alterio's (2003) 'Links between learning and storytelling' maps the levels leading to reflective learning indicated in Moon's map of to learning through storytelling as shown in Table (i).

### **Table (i)**

Stages of learning through storytelling	Map of Learning (Moon 1999)
Stage 1 Story finding	Noticing
Stage 2 Storytelling	Making sense
Stage 3 Story expanding	Making meaning
Stage 4 Story processing	Working with meaning
Stage 5 Story reconstructing	Transformative learning

‘Links between learning and storytelling’ Mc Drury and Alterio (2003:47)

### **Adapting the model for the peer mentoring context**

This guide moves the process on to a further stage by maintaining the academic integrity of Moon and Mc Drury and Alterio’s work and adapting their model for use in the context of peer mentoring. The adapted model is shown in table (ii).

Table (ii)

Stages of leaning through storytelling	Map of Learning (Moon 1999)	The peer mentoring context
Stage 1 Story Finding	Noticing	Setting a personal development goal within the peer mentoring context
Stage 2 Storytelling	Making sense	Describing and deconstructing – what is happening in working towards achieving the goal?
Stage 3 Story Expanding	Making meaning	Searching for meaning in developing this goal
Stage 4 Story Processing	Working with meaning	Working with these meanings to clarify the learning that is taking place
Stage 5 Story Reconstructing	Transformative learning	Identifying new learning and its application for future action

### Learning Inventories

An important factor in the early stages of the reflective process is to provide a catalyst for such learning to begin. This equates with Stage 1 of the model, ‘Story finding (Noticing) - Setting a personal development goal within the peer mentoring context’.

Two learning inventories are suggested for use in this context. Both inventories are self assessment tools and incur a cost. Learning inventories are used as such ‘trigger points’ in the early stages of the module and are of value because they:

1. Help students to set a personal development goal as a focus for their reflections during the mentoring process;
2. Introduce the concepts and language of reflective learning.

The first learning inventory is the **Temple Index of Functional Fluency (TIFF)**. This tool encourages self awareness and understanding to enhance and promote emotional literacy and is concerned with the ability to manage relationships. Its purpose is to enhance the mentoring skills of students and its rationale is based on the premise that good peer support and mentoring occurs through emotional competence and effective learning relationships and the skill of the mentor in managing them. The tool is based on a model called “Functional Fluency” which is described as ‘the art and skill of interpersonal effectiveness. Further details about this model can be found at <http://www.functionalfuency.com/> By helping to identify positive ways of responding to each other the tool helps to promote effective communication. As Temple (2004) states:

*“The term functional fluency denotes efficacy of interpersonal functioning: by which is meant a seamless integration of a wide range of effective ways of behaving that supports the ability to build positive relationships.”*

The second learning inventory is the **Emotional and Social Competence Inventory-University Edition (ESCI-U)**. This inventory has been developed by the Hay Group, based on Goleman’s (2007) work on emotional intelligence. It is designed to be used by university students as a self-assessment tool, although some background to the topic and the contribution the inventory can make to understanding oneself is important (the workbook is very useful in this respect). Students complete the self-assessment questionnaire which contains 70 statements about specific attributes or dimensions of emotional competence in four main clusters of dimensions, one of which is relationship management as well as recently added cognitive competencies. Students have to indicate how much they think each statement describes their behaviour and then they complete each of the ‘discovery’ sections and consider in particular the relationship management aspect of the inventory.

## **Conclusion**

Reflective learning is an important aspect of the PDP process. It has been argued that reflection is enhanced by the presence of a number of factors including active learning situations such as mentoring practice which provides a useful context in which this reflection can occur. Tools and techniques are suggested to further support this process namely, 'learning through storytelling', built into the activities of the module. Inventories provide a useful catalyst for personal and professional development at the beginning of both the module and the reflective process. This approach therefore offers several opportunities to encourage students to better understand their own learning processes and, in so doing, relate these to their own self development and to future employability.

