

Through the Mirror: An Exploration of the Positives and Pitfalls  
of Encouraging Students to Think Reflectively

Joanne Jane Lewis

Dissertation submitted as part requirement for the  
Master of Arts in Transformative Practice  
at University of Worcester

June 2013

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Preface and Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4 - 9</b>
1.1 Looking Back to Move Forward	
1.2 Research Focus	
1.3 Overall Research Aim and Individual Objectives	
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	<b>10 - 18</b>
<b>3. Reasons for the Research</b>	<b>19 - 29</b>
3.1 Methodological Approach	
3.2 Data Collection and Analysis	
3.3 Potential Issues and Limitations	
<b>4. Findings – Through the Mirror</b>	<b>30 - 42</b>
<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>43 - 48</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>49 - 57</b>
6.1 Objective 1 – Findings	
6.2 Objective 2 – Findings	
6.3 Objective 3 – Findings	
6.4 Objective 4 – Recommendations	
<b>7. Appendices</b>	<b>58 - 59</b>
<b>8. Bibliography</b>	<b>60 - 67</b>

## **Abstract**

Reflective practice has established itself as a recognised method of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within the field of Youth and Community work. However, concerns have been raised at the students' lack of ability to engage in critical reflection (Richards and Richards 2012) and the shortage of contemporary research specifically related to this issue (Elmslie 2009). This dissertation focuses on the impact an educator has on a student's experience of reflective practice within the classroom. The research has been conducted through an action research study using heuristic methods to engage in a deeper exploration of the experiences of student and educator. Initial discussions with a focus group of six students led the way with this exploration, which developed into a collaborative research study with a student co-researcher. This research produced a number of key findings including: that assumptions regarding a student's ability to engage in the reflective process are often questionable; by viewing reflective practice in terms of teaching and learning can create a barrier for both the student and the educator and finally that the assessment process for reflective practice is problematic and often flawed. The recommendations drawn from this research includes, the need to keep the course content flexible and creative therefore, adapting to the individual needs of the students. Ensuring that alternative ways are explored in which to design the assessment process and therefore reducing the emphasis on journal writing. Finally, the importance of both reflective and reflexive processes and making sure that they are embedded in the life and work of the educator, to provide individuals with ongoing CPD, which in turn will inform and improve the experiences of both students and educators within a Higher Education Institution. The overall conclusion of this research study suggests that when reflective practice is fully appreciated and understood it has the capacity to make a transformational shift.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my husband Ben and children, Charlie and Izzie for their understanding, patience and unwavering support. With her kind permission I would like to also thank Kelly Leach, my co-researcher for her willingness to assist me with this research study. I am grateful to all the students who have played their part in this study, your voices have been heard. Finally, I would like to thank Wayne for giving me the opportunity to find my voice.

## **Abbreviations**

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution

For the purpose of this dissertation the terms, academic, lecturer, teacher, tutor and educator are used interchangeably and should be taken to include anyone engaged in the support of student learning in Higher Education.

## **Through the Mirror: An Exploration of the Positives and Pitfalls of Encouraging Students to Think Reflectively**

### **Looking Back to Move Forward**

Following a lecture with first year students on 'Reflective Practice', a student approached me in a fluster, "...why should I tell you my private thoughts when I don't even know you", she spluttered at me! I knew then that I had a problem.

Reflecting upon the student's comment made me suddenly aware that, although I was teaching a module of reflective practice, I was still unsure of the impact it was having on the students. I realised the importance of now entering my own process of critical reflection in order to explore and understand the true meaning behind the student's statement. Only through critical reflection would I be better placed to comprehend the effect I was having on the students' ability to engage with a reflective practice process. From this interaction, the first seed of my research was planted.

Within the 131 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the UK (Universities UK 2012), tutors are expected to teach and students are expected to learn (Fry et al 2003). Since the time of Aristotle, this process of learning has been established within the field of education (Taylor 1955). However, what happens when this process encounters barriers to learning or when the subject matter requires a different approach to teaching? How do lecturers cope with the added pressure of engaging in this process with students; covering a subject such as reflective practice, which requires a degree of personal input from all involved? How do lecturers and students cope within a classroom, which is filled with individuals who are diverse in their experiences and understanding of the world in which they live? To add to this pressure, the lecturer must ensure that there is a consistent academic process, which does

not stray too far from the expectations of the programme of study, for which the students have embarked on.

Stephen Brookfield (1995: p.7) in his book, '*Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*' advocates that one of most enlightening ways to deal with issues and dilemmas such as these, is to work through a process of critical reflection. He believes that by going through this process you will discover not only answers to your questions but that you also have the opportunity to determine the '*worth of your teaching*'. My starting point was to begin by setting in context my understanding of reflective practice and the links it has within the field of youth and community work.

Since John Dewey (1910) first introduced the concept of '*Reflective Practice*' some 80 years ago, it has been acknowledged within HEI as one of the key ways in which students can make those vital links between theory and practice (Jasper 2003). However, reflective practice has not avoided criticism, with suggestions that it focuses primarily on personal goals and does not always lead to changes within professional practice (Eccleston 1996). Despite some misgivings it has still established itself as a recognised method of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within Higher Education (HE) (Bleakley 1999). It forms an integral part of a number of HE courses in professions such as, nursing, health care, teaching and youth and community (Ghaye et al 2000).

Authority figures in the field of reflective practice, (Schon 1983, 1987, Kolb 1984) identified the value of teaching it as a discipline, advocating the importance of developing a students' ability to engage in critical reflection throughout their professional career. Given the emphasis placed on reflective practice, it is not surprising that concern has been raised at the lack of contemporary research and literature specifically related to the field of youth work (Elmslie 2009, Trelfa and Richmond 2008).

This lack of literature and in-depth research specifically linking reflective practice to youth work suggests that this relationship is still in its infancy

(Trelfa and Richmond 2008, Emslie 2009, Herman 2012). Much of the information used within this field of research is taken from the disciplines of nursing and teaching. Still from the limited research, which explicitly explores the relationship between reflective practice and youth work, it appears to raise issues regarding the ability of students to engage with critical reflection (Emslie 2009, Richards and Richards 2012). In Trelfa and Richmond's view, "*students... in the first year would be less aware of the map*", referring to a students' inability to engage in reflective practice, particularly when making links between theory and practice (Trelfa and Richmond 2008: p.121).

It is these findings, coupled with my own concerns regarding the students understanding of reflective practice process, including their reluctance to engage in '*formal*' reflective practice, which led me to critically reflect on my own teaching methods of the Reflective Practice module within a HEI.

Engaging with both reflective and reflexive critical processes would enable me to examine the concept of reflective practice through a multitude of lenses seeking the views of students, colleagues and engaging with the theory from a research perspective. I intend to explore previously held assumptions concerning students' reluctance to connect with reflective practice and examine the actions I have taken to help or hinder their learning process. Exploring the dynamics within the classroom encompassing the internal and external environment and the impact of relationships on students' learning to recognise their connection with their teacher and a particular teaching approach.

## **Research Focus**

There appears to be some debate regarding the best approach towards teaching reflective practice. For example, Richards and Richards (2012: p.17), in their paper '*Sponges don't make their own water*' raises the concern that first year students need to "*firstly have sufficient competence in critical thinking before they can embark on the level of self-awareness needed for reflection*". Does this suggest that students are rushed too early into practicing



reflective practice, lacking theoretical background and knowledge to make those vital links between theory and practice? Alternative views suggest that students need to initially spend time reflecting on their personal experiences in order to have a better understanding of themselves before they can start to make a connection between theory and practice (Jasper 2003).

This study aims to create a bridge between these theoretical viewpoints, by taking a '*step back*' and viewing the process and impact of teaching reflective practice through a '*systemic lens*'. My current thinking and belief in how my world is structured informs this systemic lens. Appreciating that there is an interconnection of '*all things to everything*' and that nothing functions in isolation. Understanding that within this complex world I live in, I am a participant not a spectator. Systemic thinking is an integral part of my '*make-up*', and will support me to discover new ways of understanding personal and professional issues, which will act as a catalyst to change and aid me in my personal development (Meyerson and Scully 1995). It is however important to understand that when dealing with complexity, it is impossible, "to *know everything ... and we must accept incompleteness*" (Bateson 1973: p.408). A systemic lens respects that this is the case and '*things*' will emerge and works with an evolving process (Marshall 2004). It is from this mindset that I will endeavor to work from.

A major focus of this research will concentrate on my own preparation and delivery of Reflective Practice module, including the introduction of a specific '*experiential learning*' activity, which was introduced to help create a conducive environment to understanding the processes involved in reflective practice. Experiential learning is already an established method through which reflective practice is currently delivered but are students sufficiently prepared to deal with the impact of such an approach? How does a lecturer adapt to what emerges during experiential learning activities?

To gain a deeper understanding of these issues, two main activities need to be tackled. Firstly, conduct a review of the relevant literature to establish current research findings on the impact of reflective practice within the field of Youth and Community. Followed by the collection of empirical data on

students and lecturers to ascertain their experiences of teaching and learning reflective practice within a HEI.

### **Overall research aim and individual research objectives**

The overall aim of this research is to gain a greater understanding of self and the impact my role as a lecturer has on students understanding reflective practice in a Higher Education (HE) environment. The section entitled **Research Methods** contains the details of the research methodology adopted to collect the data.

The objectives of this research study are to:

1. Identify the barriers, both personally and professionally, which can impact on the successful delivery of Reflective Practice module.
2. Engage with a critically reflexive process to analyse current methods of teaching within my own teaching of reflective practice.
3. Explore student and lecturer views of reflective practice, including the impact of experiential learning and the positives and pitfalls experienced when engaging with it as a process.
4. Formulate recommendations on a future teaching approach to the Reflective Practice module.