## Part 2 Outline of Activities – Guidance for Mentors

### Stage 1: Story Finding - Setting a Personal and Professional Development Goal within the Peer Mentoring Context.

The purpose of this section is to help you find an appropriate starting point for a story about your development as a peer mentor. One place to start is with a 'curiosity' about your interpersonal effectiveness in relation to working with other people. The peer mentoring context is a good example of a situation where interpersonal effectiveness is crucial to success. This 'curiosity' can come from your insights as a result of undertaking personal inventories such as the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI-U) or The Temple Index of Functional Fluency (TIFF). Your tutor will tell you more about these tools and how to use them. If you are not using a personal inventory you may already be aware of aspects of your behaviour with others which you want to investigate. One example could be that you want to become more assertive in your relationship with your mentee. Another example could be that you want to improve your listening skills. Often our behaviours are associated with emotions/feelings which can range from experiences such "I felt I handled the situation really well" to "I am not quite sure what I should be doing in this situation". When considering personal development it is important to 'tune into' our emotions as these are **our internal barometer** and are indicators of when things are going well, when they going wrong or when experiences and self- awareness indicate that we might wish to change behaviour in some way. For this reason our internal barometer is an excellent way for us to learn something more about 'the way we tick' and the more we know about this the more likely we are to know ourselves, how we learn and ultimately what would be in our best interests in relation to our personal and professional development.

### **Activity 1 Postcard Stories**

This exercise is adapted from McDrury and Alterio (2003:68) and refers to finding an appropriate starting place for the development of your story about your interpersonal effectiveness within the peer mentoring context. Check with your tutor to ensure you are selecting appropriate ideas to work with.

Now use the following 'starter' to help you write a 'postcard' to your tutor giving a brief synopsis, in no more than 50 words, of an aspect of your interpersonal effectiveness which you would like to investigate as you practice the skills of becoming a mentor.

To enhance my interpersonal effectiveness as a mentor I would like to.....

## **Stage 2: Storytelling - Describing and Deconstructing. What is Happening in Working Towards Achieving the Personal and Professional Development Goal within the Peer Mentoring Context?**

### **Activity 2 - The 'Diamond Exercise'**

This exercise is adapted from McDrury and Alterio (2003:75) and requires you to work collaboratively with two other trainee mentors within your group (i.e. your 'learning group'). It is designed to help you begin your story about how you are learning to develop your interpersonal effectiveness.

You begin by working independently. Using your postcard story from activity 1, now think about 9 aspects of this personal goal that are meaningful for you within the context of your mentoring practice to date and write one aspect on each of 9 strips of paper. You could focus on situations that have happened to you in your peer mentoring activities, an emotion associated with the story etc. Arrange the strips in the pattern of a diamond starting with the most significant aspect of the story at the top of the diamond and the least important aspect at the bottom. Now consider the following questions. Why was the strip you placed at the top of the diamond the most significant aspect of this story for you? How have you arranged the various facets of your story and why have you arranged them in this way?

Take 2 minutes to note what you have learned from this activity and record your thoughts about this exercise in bullet point form below:

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### **Stage 3: Story Expanding. Searching for Meaning in Developing this Goal**

This exercise, adapted from Mc Drury and Alterio (2003:89), should be conducted within your learning group. The main purpose of the activity is for each member of the group, in turn, to share their key observations from activity 2. Whilst one member of the group listens and asks questions, the third member acts as an observer. The skills that you can develop from this activity are:

1. Listening skills
2. Questioning skills
3. Collaborative learning

### **Activity 3: Sharing Stories**

#### ***Listener activity***

The listener asks questions such as, why are these points important to you as you develop your skills in mentoring. The following questions can help the dialogue to begin. What happened during your mentoring practice which helped you to think about the development of your goal? How did you feel? How did your mentee react? Why do you think things happened the way they did?

The listener then retells the story as they heard it to the other two members of the group.

#### ***Teller activity***

The teller draws on details revealed during this activity and expands and clarifies their story.

#### ***Observer activity***

The observer listens to what is going on and makes brief notes to feed back at the end of the session.

### **Stage 4: Story Processing - Working with these Meanings to Clarify the Learning that is Taking Place**

This section is about using your imagination to widen your story concerning the development of your interpersonal effectiveness as a mentor. As a result of the next

activity you will be able to extract new and multiple meanings from your story. One way to do this is to think about your story in creative ways. In *The Art of Storytelling*, Moffat gives the following tips on how to tell stories:

- Remember that the brain has two halves: left and right.
- Stories have the capacity to appeal to each side of the brain but they do seem to engage the right brain particularly.
- Develop the art of storytelling so that the brain has a chance to receive, store and analyse your messages.
- Encourage the brain to be triggered by the use of your senses (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory references).
- Think about using the power of metaphor.