This research work will contribute to the development of reflective practice teaching in a number of important ways. Firstly by providing a critical review of issues pertinent to the development of teaching reflective practice. Secondly by critically examining existing models and frameworks which currently deliver the module. Thirdly by obtaining the views of the students and lecturers who currently teach and study reflective practice. A rich picture of reflective practice can emerge allowing a meaningful comparison between theory and practice from which an improved understanding of teaching reflective practice to students on a HE Youth and Community course can be derived.

The next chapter – **Literature Review** examines literature pertinent to the

objectives of this research, including an investigation into the theory of '*reflective practice*'. It also includes an exploration of a number of related disciplines which support the reflective process.

## **Literature Review**

Embarking on '*formal learning*' at any age may be compared to standing at the edge of a minefield. You have the choice to carefully navigate your way through, avoiding the potential blasts, reaching the other side alive and '*whole*' with the profound knowledge that you are wiser for embarking on that journey. Alternatively, you could choose to sprint through the minefield, reaching the other side slightly wounded but relieved that you never have to enter it again. Formal Learning, in other words, education can evoke powerful responses depending on people's perceptions of where knowledge and learning is created and discovered.

Throughout this research study two main sources of information are drawn upon to inform and enhance my own understanding of where knowledge and learning is created; namely experiences and literature. Literature has the power to introduce us to new worlds of experience. It has the ability to raise questions within us and to challenge our thinking. It is a form of knowledge that draws on all our ways of knowing. Studying literature, as Myron Magnet (2003) describes it can, "*create wisdom and the ability to see into the heart of things*". It is armed with this belief that literature will support my thirst to learn more regarding the power and potential of reflective practice.

Despite all of the research concerned with learning there still remains no specific '*theory of learning*', which encompasses **all** of the actions involved in the process of human learning (Brockbank et al 2002). Research, which is concerned with studying '*theories on learning*' generate a variety of opinion

and responses from academics. However there is agreement and acknowledgment that the impact of learning affects every individual in different ways (Kolb 1984). It is this acknowledgement that individuals sitting in a classroom listening to a lecturer at the front of the room, creates from this experience their own interpretative landscape of learning and knowledge. A landscape, which is shaped using materials gathered from their own understanding, experience and learning with regards to the contents and context of their lives (Bruner 1990).

It is the peeling back of all of these layers, which provides an insight into another world of learning. Where the subconscious is unlocked, working in tandem with the conscious thought to offer the individual a deeper, more holistic understanding of knowledge. Not only of their external world but importantly of their internal world. Within this world of learning, the opportunity can arise to make “*education a humanising process*” (Richards and Richards 2012: p.3).

Connecting an individual’s external and internal world through the context of education has the potential to create a ‘minefield’ experience. As literature and new experiences challenge previously held assumptions. Literature can unlock subconscious thoughts enabling individual’s to reflect on experiences, thoughts and actions. Setting individuals on a path of engaging with a reflective process.

Since Dewey in 1933 first introduced reflective practice as a concept, which he continued to develop through experiential learning theories (Dewey 1933, Ghaye and Lillyman 2006). There have subsequently been a number of definitions and theories produced by authority figures within the field of reflective practice. Authority figures including, Mezirow (1981), Kolb (1984), Schon (1987) and Johns (2002), each one taking a slightly different perspective on the meaning, purpose and use of reflective practice.

The term ‘*reflective practice*’ has numerous definitions, all of which aim to describe and distinguish themselves from the myriad of theory and literature.

In broad terms, '*reflective practice*' involves the intentional process of taking experiences, exploring them; creating new ways of understanding and addressing issues raised from these experiences with a changed perspective of self (Boud et al 1985, Mezirow 1981, Bolton 2010). Gillie Bolton (2010) suggests that instead of concentrating purely on reflection, which can be limiting, alternatively, focus on looking '*Through-the-mirror*', thereby creating a panoramic viewpoint from which to explore our experiences. Whichever, definition and theory which connects most with your understanding, there appears to be a consensus of opinion that within '*reflective practice*', reflecting on experiences is the core ingredient.

Having the ability to view your minefield through a panoramic lens and learning from past experiences has the potential to help you negotiate risks. Dealing with the unknown brings fear and dread but discovering ways in which to challenge and learn from the unknown can also bring wonder and excitement. Uncovering new ways in which to learn from experiences can provide a different lens through which to view your minefield.

Dewey, an educationalist, took the view that the experiences through which individuals lived, "*can be described as a dynamic continuum and that each experience influences the quality of future experiences*" (Ghaye and Lillyman 2006:p. 7). Dewey viewed '*habits of the mind*' as integral to this process, enabling individuals to make sense of situations by reaffirming their beliefs through an examination of habitual assumptions (Mezirow 1990). Although Mezirow (1990) agreed in principle with this concept he preferred to take the view that, rather than reaffirming a belief, he suggested that reflective practice took place during points of '*critical reflection*'. A term he believed provided the opportunity to challenge the validity of '*habitual thought*' to create a '*frame of reference*' as ways of interpreting experience (Rosenfield 1988). Every individuals '*frame of reference*' is unique, as it is influenced by their individual beliefs, values, perceptions and assumptions which have been constructed by the particular cultural, historical, social and political standing in which they originated (Ghaye et al 2000, Sung-Chan and Yuen-Tsang 2006).

Donald Schon (1983) agreed that critical incidents were valuable in the process of learning. Within his work he distinguished two types of reflection, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, which he modeled as a means by which professional practitioners could engage in '*critical self-reflection*'. He argued that reflective practice could:

*“challenge the professionals frame of reference so that he becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice.”*

(Schon 1983: p.310)

Schon (1983) implies from this statement that an individuals '*frame of reference*' is intrinsically tacit and requires continual examination, which ultimately challenges existing '*frames of reference*'. Only by persistent, reflexive, scrutiny of an individuals '*frame of reference*' can they (and we) begin to appreciate and understand where the roots of an individual's interpretation of their experiences are born. Until this is addressed on an individual basis, it is difficult, if not arguably impossible to engage in a deeply reflective process (Capelin 2012).

Wheatley (1999) writes how '*chaotic, complex and uncertain*', critical self-reflection can be when searching into the very heart of self, to discover new lens through which to see the world. She encapsulates a systemic approach regarding the process of self-reflection when she pens:

*“When we concentrate on individual moments or fragments of experience, we see only chaos. But if we stand back and look at what is taking shape, we see order. Order always displays itself as patterns that develop over time.”*

(Wheatley 1999: p.118)

At this level of self-reflection, Wheatley suggests that all analytical processes are discarded, to be replaced by '*intuition and sensation*', a domain the German Philosopher Heidegger described as, '*dwelling consciousness*', in other words that we " *dwell with the phenomenon and feel how it makes itself known to us*" (Wheatley 1999: p.141). Johns, in his book '*Guided Reflection*'

described this domain as a, “*space of stillness that enables the practitioner to reconstitute the wholeness of experience*” (Johns 2002: p.11). Within systemic therapy the task is to support individuals to reinterpret their experiences in a way which is purposeful and which can be actively used to aid them in taking action to improve on future experiences (Broken Rainbow 2008).

Judi Marshall(2004), applies the notion of systemic thinking to the process of self-reflection upon her own experiences. Fully immersing herself in the concept of connectedness, acknowledging that from within this reflective space, new perspectives, understanding and knowledge will emerge and unfold as the narrative of life is written. Both Johns (2010: p29) and Senge (1992: p9) take quite a spiritual view of reflection as they see it as an, ‘*awakening to self*’ which enables you to ‘*plunge below the surface and leads you to touch the core of your life*’.

Applying systemic thinking to reflective practice does not provide a mechanism through which all the answers are discovered. Rather it creates an understanding and heightened awareness that there is a great deal which is connected to our experiences which influences our behaviour that we still do not know or appreciate (Marshall 2004). Yet applying systemic thinking encourages us to take the plunge into the depths, to reach out and awaken our senses to new ways of interpreting the complexity of life. Seeking alternative ways in which to construct and create the narrative of our lives. As Christina Baldwin (2005: p xi) in her book ‘*Storycatcher*’ wrote, “*our lives are our story and our story is our life.*”

If experience is the ‘*raw data*’ and reflection is the ‘*awakening*’ then creating the narrative is like looking ‘*through the mirror*’ (Johns 2010). Folk stories, such as Snow White, portray a mirror as an object that cannot lie; it can only tell the truth (Shawne 2013). Narrative creation in its purest form requires openness and honesty and a willingness to engage with the unknown. However, as most literature concerned with narrative acknowledges and Oscar Wilde (1895) sums up, “*The truth is rarely pure and never simple*”. Clifford (1986) develops this thinking further by suggesting that no narrative or

story however carefully told can be completely true. As it has been told from the narrators perspective, which has already been subjected to a reflexive journey into their memories, values and 'roots' (Denzin 1992). The story has already been changed.

Creating narrative and story through reflective and reflexive practice has been widely acknowledged within research and literature (Baldwin 2005, Bolton 2005, 2010, Foucault 1997) as a means by which individuals can make sense of their lives. It enables individuals to look '*through the mirror*', at their past experiences, beliefs and assumptions, providing a holistic lens through which to scrutinize the complexity of their experience (Sinclair-Bell 2002). Johns (2009: p2) suggests that the narrative of life can only be fully appreciated when it is reflected upon, as reflection breeds '*mindfulness*'. A domain from which, value can be derived from every interaction.

Authentic narrative requires reflexivity to occur for the story to truly unfold. The process of looking back, '*seeing your own footprints*' (Brockbank et al 2002) and observing the changes within self which have been the result of a greater sense of knowing through the power of reflection (Johns 2009). Foucault (1997: p.233) describes the reflexive process as, '*one of the most ancient western traditions*'. A process that can surprise, bewilder, enlighten and question taken for granted assumptions regarding an individuals understanding of experiences. Bolton (2005: p.33) talks at length about the importance of taking responsibility for personal narratives as she identifies two main points; they are formative of the person and the person has consciously chosen to narrate their story in this particular way. Adler and McAdams (2007: p.45) reinforce this view when they wrote that, '*narratives construct the self*'.

The creation of narrative is a natural phenomenon and is at the very core of how humans make sense of their lives in this complex world in which we inhabit. Bolton (2010) suggests that it is through the creation of stories that humans are able to negotiate their way through the complexity of interaction and interconnectedness with all things. As it is through stories that movement, freedom and flexibility can be maintained enabling humans to adapt to the



chaos of constant change that they face each and every day. Stories are important but they will remain only stories if no action or movement, which constitutes change, is derived from them (Josselson 1996). It is only through critical reflection and the ability to communicate findings can action occur to produce a change in perspective resulting in a transformational shift from within an individual can take place (Doty 1996, Mezirow 2000).

Jack Mezirow established, in 1978 the notion of transformational learning (shift), during his study of women returners to college who wished to resume their education. Mezirow's (1998, 2000) theory of transformational learning, is ultimately concerned with the process, which adults undergo to arrive at a point when their experiences create a change or shift in their '*frame of reference*'. In broad terms, a transformational shift is the result of an individual critically examining previously held assumptions, beliefs and values with regards to specific problems. Creating a new lens through which to understand and respond to a specific problem, developing a greater understanding of self within the context of the issue. Kegan (1994) suggests that transformational learning enables individuals to gain a greater understanding and hence a greater responsibility for ones own views, beliefs and values.

There are a vast range of models and theories regarding transformational learning. Including, Mezirow (1978, 1998, 2000) who devised the 10-phase process of transformational practice, which is triggered by a '*disorientating dilemma*', King and Kitchner (1994) with their creation of the 7- stage model which worked towards a transformational shift based on making reflective judgements and Kegan (1984, 1994, 2000) who explored 5 orders of development which were concerned with the '*evolution of consciousness*' or '*forms of the mind*' a term he developed in his later writings. Kegan (1994) described Order 5 as the point at which individuals develop a '*Self-Transforming Mind*'. At this stage individuals have the ability to see beyond themselves, others and systems of which they are part, developing an appreciation of how all people and systems connect. Kegan summarized this

stage as the point when individuals, '*recognise their commonalities and interdependence with others*' (Kegan 1982: p.239).

Within these models of transformational learning, it is only as an individual moves through the later stages of the model is there acknowledgment of truly engaging in deeper levels of reflective practice before finally reaching the stage when a '*transformational shift*' can occur (Merriam 2004). The key elements deemed necessary to reach the ultimate transformational stage, include the ability to critically reflect on experiences (Criticos 1993). And the capacity to engage with '*rational discourse*', a process through which all previous assumptions are put aside in order to discover new meanings from experiences (Mezirow 1995).

However, studies including Belenky and Stanton (2000) suggest that not all adults have the capability to engage in cognitive development, the process of gaining knowledge including how humans acquire, construct and use it. As a result, reaching a '*transformational shift*' is not always possible (Piaget 1972). Investigations also highlighted that both age and education played a significant role in an individual's ability to reflect and analysis experiences to a level required necessary to make a '*shift*' (King and Kitchner 1994). Kegan (1994) claimed that most adults are not capable of this process until they reach their 40's.

Yet, a number of studies have produced results, which highlight, that not all transformational learning has to be part of a rational process. It can also be produced as a result of '*non-rational*' approaches (Merriam 2004). Freire (1970) in his research concerning illiterate peasants demonstrates that this was the case. Koven and Dirkx (2003) also discovered during their work with environmental activists that their transformations:

*"rarely indicate(d) a strong reliance ... on critical reflection and self-analysis ... The inner work that characterized this approach to transformation is grounded in affective emotional, spiritual and transpersonal dimensions of life."*

(Dirkx 1997: p.115)

Based on research findings, Taylor (1997) suggested that the role of critical reflection needed to be minimised, not necessarily replaced but supported, by an increased focus on “*other ways of knowing*” (Lamm 2000). Taylor (1997) identified a number of perspectives which warranted further exploration, including a view that there required a greater emphasis on the fundamental role of feelings, the importance and impact of relationships and the role of collective unconscious in looking beyond self and recognising others.

Returning to the start of this chapter and reflecting on the discussion around the ability of literature to raise questions within us and to challenge our thinking; this exploration of literature has raised a number of questions regarding critical reflective practice, the creation of narrative and reaching a transformational shift, all of which warrant further exploration through this action research study.

The next chapter of this research study will detail the research methods used. Including, the reasons for the research study, the data collection methods adopted, the means by which the data will be analysed and finally the reporting format for the research findings. As I continue with my research I will tread carefully and sensitively through my minefield but this time I will not be alone.

## **Reasons for the Research**

This research study has evolved from a growing concern that my teaching of the Reflective Practice module was too prescriptive. My lectures did not create the time and space for students to explore their own experiences and understanding of reflective practice. Instead a sterile classroom environment was created with teaching and learning taking a more traditional route. This approach, I believe, led many students within that particular year, to take the decision to reject reflective practice as a skill and instead identify it as a task necessary to pass assessments.

The reason I initially adopted this approach to teaching the Reflective Practice module raised a number of issues regarding where I located myself within my new role as a lecturer. I feel I lacked the confidence to engage in '*natural*' conversation with the students. I know I wanted to prove my abilities to my colleagues within the team and I felt it was part of my duty to ensure that students were given as much information as possible during the lectures. But did I really expect students to understand and appreciate the impact reflective

practice could have on them from my teaching input? Did I believe that students had the motivation to engage in reflective practice as part of their self-development, if it did not specifically relate to an assignment question? I have considered these questions and many more over time as I searched for ways in which I could gain deeper learning of reflective practice both on a personal and professional level.

My passion is people, I enjoy the interaction, and discussion, debate and I value other people's opinions. My teaching approach had appeared to stifle the students' voices and opportunities to explore reflective practice within the classroom were limited. My approach to working was conflicting with the way in which I value people; respecting and listening to their views, building trusting relationships and removing barriers of power. Pivotal to this research study is the overwhelming wish to re-engage with my values. Generating an environment in which students have the confidence that their voices are heard, respected and valued. Creating a person-centered approach to my teaching, which recognises the value of working alongside students in a collaborative approach as we explore new perspectives, knowledge and understanding of the potential impact of reflective practice.

For me reflective practice is not just a skill, it is part of me, my 'make-up', it enables me to learn and develop as a person both personally and professionally. It is as integral and necessary to my life as my heart, lungs or brain, without it I feel I would become an empty vessel devoid of feelings; joy, sadness, empathy and strength. I value the power of reflection, how it can remain personal yet the process and understanding derived from it can have a lasting impact on others. At times reflective practice can be difficult to explain as it is in some cases it '*just is*' (Richards and Richards 2012), an intuitive feeling that needs to be explored further, an emotion or memory that suddenly appears from nowhere. Recognising the impact reflective practice has had on me has not been immediate, it has taken time and support from a diverse range of experiences, conversations and interactions. I want to now develop my skills further so that future students can have the same opportunities as I have had to see for themselves the potential benefits of reflective practice.

My main reasons for this research study is to gain a greater understanding of self so that I may have a more informed appreciation of the impact I have on a students' experience of studying a Reflective Practice module. Focusing on where I locate myself in the role of lecturer by exploring, through reflective practice, my own positives and pitfalls of '*looking through the mirror*'. In doing so I believe this will ultimately lead onto the development and improvement of my teaching skills. From a more informed platform, I have the tools to gain confidence in my teaching ability, build positive relationships with students and create an environment, which is conducive to learning. This is new and uncharted territory and one, which I fully expect will change as I explore the hidden and unknown. At this stage in the research it is important that I frame my thinking with the creation of objectives of the study, which will support the discovery of my overall aim. These objectives are outlined below:-

1. Identify the barriers, both personally and professionally, which can impact on the successful delivery of Reflective Practice module.
2. Engage with a critically reflexive process to analyse current methods of teaching within my own teaching of reflective practice.
3. Explore student and lecturer views of reflective practice, including the impact of experiential learning and the positives and pitfalls experienced when engaging with it as a process.
4. Formulate recommendations on a future teaching approach to the Reflective Practice module.

Currently, the process by which this research could create a transformational shift in knowledge and understanding remains vague. The vagueness is not viewed as a stumbling block but an exciting opportunity to create new knowledge and understanding within a collaborative process (McNiff et al 2011). It is primarily a process, which encourages individuals and groups to simply ask the questions and see where the answers take us (Berlin 1998).

Adopting a collaborative process upholds the systemic belief in the power of relationships and that there is a connection in all interactions. That even the

smallest of actions creates a ripple effect, which has an impact on all things (Byrne 1998). When you engage in human interaction you engage with complexity, which can be chaotic but this provides the environment, which is constantly adapting and changing in response to every miniscule action. It must be acknowledged that taking a non-linear, emergent approach to this study does not detract from the fact that ultimately I am responsible and accountable for ensuring that this research study fulfills its ethical obligations. That it remains true to the values, which underpin it. Values and principles, which respect and celebrate the complexity involved in seeking meaning and understanding from individual and collective experiences. Every stage of this research acknowledges that it is dependent upon the relationships created, which are inclusive, not exclusive; respectful to the experiences and views of all whom are involved and recognises the interconnectedness of 'everyone to everything' (Byrne 1998).