#### **Activity 4: Sparking Deeper Thinking**

Taking these tips 'on board' we now need to consider the art of storytelling further. Begin with a **straightforward linear story**. This means developing a basic plot involving a small number of characters. These characters are likely to be your mentee, your tutor, your friends etc. To create a good story about how you are learning about yourself in the mentoring context you need to begin with a 'bare bones' plot! This approach will enable you to expand your story. You should put yourself at the centre of your story where you play the key role of the reflective learner.

You should consider the following questions:

1. In which context did this story take place?
2. Who are the main characters?
3. What were the main actions that took place?
4. What were the key turning points or landmarks in your story?
5. Are there any images, photographs, metaphors etc which you associate with this story, for example, our ideas 'snowballed' or, "every cloud has a silver lining"!!!  
You can play with these ideas as much as you like as well as enjoying the activity.

This key information will stimulate creativity in your thinking and either trigger recall or prompt easy re-creation of the story. Now begin the next activity.

Now write down the key points of the story so far. Remember to record any emotions associated with the story as demonstrated in the following example below:

### **Learning to Mentor**

I am training to be a mentor.

I want to develop my skills in being assertive. Equally I want to be as supportive as possible so I need to know what assertiveness means in the context of mentoring.

I have never had to do this before so it is challenge.

I am preparing for my first mentoring session and I am feeling slightly nervous. Will we get on, will she be willing to learn, do I know enough?

From my understanding of mentoring I know we have to agree some goals for our first mentoring session.

There is so much to think about!

I have read a chapter on what being assertive means and why it is important to empower my mentee to learn for herself.

I think I know more about what being a passive person means at this stage.

What would my mentee think if she knew I had never done this before?

I asked my tutor for help.

Then I chatted to my housemates about what assertiveness meant.

When I met my mentee I decided to tell her that I was also learning – she welcomed my openness.

It felt like we were ‘in it together’ and this was a great starting point for her to decide what she wanted to achieve.

This got our relationship off to a good start

My confidence grew from this experience

Now write your own ‘bare bones’ plot for your mentoring story using key points like those shown in the example above.

## **Theories of Learning - 'Swampy Low Ground' and 'Hard High Ground'**

To continue the journey in processing stories we will now consider the work of Schon (1983). We are aware of his ideas of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. Schon differentiated between 'hard high ground' and 'swampy low ground' as cited in Mc Drury and Alterio (2003:107). In their view the 'swampy low ground' is where there is constant change (this is most likely to occur through reflection-in-action, for example what is happening during your mentoring practice sessions) and the hard high ground is a place where competence and confidence develop (this is most likely to occur through reflection-on-action, for example after your mentoring session has taken place). To learn from previous actions requires a deep level of evaluation and reflection and your continuing mentoring practice gives you fertile ground to work from.

Atkins and Murphy (1993) cited in and paraphrased by McDrury and Alterio (2002:109) identified 5 key requirements for reflection as follows:

1. Self awareness (particularly of feelings surrounding an event).
2. Description of the event
3. Critical analysis which means the relevance of existing knowledge, challenging assumptions and imagining alternatives. It does not mean being critical by finding fault.
4. Synthesis which means the finding of new meanings and new perspectives
5. Evaluation which means "making judgements about the value of something".