This research study is not however pure self-indulgence, it has an academic value specifically related to the field of youth and community work, which until recently has suffered from insufficient research (Emslie 2009). This research study therefore provides an opportunity to gain a variety of perspectives and experiences which ought to contribute significantly not only to the study of reflective practice in general, but to provide a holistic understanding of the experiences encountered when teaching or studying a Reflective Practice module within a HE establishment. Providing a platform from which the stories written through these experiences can be told.

The remainder of the chapter will provide details of the research strategy adopted, including who is involved in the research process, how data will be collected, the means by which it is analysed and how the findings will be presented. Potential issues and limitations of the study will also be addressed.

## **Methodological Approach**

I have identified my personal thoughts on where I place myself within the research topic and the type of knowledge I would like to see evolve from it. My initial concern, which started this process of exploration, developed from a belief that I am '*too prescriptive*' in my teaching. Therefore, I have embraced a methodological process, which enables this research study to unfold and progress naturally providing a narrative of the story it creates.

The methodological approach for this piece of research will be conducted through an action research study using heuristic research methods to engage in a deeper exploration of the experiences that emerge. The reason for choosing heuristic research methods is that the process involved enables the role of the researcher to remain part of the research at all times. It is a process that not only explores the nature and meaning of experiences but it also values personal experiences. Creating conditions from which '*self-understanding*' and '*self-growth*' can occur which ultimately can lead to some form of personal transformation for the researcher (Moustakas 1990).

By adopting an action research approach this study makes the assumption that there may be as many questions raised as there are answered. That it only takes one small piece of the jigsaw puzzle to be positioned for a transformational shift in self-awareness and understanding to occur. Action research mirrors a systemic lens as it takes the form of enquiry that enables practitioners to examine and assess their work from alternative perspectives. It allows the researcher to ask themselves questions such as, "*Why do I do things the way I do?*" "*Is what I am doing working?*" "*How can I make improvements?*" "*What emerges from certain actions?*" (Reason and Bradbury 2001, Koshy 2005, McNiff and Whitehead 2011).

Action research has grown in popularity within the field of education as it enables educators to explore their teaching approach; taking a more in-depth analysis of an identified concern, using legitimate research techniques to understand and address the issue (Clegg 2000). In terms of this particular research study, Stringer's (2008) simplistic '*Model of Action Research*' comprising of **LOOK – THINK – ACT** forms the basis of the study. But is



developed further with Coghlan & Brannick's, '*Experimental Learning Cycle*' (2005), as this will ensure that reflection is integral in every stage of the project and within it the ability to remain flexible with the process. Adopting this particular model provides a base from which invaluable evidence can be collected and analysed; not only to create a transformational shift within my own practice but to add weight to the growing body of research which is striving to readdress the limited data specifically related to the field of youth and community work.

The research will primarily focus on critically reflecting upon my role as a lecturer; where I locate myself within that role and the impact that engaging in reflective practice has on my internal understanding of self, both personally and professionally. To place this research study in context, the collection of research data will be gathered from the module *Practice: The Reflective Practitioner*, which I am responsible for teaching to first year students as part of their Youth and Community Services BA (Hons) or Young People Services FdA course. Both courses are situated within the Institute of Health and Society: Applied Social Sciences within a university setting and cover the same course content.

As discussed, this research study will engage in a collaborative process, with the support of a second year student who agreed to attend the 12-week taught module as a co-researcher. To ensure that as a consequence of any action taken by myself this did not result in providing this student with an unfair advantage over their colleagues, the ethical guidelines stated by the university are adhered to at all times (University of Worcester Ethical Guidelines 2011). As a consequence this student was not randomly picked but was offered an invitation. In their first year, along with all their first year colleagues, they were invited to participate in a series of pilot focus group meetings to discuss their views on reflective practice. These focus group discussions, in which 6 first year students participated, followed on from their reflective practice lectures and raised pertinent questions on the impact of the module. The findings from this diverse group of students proved to be the catalyst from which this research study was created. As a result of the focus

group meetings a further invitation to the 6 participating students was made, offering them the opportunity to work alongside me as a co-researcher with the next intake of first year students whom I would be teaching the Reflective Practice module. One student took up that offer to act as a co-researcher.

Working collaboratively with people brings with it a degree of complexity and uncertainty, particularly when concerned with the intricacies and dynamics of human interaction. Add to this a systemic lens from which to view the study and it becomes clear that the more traditional methods of research, whose primary purpose is to discover if an answer is right or wrong, would struggle to contend with a study of this nature. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2001) in their book *'Handbook of Action Research'* encapsulate beautifully the potential of generating knowledge that is achievable when action research and reflective practice are connected, they write:

*"It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities".*

(Reason and Bradbury 2001: p. 72)

Reflection plays the integral role within this piece of research as it is constantly at the forefront of every stage of the research cycle. Theorists on Action Research and Reflective Practice, such as Raelin (2000), Ross (1994) and Kolb (1984) all identify critical links between the two disciplines. As Raelin (2000: p.36) identifies, *"In action research, reflection is the activity which integrates action and research"*.

Approaching this research collaboratively ensures that the research remains embedded within my own value base and that this study is conducted in an inclusive, not exclusive environment, valuing the impact that all participants have on developing new knowledge and learning. Therefore, creating relationships, which are not built on *'power'* or *'expertise'* but on a collaborative understanding that new knowledge will provide sustainable

benefits for everyone involved by imparting this knowledge into a wider area for future generations of students and practitioners to '*play*' with.

Action research supports this particular study, which is not only concerned with greater learning but also with addressing the pressing urgency of sustainability, as it creates a process of exploration, which questions the '*status quo*' and does not presume that an answer will remain static (Said 1994). It creates a story with no defined ending but concentrates on the production of many chapters. The heuristic process supports the creation of this story as it works to discover and narrate the story of personal experiences (Moustakas 1990).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In essence, the data collection for this research study is primarily qualitative in nature, not quantitative, as qualitative data relates to '*things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of it, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: p.2). The collection of qualitative data will take the form of reflective journal entries, recorded conversations and focus group activities to enable a wide range of personal and collective responses to be gathered.

The data collection for this study will rely heavily upon my co-researcher and I to engage with a critical reflective process, using both formal and informal methods of capturing reflective thoughts. Formal methods of capturing reflective thoughts will include keeping, individually, a reflective journal both during and after the 12 week period of the taught module. More informal methods of collecting reflective thoughts will include the use of a Dictaphone to record our conversations following the lectures.

Reflective recordings of the pilot focus group, and the views of the 16 first year students, whom are currently on the course, will be collected and analysed to provide a greater insight into their experiences and understanding

of the Reflective Practice module. With the consent of the first year students (Appendix A) and adhering to the universities ethical guidelines regarding confidentiality; data collection will take the form of extracts from the students Reflective Practice assignment, within which they are asked to submit two reflective journal entries. Also data will be gathered from an evaluation session, which will take place at the end of the 12-week period, in which students will offer feedback on their understanding and learning from the Reflective Practice module. First year students who wish to explore their views further will be invited to meet either individually or as part of a focus group. These meetings will be recorded to enable the meetings to remain as fluid as possible, whilst students explore their experiences further.

In addition to the input from students, the views of colleagues whom either teach or have an interest in reflective practice will also be gathered, in the form of informal recorded conversations. Their experiences of engaging with reflective practice within the context of their teaching and learning or as part of their professional role within practice are vital to the contribution of knowledge to the further development of the skill of reflective practice. Regarding the study of the data, Stringer emphasises that the process of analysis within action research is:

*“a process of reflection and interpretation, providing participants and other stake holding audiences with new ways of thinking about issues and events investigated.”*

(Stringer 2008: p.95)

I intend to analyse the data focusing on ‘*key experiences*’ or ‘*transformational*’ moments of participants that emerge, Denzin (1989: p103), makes reference to these moments as ‘*turning-point experiences*’.

From the data collected a narrative will emerge based on the experiences, feelings and perceptions of all those involved. This narrative made up of many voices will create a story, which will contain an eclectic range of thoughts and views regarding what reflective practice means to individuals and the impact that it has on them. Presenting the findings in the form of a narrative supports

the epistemological assumption that people make sense of their experiences by placing them within a story framework (Sinclair-Bell 2002). To develop this further I will engage with a critically reflexive examination of the individual and collective story to discover the underlying assumptions, which have molded and shaped my actions (Cunliffe 2004).

The value of creating a narrative, enables a richer understanding of the issues involved and provides a much more holistic approach to understanding the impact of reflecting on experience has on individuals (Egan 1988). Capturing narrative provides a powerful story, which enables the conscious and unconscious knowledge to unfold, providing an environment through which those vital '*transformational shifts*' can occur.

The creation of this story, as with reflective practice, is continuous, ever changing and adapting to new experiences and understanding. Therefore, for the purpose of this research study, the uncertainty of the story that will emerge from the data adapts well to an action research approach. Mellor (1998: p. 96) suggests that at times the Action Research methodological process is '*untidy, haphazard and experimental*'. It is not necessarily interested in finding a specific answer but is focused upon the knowledge, learning and subsequent '*new*' questions which emerge from the research. Action research, as does reflective practice and the creation of story, work from a position that the creation of knowledge and learning has no ending, they are constant, evolving and are never completed (McNiff et al 2011).

### **Potential Issues and Limitations**

There are limitations to this study, particularly as it is being conducted on a small scale in comparison to some studies. With a total of 23 students, across two year groups participating in the study, out of a total number of 54 students who are currently studying on the three year course. Therefore, with this small scale study care must be taken regarding the data collected and how the findings are reported as this may lead to participants who wish to remain

anonymous being recognised through the narrative of the story (Koshy 2005). In order to ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout the duration of this research study, guidance is taken from the Worcester University Ethical Guidelines (2012) and BERA Guidelines (2011).

Presenting the research findings in the form of a narrative raises important ethical issues that must be addressed. It must be acknowledged that when I take individuals stories and place them in a collective narrative, this cannot be free from my own interpretation and meaning, which I place on their stories. I must be mindful of my subjectivity of this research (Peshkin 1988) and ensure that the voices telling their stories are given the right platform to be heard. It is essential that the participants' stories are explored sensitively, demonstrating understanding and empathy to individual's backgrounds, cultures and identities.

It is through the recognition of the diversity of all the participants, coupled with an awareness of their similarities and interconnectedness, which will provide a framework from which a story will emerge.

This chapter has provided my personal and professional reasons for pursuing this particular study and why action research, coupled with a heuristic process, are the chosen methods by which to conduct the research. It has also taken into consideration the limitations and potential issues of the study and identified ways in which these can be addressed. The next chapter '**Research Findings**', discusses and tells the story of the research data gathered.

## **Findings - Through the Mirror**

Fully immersing yourself in 'reflective practice' is akin to being parachuted into the centre of your minefield, with only one piece of advice, "you have to find your own way out".

The following accounts are segments taken from five discussions with students and colleagues to explore elements of reflective practice in more depth. The dialogue and reflections included in this chapter highlight a number of key issues regarding reflective practice both in terms of learning and teaching. Stringer's (2008) simplistic reflective practice module of **LOOK – THINK – ACT** provides the framework from which the findings are reported.

Due to word limitations only specific segments of dialogue have been included. Great care and attention has been made to ensure that the dialogue remained authentic to the context within which it has been explored.

### **‘Stop the Clock’(Personal Reflection)**

*A student coming up to me today upset about being asked to discuss their reflections has really struck a chord with me. Instead of encouraging students to reflect, are we putting them off? Why do we think it is ok to ‘force’ students’ to write reflections and then assess them? How would I feel if I was asked to share reflections, especially personal ones? It feels uncomfortable and I am concerned that there are issues with the structure of the reflective practice module and the way I am teaching it. I need to explore this further by talking and really ‘listening’ to the students’ views and their experiences of the reflective practice module.*

### **‘Look’**

From a class of 20 first year students, 6 students agreed to meet up to discuss their thoughts and feelings regarding the reflective practice module. I was keen to keep the meetings as informal as possible and to make sure that it avoided replicating a lecture. I therefore asked the students where they would like to meet and they suggested a small but comfortable seating area in a public part of the university. The meetings took place in the morning during a natural break for students’ before their next lecture.

Initially, the conversation was primarily concerned with the practicalities of writing reflections, including when and where they reflect, on the bus, in the car. As everyone relaxed the conversation turned to personal concerns:



- Student D: I have emotions but I don't let people see my emotions.
- Jo: Do you keep them closeted away? Do you let yourself see them?
- Student D: No
- Student C: It is a coping mechanism, isn't it?
- Jo: The way you all see yourselves, are these barriers to stop you writing reflectively? I think you said you were quite scared of reflection, the thought of reflection. Is that because you don't want to unlock things?
- Student D: Yeah, cos I think some things should be left in the past. If I was to think about things that have happened then I would end up bitter. I don't want to end up bitter.
- Jo: Do you think reflections have the danger of unlocking these things? So when you are writing reflections, you don't allow yourself free writing you really structure what you are going to say?
- Student D: Yes, because I know that it is going to be read and people are going to make pre-judgments on it. No matter how much is said, oh no we won't judge, you are human beings and there will be judgments about what I have written in my reflective journal.
- Jo: Did the woolen exercise unlock things?
- Student D: Yeah, that was quite helpful that I didn't have to see the words. That was a simple thing that not everyone understood it. The fact that it was personal and secret to me. Someone just looking at the wool would not necessarily understand what it meant.
- Jo: So that was a kind of powerful, visual reflection. But it was still secret. So you are not against reflections but you are against having them out in the open domain.
- Student D: Yeah.
- Jo: Did you feel that the woolen exercise was too soon into your learning?
- Student C: Not from a personal front. I think sitting there doing it was very

process good as it made you start thinking about yourself and the  
of reflecting. But then to go straight in and write an essay on it  
within a few weeks with having to understand the theory. When  
we haven't really got our heads around what we are doing was  
quite difficult.

### **'Think' (Personal Reflection)**

*A number of issues have been raised during our initial discussion. It is evident that this group of students finds value in reflection but to be dropped in at the deep end at such an early stage in the course makes them feel vulnerable and anxious. There is something in here about the timing of the reflective practice module and the pace at which we push the student's. Developing the skills of reflective practice can take years and refining them can take even longer. King and Kitchner (1994) discovered that many students reached stage 4 in the development of their reflective skills whilst lecturers reach stage 6. The higher you move up the levels the more proficient you are at cognitive thinking. Am I not only moving the pace too quickly but also not acknowledging the starting point and capabilities of the students when they are first introduced to reflective practice?*

*I can see and feel the student's anxieties during our discussion. Pollner (1991) suggests that the reflective process can be 'unsettling', Johns (2010: p1) eloquently describes it in terms of "not an easy journey for the path is strewn with barriers". My initial conversation with the group appears to confirm both of these notions as within a short space of time a number of issues have arisen concerned with, 'emotions, sharing, expectations and timing'.*

*Reflective practice can be problematic for many individuals, particularly when emotion is so intrinsically linked to particular experiences and engaging in reflection reconnects the past back with the future. Bolton (2007), in her paper 'Open the Box' talks about the dilemmas of asking people to open themselves up to self-examination. It is important to be mindful of these potential risks, particularly within the early stages of reflective writing.*

*However, I do agree with Richards and Richards (2012) notion that despite uncomfortable periods individuals may discover valuable learning from reflecting on and working through difficult experiences.*

### **'Look'**

Subsequent meeting of the group of 6 students:-

Student E: Everyone is trying to link the theory and it might pop-up, like that links to that but then it halted the reflection and when I get to the end of it and try to go back and put theory into it then its almost like writing an assignment or essay now. It doesn't feel right to try and add theory in and it almost goes against what you are trying to do.

Student C: Yeah, It is not about emotions as you are too busy thinking about linking it to theory. It goes against what you are meant to be doing.

Student E: It would be better if we were not told to put theory into them at all to begin with.

Jo: Do you think that we are pushing people at a different pace?

Student E: Yes I think so. Definitely to begin with and then trying to write a reflective journal when you are not even in that frame of mind. I spent ages trying to write a reflection but I don't feel I could write a reflective journal to the level I was being asked.

Student D: The level of expectation at the beginning were too high to be honest. Reflections are really hard to write.

Student E: I enjoy reflection but not the reflective journal. I used to write a lot when I was dealing with things as a coping mechanism but when I came to uni and was told you need to do this, I can't do it. I had a massive argument with my sister and tried to write about it not even from a reflective journal point of view and I couldn't do it. I was working myself up more.

Jo: So we have stopped you from being able to write.

Student E: It is almost that I have pushed it away. But I could sit down and

talk to somebody so I can talk reflectively but writing it is too difficult.

Student C: You get frustrated because writing frustrates you.

Jo : Is it because we have asked you to write and not inspired you to write?

Student E: Yeah. It is almost a rebellious thing in that I really don't want to do it. A subconscious no no just push it away.

Student A: I am not going to lie to you. I only write reflections because I have to do 15 for my portfolio. I wouldn't write any if I didn't have to do them for you (Jo).

Jo: The way the module is constructed has it taken all the personal out of it?

Student A: I think so, yeah.

### **'Think' (Personal Reflection)**

*I can completely understand and empathise with the students regarding how the current module is having such a negative impact on them and their learning. I fully understand their concerns regarding trying to write reflections linked to theory, they have only been at university for 10 weeks. Not really long enough to get to grips with student life let alone understand and appreciate the concepts I am trying to teach them. I am expecting a great deal from them; learning how to write meaningful reflections, linking it to theory and then developing their own style of working within practice. Some of these students have only just started a placement in youth and community for the first time. They are like rabbits in headlights!*

*The student's confusion regarding the theory of reflective practice has raised a number of questions for me. What should come first, learning about self through connecting with personal experiences or studying the theory of reflective practice so that students have an understanding of the process before they engage with it? Reading matter on the subject does not provide a*

*conclusive answer, Jasper (2003) clearly states that reflective practice starts with an experience and therefore she advocates that the initial stages of reflective practice should concentrate on 'understanding self'. I interpret this as a process of first looking more reflexively at oneself and personal experiences in order to gain a level of reflective awareness before it is edited by theoretical perspectives. Alternatively, Richards and Richards (2012) suggests that when students are first introduced to reflective practice they should be provided with a theoretical base, which will enable them to 'critically think' about the subject before they develop a degree of 'self-awareness'. In other words, 'Forewarned is Forearmed'.*

*Currently, I sway more towards the view of a starting point of experience and understanding self better. As I appreciate that I have sought out literature and theories that relate specifically to gaining a greater understanding of self and personal experiences. I believe that the reflective practice module needs to be able to offer an eclectic range of learning by being more creative, perhaps 'playful', regarding both theory and practice. I do feel strongly that reflective journal writing should not be the focus of the assessment but perhaps the creation of reflective dialogue with peers and tutors within a supportive environment.*

*I appreciate that at university level assessments are integral to the process but should reflective practice stand alone as an assessed piece of work? Wouldn't it be better to encourage the students to reflect throughout all the other modules and include reflection within these essays from the viewpoint of a practitioner; not ignoring the personal but allowing students to engage with personal reflections at their own pace, keeping them private?*

### **'Act'**

Armed with a greater understanding of the issues and barriers experienced by first year students studying reflective practice, subtle changes to the course for the next cohort were made. The seating within the classroom was changed to remove barriers of desks and instead all students and lecturer were seated

in a circle so that the flow of communication was not inhibited. Less emphasis was placed on the use of Powerpoint and instead more practical exercises were introduced. The wool and stick activity (Appendix B) was introduced much later into the course, at week 7, the previous cohort of students had participated in this activity at week 2.