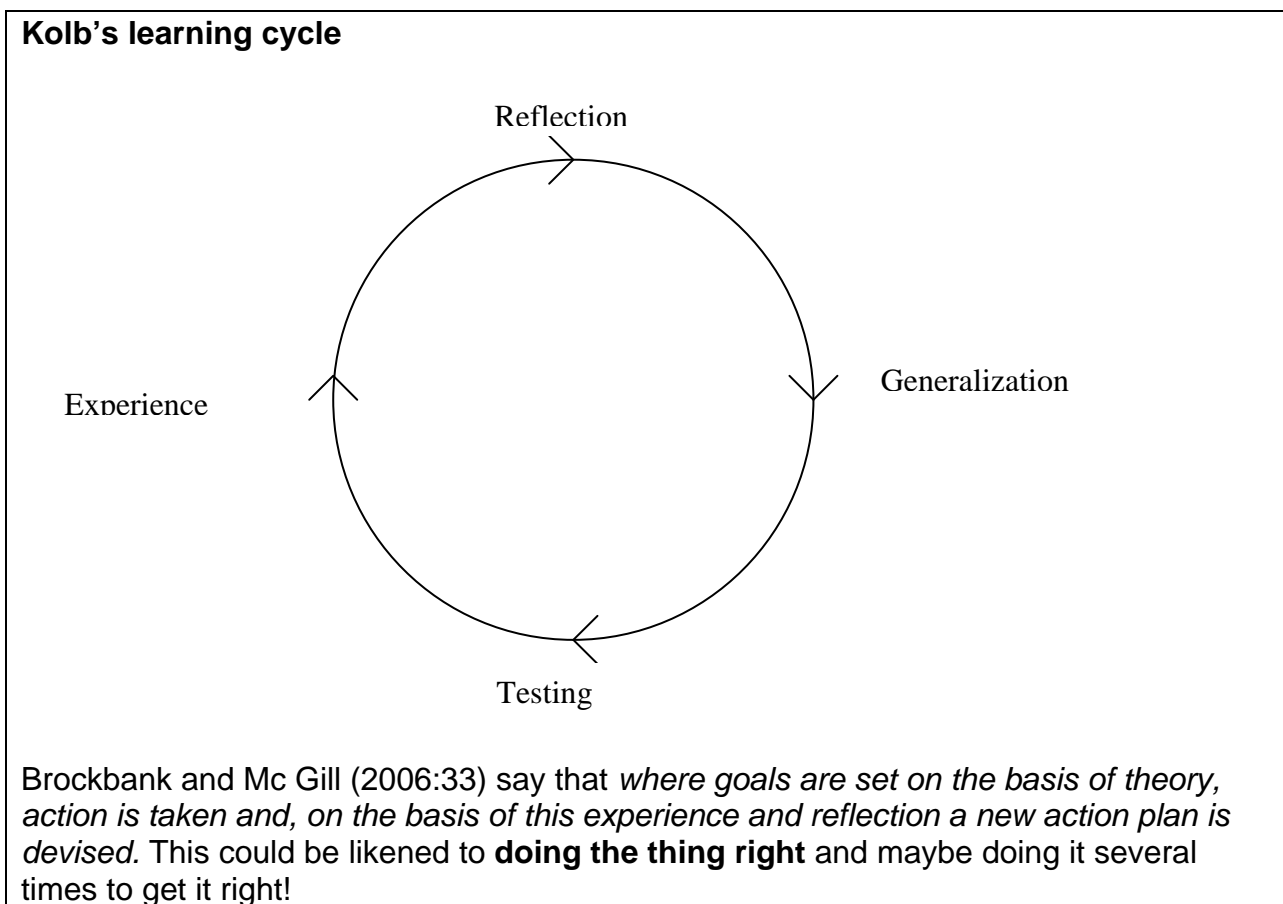
By undertaking the earlier activities in this guide you have addressed the first three stages of Atkins and Murphy's model. The remaining part of this guide to critical storytelling will address the two remaining points of the model and, most particularly, theories of learning through storytelling.

## **Single and Double Loop Learning**

Argyris and Schon, cited in Brookbank and Mc Gill (2006:33), discuss two types of learning, namely 'single loop' and 'double loop' learning. Single loop learning was originally identified by Kolb (1984). He states that the learning process often begins with someone undertaking a particular action and then observing the effect of that action in a particular situation. The next step is to understand these effects in the particular

instance so that if the same action is taken again in the same circumstances it is possible to anticipate the result. In other words, we can generalise that there is a connection between actions and effects. For example if we wished to observe our skills in listening in the mentoring context we could make an observation that we spent too much time talking and not enough time paying attention to what the mentee was saying. After reflection on this behaviour and why it may not be particularly effective we could then 'test' the outcome of saying less and listening more in subsequent mentoring sessions. The latter step involves application to a new set of circumstances and the possibility, on reflection, of doing something differently next time around. It is often depicted as a single loop but already we can see the potential for changed behaviour when circumstances change. Please see Figure 1.