An invitation to act as a co-researcher, observing teaching and learning with the next cohort of students was made to all the members of the original group of 6 students. One student accepted this invitation and joined in the Reflective Practice module with the new first year students.

As Josselson (1988) identifies, embarking on narrative research is never completely free of ethical dilemmas. Therefore, great care and attention was taken to build a genuine, respectful and trusting relationship with the co-researcher. The role of the co-researcher was that of the expert within this relationship. Their input enabled me to gain a greater understanding of reflective practice and with their guidance and support I started to appreciate alternative ways of developing my own practice.

#### **'Look' (Co-researcher's reflection on the woolen stick activity)**

*The wool and stick activity that Jo led as part of the first year Reflective Practitioner module was something that really started off my understanding of reflection as an active process to develop practice. It was a thought-provoking task that encouraged a depth of emotion that I had not been expecting to experience and have appreciated ever since. However, I was definitely not expecting the outcome that came when Jo led the same activity with the new cohort of first years.*

*The whole dynamic of this activity was different from the beginning. They seemed to understand the notion of the activity fairly quickly – at least compared to my year. Some were more active in moving away from each other to do the task, allowing themselves the space and time to reflect deeply – they were totally engrossed in the activity. Although the majority of the class*

*did sit together, chatting wasn't continuous. Conversations were struck up every now and then but the content was not of an overly devastating effect. It was very different to my experience, where the room was very distracting due to being a lot noisier.*

*The bit that totally blew me away was when it came to the part of the session where people had the option to share their reflections. Nearly all of the class shared their reflections! Those who didn't share were obviously battling with emotions but it didn't disrupt the process when they chose not to. It was amazing to watch. Tears were flowing around the room as people listened to and empathized with each other. Comfort was shared and the atmosphere was that of openness.*

*Jo and I sat at the end of the lecture and didn't exactly know what to say to begin with. It was obvious that they were capable of reflection and that was really encouraging in terms of the module. However, the emotional state of the students had been quite fragile as they left, which began to make Jo question as to how appropriate it was as a task.*

Researcher: They were saying, this is how I felt about it, this happened to me. This is how I felt and this is me because of it. It seemed to me that this was the first time for a lot of them that they even thought that way about the situations they had experienced. That could affect a reflection negatively if they thought, wow reflections are always going to be so emotional.

Jo: It is not always going to be like that all the time but emotion is going to be part of the reflection. It would be my worry and concern about what I am opening up for them and the responsibility I feel.

### **'Think'**

The session with the wool and stick activity certainly felt like a therapy session. I am not a trained therapist but I do care deeply about ensuring that I work with the best intentions both morally and ethically. Gillie Bolton (2005)

advocates that reflective facilitators do not have to be therapists but it would be good practice to have an understanding of some of the principals and ways in which therapeutic practice works. Gaining a little knowledge in this particular field would provide me with greater confidence in my ability when handling sensitive situations.

Teaching reflective practice does raise a number of serious ethical considerations for me. How do I ensure that I am practicing in ways, which are morally and ethically sound? Reflective practice can be compared to 'Pandora's Box', bringing to fore experiences, which could expose student vulnerabilities. It is vital that I don't avoid these ethical dilemmas, rather I acknowledge that they exist and take action to reduce the risk to students.

There are a diverse range of students made up of a variety of ages, experience, culture, background and values. It is important that I follow some of the basic principles of ethics, as suggested by Carl Rogers (1969), that of respect and 'unconditional' regard for students. However, it is also imperative that my perspective is not taken as 'one size fits all' but building a more holistic individual relationship with the students. Paying attention to Carol Gilligan's (1982) 'ethic of care', this approach is primarily concerned with listening and responding to people's concerns. Using this approach issues are explored through dialogue, storytelling and the sharing of different viewpoints. It is being mindful to the stories which are unfolding and the impact they are having, not only the storyteller but all who hear them. Making moral and ethical judgments not only on the here and now but also on the longer-term interaction with each and every student.

### **'Act'**

This research has raised many ethical and personal concerns regarding my teaching the reflective practice module. Yet, personally I recognise and I am testament to the benefits of taking the risk and connecting with reflective processes. I want to establish if, although the reflective practice module



appeared problematic to a number of students, after a three-year period of studying and writing reflective journals were the perceptions still the same. This feedback is taken from a meeting with two 3<sup>rd</sup> year students.

### **'Look'**

Student F: I worked out in the first year that I don't like being told what to reflect on – the outcomes in the portfolio. I don't want to reflect on them. You have to mould your practice to meet the outcomes so it is not reflecting on something that I have seen that would benefit me. It is to meet the university outcomes. It is not a natural reflection.

Jo: What has been the shift in being more accepting of reflective practice.

Student F: It is a personal process. Being first introduced to reflective practice through the Work Based Learning portfolios I felt it was really forced. Doing the specialism module where you had to keep journals alongside it, doing that helped me create my specialism. I went through the process myself, rather than being told what to do. It was my choice.

Jo: Did you understand yourselves better from this process?

Student G: Yes and you appreciate why you do things. It makes you reflect on you as a person. Nobody else could write your reflection.

Student F: Yes, but this transition is hard to go into and you think it is a waste of time but once you actually go into it is vulnerable. You feel very vulnerable. Find out things about yourself that you don't want to know.

Jo: By reflecting you are creating space for yourselves to enable you to have a new way of thinking about things. There is a tipping point where I thought this is scary I am not going to go into this. But I recognised that this is important, a bit like a sea-saw. Then thinking I am going to have to tip into this or I am going to miss something really important to me.

Student G: That is especially right for me. I am completely different now to what I was in my first year and I am grateful that other people

boost            have noticed that about me and that has given me a bigger

feeling the way I am now. I can be myself instead of trying to be something else.

Student F:    I have tipped myself into reflection and looking at myself I am happier now. Even though at times I have a really bad feeling that this is going to change things.

Jo:             Is it always a bad feeling or do you ever get that feeling that, this might be alright.

Student G:    It is very personal and as you said before you go to the tipping point I feel happy with where I am. But then you think, this is going to improve me.

### **'Think' (Reflective Conversation between co-researcher and Jo)**

*I believe there is a real problem with the process by which I teach reflection and the pace at which it is taught. Because the theory of reflection such as Gibbs and Kolb is actually a hindrance, not a help, as it is too prescriptive and is preventing writing from taking place. I feel it is important to learn to think reflectively first. Using all of your senses and engaging with your emotions then re-visiting the reflections 6 months later from a more theoretical perspective.*

*This exploration into reflective practice has convinced me that within current teaching methods, one size does not fit all. Why can't we have different ways of learning and capturing reflection, which actually mirror the way we are? Why do we follow a specific format? The assessment of reflective practice is problematic because of the barriers concerned and as a result students edit their reflections. I have not read a really authentic reflection because I can see there is so much editing in it and students are just writing them because they have to.*

*There are two processes included in a reflection, an academic process and a personal process and the two can clash. Personally, I reflect all of the time and have developed and grown as a result of that but this has not resulted in*

*pages of writing. Likewise, I have read pages of writing from students reflective journals with very little growth or development evident. There needs to be a deeper exploration into this process. If it creates reflective thinkers it provides a process through which individuals can deliberate the past to prepare you for the future and that within all experiences there is an opportunity to learn and develop from it.*

*Research suggests that only mature adults in their forties are capable of engaging in a completely reflective process, yet our ages differ by over 20 years, from the early twenties to mid-forties. Engaging in reflective dialogue can strip away the perception of barriers linked to age creating the space for reflective thought and dialogue to flourish. As you reach your mid-forties you may develop skills, which enable you to join up all the dots to see a clearer picture compared to when you are young and your focus is then on finding the next number on your 'dot to dot' page. Engaging with reflection is a life choice but when that choice is imposed upon you then difficulties can arise.*

*It is vital that a supportive environment is created which encourages all those involved to engage with and 'play' with reflections. Enabling individuals and groups to explore a variety of approaches to capturing reflections. Ensuring that that the theory does not swamp the practical implications of reflections. Avoiding the danger of being 'over taught' which squeezes out the space for creativity and holistic growth of individuals and groups.*

## **'Act'**

Exploring reflective practice with students and colleagues has raised a number of questions, which I did not expect. Prior to this research it appears I have made a number of assumptions regarding the students, the design of the module and how I viewed myself within education. Looking through the mirror, I have discovered that discussions with students and colleagues have

challenged a number of those assumptions. The next chapter – **Discussion**, will explore three particular questions my findings have raised in more depth.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this research have raised a number of questions, which complement and contrast with the original focus of the dissertation. It is important not to lose sight of the original issues but it is also a valuable piece of research to explore, in more depth, the questions which have emerged during this process. As a result three fundamental questions have been raised which warrant further discussion:-

1. The perception that students are not '*academically mature*' to deal with a taught framework of reflective practice. Particularly first year students who have not yet made the 'shift' in their learning.

Research literature, including the work of Belenky and Stanton (2000), suggested that not all adults were capable of reflecting at a critical level. Also Kegan (1994), who suggested that most adults were not capable of this process until they reached their 40's. Both comments appear to confirm a range of perceptions made during personal assessments of students work including statements such as, '***students don't know how to reflect***' and my own assumption that '***they can only describe an event, not reflect upon it***' (Bolton 2005: p.101). The voices of the students within this research do not substantiate these claims. In many ways they display a wide range and level of understanding of the skills necessary to engage in deep and meaningful reflective practice, which does not correlate with age or academic ability. A number of students I have worked with over the last three years, ranging in age from 19 – 40, have displayed a natural, intuitive aptitude towards connecting with reflective practice. Almost a 6<sup>th</sup> sense in the way they reflect and tell their story.

This sixth sense aligns itself more closely with the work of Freire (1970) and his non-rationalist approach to reflective practice through his study of Brazilian peasants. It also links with Taylor (1997), who suggested that within reflective practice there are '*other ways of knowing*', which did not use maturity but acknowledged the importance of 'mindfulness' and intuition.

In this instance, instead of looking at the 'abilities' of students, it would be perhaps more pertinent to look at the role of the lecturer. Making a '*shift*' in understanding that it is impractical to believe that students can be 'taught' a particular reflective practice model. I acknowledge that this is in complete contrast to the work of Russell (2005: p.199) who impresses that '*reflective practice can and should be taught*'. This does not detract me from recognizing that as a lecturer, it is presumptuous of me to feel that I have the skills and ability to engage with a diverse range of students to proficiently '*teach*' them the complexities of reflective practice. The art of reflective practice, or as Dewey (1910) refers to it as 'thinking', is as natural to a human being as breathing, it is an inherent part of our being. It is a growing emergent skill, which you learn through experience, it cannot be '*text-book*' taught. This is not a disregard for theory and knowledge as they are integral to the learning process. It is however a cautionary note on taking time to identify the best way in which to explore and play with theories, which create curiosity not subdue it.

Karen Hanson (2011), author of 'Reflect – is this too much to ask?' expresses her wariness of the concept of specifically teaching reflective practice, as she recognises the risk of students using reflective practice models in a 'technical way' rather than using them for the purpose of '*developing a way of knowing*' (Hanson 2013). However, Hanson (2013) recognises that students need a certain degree of guidance regarding, what is '*reflective practice*'. The guidance for the educator at this point is to be clear regarding their understanding, purpose and definition of what reflective practice symbolizes to them. Hanson's definition of reflective practice encompasses the following:

*"...active engagement in continual review and repositioning of assumptions, values and practice in light of evaluation of multiple perspectives, including the wider socio-cultural perspectives influencing the context; transforming and transcending self and practice in order to effect change and improvement"*.

(Hanson 2012: p.17)

Clarity on what an educator hopes to achieve '*with*' their students (not '*for*' or '*to*' their students) is a vital starting point and cannot be underestimated.

2. Is there a problem with the pace we are taking the students? Are we forcing this pace?

As with any learning of a new skill, you generally improve with practice and experience over a period of time. The pace of this improvement is based on an individual's understanding of the concept, capabilities and natural ability regarding the specific skill. An integral element of this learning process is the continuous function of 'thinking', consciously and sub-consciously, about the skill upon which you are attempting to learn and master.

Exploring the work of Dewey (1910, 1916, 1933) around the notion of 'thinking', offers a starting-point, which encompasses the diversity and complexity that each individual brings with them when engaging with learning. Dewey (1910) suggested that as human beings we have three natural resources, which we draw upon to learn from our experiences, '*curiosity, suggestion and orderliness*'. Although his research was primarily concerned with the behaviour of children he acknowledged that as we developed into adults, for some, these natural resources '*dried up*' and became redundant.

For the purpose of this discussion I want to concentrate on the notion of '*curiosity*', as this is an area, which I personally most equate with when considering the student/teacher relationship. Drawing upon Dewey's (1910) explanation of these natural resources, it becomes apparent that during '*teaching*' a model of reflective practice, students are not encouraged to be '*curious*', as they are given a framework from which to hang their story on. In some cases, reflective practice models by their very nature are too prescriptive and in these cases curiosity is replaced by confusion, as Student C during a group discussion intimated:

..."to go straight in and write an essay on it [reflective practice] within a few weeks with having to understand theory. When we

haven't really got our heads around what we are doing was quite difficult".

(Student C Interview 2011)

A statement, which indicates, that for some students the pace of the module was moving too quickly. As Moon intimates it is important to recognise that:

*"Reflection involves the 'slowing of the pace of learning', it is more possible to recognise the role of emotion in the process of learning when it is slowed down".*

(Moon 2004: p88)

Through a systemic lens, reflective practice is an emergent property and things happen at a natural pace, there is no prescriptive time frame linked to this emergent process. Whatever is the speed of this pace, it can take time perhaps years as a person moves into adulthood. Dewey (1910) derives that sometimes a slower pace of learning can subsequently lead to a greater depth of reaction to specific issues. He suggests that time is necessary to enable individuals to absorb and understand experiences and ideas. He advocated that as a person develops over time and at their particular pace, if they remain open to their surroundings and sensitive to their experiences their curiosity develops into a *'positive intellectual force'*(Ward 2013: p.2). In other words, their curiosity is tweaked and they become interested in searching for answers, which are impacted upon by environmental, political and social interaction. Reflective practice within this culture becomes part of everyday life, a *'habit of the mind'*.

I agree with Dewey (1910), that in order to tweak an individuals' curiosity, at a pace that suits their personal learning style, then the role of the educator is that of a dual-learner with the students. Paying particular attention to the creation of an environment in which curiosity, excitement and wonder prevail, fueling reflective thought on lived experiences (Ward 2013). Avoiding any form of over prescriptive reference to theory or personal experience, creating the space and flexibility for students to formulate their own understanding and learning.



The final question raised by this research is concerned with student assessments within a HEI.

3. Is the assessment process problematic, preventing the capturing of authentic reflections as students write knowing it will be academically assessed? It becomes an academic activity rather than a framework for insight and learning.

The voices of the students within this particular research certainly confirm that the assessment process they have undergone for the Reflective Practitioner module is problematic. The students allude to the fact that they see journaling as an academic activity from which assessments will be made. I can see no evidence from my discussions with students that it encourages creativity rather it produces the opposite response in subduing it. The students' concerns confirm the findings of Boud and Walker (1998) and Jasper (1998) who discovered during their research that when students were asked to reflect in educational situations, many found it difficult to interpret what they had been asked to do or they just resisted authentic reflection and resorted to a 'tick box' exercise.

Within the limitation of this dissertation it is unfortunately not practical to engage in an in-depth exploration of the cause and implication of this particular issue. However, even at this preliminary stage of investigation it is important to recognise the work of Brookfield (1995) and his Four Lens Theory, which can support the on-going work of developing my skills as a critically reflective teacher. Brookfield (1995) created a model comprising of 4 lenses from which to engage in a critical process of reflection, these included, 1 The Autobiographical, 2 The Students' Eyes, 3 Our Colleagues' Experiences and 4 Theoretical Literature.

It is this model that I can now see has been the cornerstone of my research and integral to my reflective thinking, long before I formally decided to

research and write my dissertation. It is a model which Brookfield (1995) suggests enables:

*“...teachers’ to become aware of the paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasoning’s that frame how we work... So that teachers’ can reveal aspects of their pedagogy that may need adjustment or strengthening”*

(Brookfield 1995 cited in Miller 2010: p. 87)

It is a model by which the process of connections can be made and actions can be formulated, using the perspectives from all four lenses in ways, which create a ‘*transformational shift*’ in learning through fully immersing yourself in a critically reflective process.

The final chapter – **Conclusion**, offers the opportunity to summarise the journey that has been over two years in the making. Writing a conclusion will enable me to take a ‘look through the mirror’ offering a panoramic overview of perspectives from all four lenses.

## Conclusion

## Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding of self and the impact my role as a lecturer has on students understanding reflective practice in the environment. The findings of this research have enabled me to gain a better understanding of this aim and how I can now take action to improve my personal and professional being.

The objectives of this research study were to:

1. Identify the barriers, both personally and professionally, which can impact on the successful delivery of Reflective Practice module.
2. Engage with a critically reflexive process to analyse current methods of teaching within my own teaching of reflective practice.
3. Explore student and lecturer views of reflective practice, including the impact of experiential learning and the positives and pitfalls experienced when engaging with it as a process.
4. Formulate recommendations on a future teaching approach to the Reflective Practice module

As a result of my findings, there were three additional questions, which emerged, which I explored in more depth during the **Discussion Chapter**. I will not cover these in any more depth within this conclusion.

The following points below summarize the findings of the objectives and discuss suggestions for further exploration.

## Objective 1- Findings

- My assumption that students' were unable to reflect or chose not to engage with authentic reflective writing.
- Viewing reflective practice in terms of '*teaching it*' and '*learning it*' is problematic and a barrier for both student and lecturer.

Within the introduction of this dissertation, I wrote of my concern of the students' lack of understanding regarding the reflective practice process and their reluctance to engage in '*formal*' reflective practice. During this period of research and reflection I have made a '*transformational shift*' in my thinking and have created a new frame of reference through which I view reflective practice within a HE setting.