Figure 1

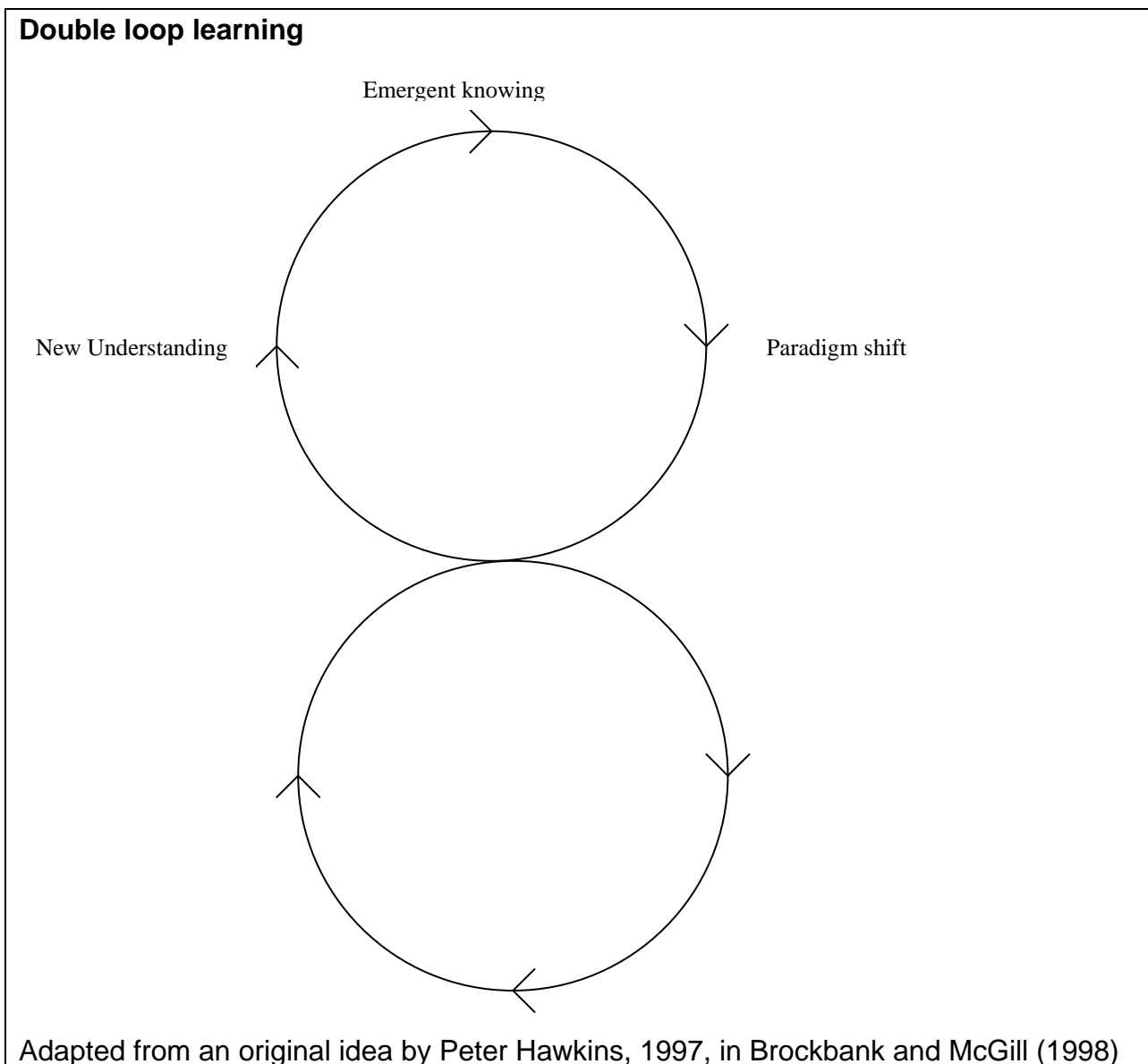


In the mentoring context there is a need for continuous improvement and doing the thing right may not be sufficient when we consider the complexity of human interaction so we may need to 'think outside the box'. This implies not just doing the thing right but

also **doing the right thing**. This process can be explained by the 'double loop learning model' (shown below). This model is taken from Brockbank and McGill (2006:35) who have adapted the 1997 work of Peter Hawkins. In double loop learning (see Figure 2 below) the assumptions we make and those things we 'take for granted' are questioned with a view to improvement. In Brockbank and McGill's (2006:34) words:

*"New knowledge is created when the tacit is made explicit and crystallised into an innovation that is a recreation of some aspect of the world according to some new insight or ideal".*

**Figure 2**



**Stage 5: Story Reconstruction.**

**Identifying New Learning and its Application for Future Action**

*“Our capacity to express ourselves through narrative forms not only enables us to reshape, reassess and reconstruct particular events, it allows us to learn from discussing our experiences with individuals who may raise alternatives, suggest imaginative possibilities and ask stimulating questions.”*

McDrury and Alterio (2002:55)

**Activity 5: Reconstructing Your Story – New Levels of Learning**

*“...the power of the story does not depend on its connection to the world outside the story but in its openness for negotiating meaning.” Czarniaswska (2004:9)*

“Critically evaluate what you have learned about yourself through telling your mentoring story and reviewing it? Write down your reflections on this activity in no more than 250 words”

The purpose of this final activity is to record your critical reflections by re-examining your mentoring story, deconstructing it in light of experiences with the process of writing it, telling it and reflecting from several perspectives. You are then required to write a critical reflection about your story telling ‘journey’ to show **how and what you have learned** from this exercise and how you could adapt your skills and knowledge for future mentoring situations. You should consider what personal insights this exercise has given you about your approach to your personal and professional development. You may find it helpful to share your story with a member of your learning group, thinking about their comments. The following considerations should be made:

Reflective learning - how did you apply the models of single and double loop learning to your skills development?

Can you apply the principles of reflective writing to your story? (Appendix 1)

See Appendix 2 ‘The Park - an exercise in reflective writing’ (Moon 2004). You should also refer to Appendix 3 ‘Summary of reflective writing skills’ which has been based on Moon’s work.

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## Appendix 1 Guidance for Reflective Writing

The skill of becoming a more reflective and critical writer (and thinker) involves moving from description of events (what happened) to analysis of learning from that story. This is well illustrated in The Park Exercise (Moon 2004) (Appendix 2)

Mc Drury and Alterio (2003:38) reinforce the value of reflective storytelling and story writing by saying,

*When we tell stories and process them, using reflective dialogue, we create the possibility for changes in ourselves and others. Our capacity to express ourselves through narrative forms not only enables us to reshape, reassess and reconstruct particular events, it allows us to learn from discussing our experiences with individuals who may raise alternative views, suggest imaginative possibilities and ask stimulating questions.....Through dialogue shaped to explore experiences in depth multiple perspectives can emerge.*

Cottrell (2003) supports this view and suggests that reflection is associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding and includes the following elements

- Making sense of experience  
Involving learning, standing back and gaining a better view or perspective
- Repetition  
Going over something several times
- Deeper honesty  
Critical stories can involve us having to be honest with ourselves
- Weighing up  
We need to take all factors into account, and going through several stages can help in this.
- Clarity  
Critical thinking involves achieving greater clarity and depth of analysis  
Understanding this is crucial to reflective storytelling and can help to lead to transformative learning and new and deeper ways in gaining insights and understanding knowledge and the self

- Making judgements

Drawing conclusions and making judgements on events is an important part of reflective storytelling

## Appendix 2

### The Park – An Exercise in Reflective Writing (Moon 2004 pg 196-203)

#### Introduction

This is an account of an incident in a park. It is recounted by 'Annie' who was involved in the incident herself. It is written in different versions that demonstrate different levels of reflective writing. At the end of the accounts, there are notes on the criteria for the levels of reflection that each account portrays. Your tutor may carry out this exercise as part of the activities as part of your mentor training. You may not be given the notes until you have discussed your responses to the material.

#### 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 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 began 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 agonising 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 uncomfortable 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 Park: Comments on the Quality of Reflection**

### **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 –e.g. that her personal frame of reference at the time may have influenced her actions and that a different frame of reference might have lead 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.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Summary of Reflective Writing Skills**

#### **Stage 1: Descriptive Writing with Little Evidence of Critical Thinking**

- Text is descriptive and contains little questioning or deepening of any issues.
- Usually from one point of view and no real argument.
- Superficial characteristics may be picked up rather than real issues.
- There may be references to emotional reactions but these are not explored.
- There may be ideas or external information but these are not explored in depth.

#### **Stage 2: Descriptive Text that Moves Towards Critical Thinking**

- Assumptions or points for analysis may be noted or questioned but they are not explored in depth.
- There may be some drawing in of additional ideas, reference to alternative view points or attitudes of others but these are not explored in depth.
- There is recognition of the worth of further exploring but it does not go very far.
- There may be some drawing in of additional ideas, reference to alternative view points or attitudes of others but these are not explored in depth.
- There is recognition of the worth of further exploring but it does not go very far.

#### **Stage 3: Towards Critical Thinking**

- No longer a straightforward account of an event but is definitely reflective and analytical and the writing seems more intentionally focused.
- The issue is introduced and the wording is explored so that deeper meaning or assumptions can be elicited.
- There is evidence of an emotional content, a questioning of its role and influence and an attempt to consider its significance in shaping the views presented.
- There may be evidence of external ideas or opinions of others (multiple perspectives) and this is reflected in the text.