My assumption of students was incorrect. The hours of recorded research material during which students reflect at length on personal experiences and their learning from them, confirm beyond doubt that they have the skills and willingness to reflect. These findings suggest that their ability to reflect does not, as Kegan (1994) suggested correlate to age. However, a students' level of reflection and whether or not they reach critical reflection is one, which has not been determined and warrants further exploration. A question this raises for me is concerned with the conditions that enable some students to critically reflect when others are, as Trelfa (2008) suggests, "... *less aware of their map*"?

Throughout this research, it appears that reflective practice contradicts the practice, which has been around since the time of Aristotle, '*of teachers to teach and students to learn*' (Fry et al 2003). This suggestion will not gain universal agreement as there are many great authority figures in this field that advocate that reflective practice can and should be taught (Schon 1983, Kolb 1984, Russell 1995). However, my findings have convinced me that reflective practice is one such module which should be done '*with*' students and not '*to*'

them or 'for' them. I would support Dewey's (1910) suggestion that, particularly if you wish to fuel the students' curiosity and consequently their reflective thinking, the role of an educator within this context is that of a dual-learner with the students. Working collaboratively together, creating a collective dialogue which respects and values every individual for the experience and narrative that they bring with them.

## **Objective 2 - Findings**

Engage with a critically reflexive process to analyse current methods of teaching within my own teaching of reflective practice.

- Lack of clarity regarding the understanding, purpose and definition of what reflective practice symbolizes to me.
- Confidence issues regarding my ability to work alongside students as they were introduced to reflective practice.
- My personal reflections on my experiences of education.

Within the first paragraph of the Literature Review I had compared the journey of '*formal learning*' to that of standing at the edge of a minefield. I suggested that education could evoke powerful responses, which were dependent upon people's perceptions of where knowledge and learning is created and discovered. The metaphor of a minefield led me to consider, not specifically my methods of teaching, but what '*teaching*' and '*education*' symbolised to me.

I discovered, through reflective discussions with colleagues, that my educational journey had been a minefield. The school I attended was built on traditions, '*teachers taught and students learnt*'; creativity had not yet been added to the curriculum. Students who did not conform were dealt an authoritarian blow, '*amount to nothing*', and '*waste of time*' were descriptions I was dealt on a regular basis. In my final year of school, I worked hard to

achieve credible results, not for myself but to prove people wrong. I have since understood that it takes years to build confidence, yet minutes to shatter it.

I now recognise that the confidence I lacked within the classroom with the students on the Reflective Practice module was a legacy from my own school years. I identified within this research that one of my aims (wishes) was to gain a greater understanding of self so that I may use this knowledge to create a classroom environment in which students have the confidence that their voices are heard, respected and valued. I wish to create a person-centred approach, which recognises the value of working alongside students in a collaborative and respectful way. I now understand that I want for the students a positive experience of education that I never had.

This research has enabled me to take both a reflective and reflexive look at my thoughts and behaviour, which has provided me with an insight and understanding into what I previously considered as '*puzzling behaviour*'. Having taken the initial decision to step into my minefield and seek answers, I already feel more confident, able and content with my role within the classroom. I have re-framed my thinking of how I see the role of a teacher, not as authoritarian but as a facilitator, guide, a dual-learner with the students.

This process has given me clarity regarding the understanding, purpose and definition of what reflective practice symbolizes to me. It is perhaps a longer-term process for the construction of my own definition. For now, I wish to work with Hanson's (2013) definition as it encapsulates how I have spent the last three years continually reflecting upon and transforming my personal and professional being. It reads as such:

*"...active engagement in continual review and repositioning of assumptions, values and practice in light of evaluation of multiple perspectives, including the wider socio-cultural perspectives influencing the context; transforming and transcending self and practice in order to effect change and improvement"*.

(Hanson 2013: p.17)

### **Objective 3 - Findings**

Explore the student and lecturer views of reflective practice, including the impact of experiential learning and the positives and pitfalls when engaging with it as a process.

- A students' first experience of reflective practice tends to be from an autobiographical perspective, which can be emotional as personal stories and experiences are re-lived in a public domain.
- Dilemma regarding when and how to use theory when introducing students to reflective practice.
- The expectations of students to become proficient in writing reflections engage with theory and then open themselves up to not only self-scrutiny but also public scrutiny through the assessment process.

The impact of introducing first year students to reflective practice is tangible to see. The voices echoing their concerns, reservations, frustrations and confusion regarding the expectations of HE can be heard loud and clear. Yet within all this negativity there appears to be a general consensus, be it begrudgingly, that engaging in reflective practice has a number of personal and professional benefits. As students progress through the course, there is an understanding, that by moving beyond the 'tipping point' and looking '*through the mirror*', it can provide you with a new perspective and lens from which you can look backwards and forwards to really see yourself for the first time.

The work within the classroom can aid in this process of self-reflection but as the findings demonstrated from the '*wool and stick*' activity, for some students it can cause emotional discomfort as students delve into their autobiographical lens. It is important under these circumstances to recognise the limitations and remit of the skills and role that I have regarding working with students on their autobiographical lens. I am not a qualified therapist and therefore I need to ensure that I work within the ethical guidelines as set out

by the HEI, which are in place to protect the welfare of the students and employees. Within the limitations of this research, it is not possible to explore further the ethical dilemmas or the actions necessary to address them. However, it is important to demonstrate an understanding that the remit of a lecturer needs to be transmitted to the students from the beginning. And experiential learning activities must be risk assessed with the building in of a support structure for students, should the need arise.

An integral part of supporting a student during this process of exploring their personal story is the relationship, which is built with the lecturer. It is important to work towards the creation of a genuine relationship, which is built on respect, trust and valuing each individual's diverse range of cultural, historical, social and political experiences.

The dilemma regarding when and how to use theory with students new to the process of reflective practice raises a view, which is deeply embedded in systemic thinking. I would suggest that, does it have to be an either/or answer, theory or personal experience? Would it be more conducive to learning to take a more systemic approach by offering both/and, providing the environment in which theory and personal experience can be explored together? My findings have indicated that engaging with theory is problematic but I would suggest that the prescriptive framework used to teach the process of reflective practice is part of the problem. Especially when first introducing students to the notion of reflective practice. This is an area, which merits further research in order to appreciate the issues related to the use of reflective practice theories.

Within the **Discussion** chapter I discussed the work of Dewey (1910) and his notion of a human's three natural resources, which included the importance of curiosity. It is my belief that a task of a lecturer is to 'tweak' students' curiosity on how theory helps shape their thinking. Instead of being too prescriptive become 'playful' with theory. Enabling students to explore reflective practice at their own pace, helping them to learn from theory and not just blindly copy it.



The findings of this research have indicated that students have been blindly following the assessment process, writing and providing evidence to 'tick boxes'. Further research needs to be undertaken to determine how the assessment process could be changed to ensure that with regards to reflective journal writing, the students have the freedom and flexibility to write authentic journals.

Perhaps, reflective journal writing should not be the focus of the assessment but the creation of an on-going reflective dialogue with peers and tutors within a supportive environment would provide the creative space that is needed.

#### **Objective 4 - Recommendations**

Formulate recommendations on a future teaching approach to the Reflective Practice module.

When I first began this research study I believed I would discover a range of specific activities, which I could use to teach the Reflective Practice module. I now realise that I was subconsciously seeking a 'prescriptive', 'traditional' answer to my teaching approach. This research study has changed my view of this and I no longer seek to address the specific issue of my teaching. Instead I wish to take a step-back and work with each new diverse group of students, creating respectful and trusting relationships, which acknowledge and value an individuals starting point. As this relationship builds I am confident that my teaching approach will adapt and change to meet the individual needs within the classroom.

I now appreciate the importance of respecting the pace of learning and recognising that it can neither be forced nor rushed. That learning is not necessarily measured accurately by the assessment process but is measured by the self-growth of the individuals as they learn and understand themselves and the world they inhabit. It is through the interaction with this research and the critical-reflection I have undertaken which has provided me with this sense of understanding. I have now walked the path that I have asked students to

take during this module and as a result I can appreciate more clearly their concerns, frustrations and confusion as they navigate their way through the process. I am also fully aware of the benefits of persevering with the process as gaining a greater insight into who you are and why you behave in certain ways is an experience to be cherished.

In the final stages of this research study I would offer this concluding recommendation.

- Never stop the '*habiti*' of engaging in a critically reflective and reflexive process of assessing and re-assessing who you are and what you do.

The benefits of working within this process have not only created a better understanding for me personally as my role as a lecturer (including the way in which I can make improvements to my teaching) it has also provided me with a profound understanding of why the issue that first brought me to this particular research was so important to me and why I needed to explore it further.

From that very first interaction with a student outside the classroom, I have travelled on a journey to discover who I am both personally and professionally. I discovered the value I place upon relationships and the importance of working to the best of my ability. But I have also uncovered insecurities, regrets and a willingness to 'act for change', breaking the mould set over 30 years ago when I sat in a classroom as a student.

This journey has enabled me to take a step back, to look through the mirror and to see my world and the way I inhabit it from a range of different perspectives. It has not provided all the answers but what it has created is a catalyst from which my curiosity has been tweaked and I am eager to continue to research the power of reflective practice.

## Appendix A

### Ethics Statement relating to the Action Research Study: Through the Mirror

Dear

I am undertaking an action research study into how I can develop my skills to enhance students' capacity for reflective practice, and am asking you to be a participant in my research.

I will give priority to your interests at all times. I promise the following:-

Your identity will be protected at all times, unless you give me specific permission to name you.

You are free at all times to withdraw from the research, whereupon, if you request, I will destroy all data relating to you.

I will check all data relating to you before I make it public.

I will make a copy of my research report available to you prior to its publication.

Two copies of this statement are enclosed. Please sign and date both. Keep one copy for your files and return one copy to me.

Joanne Lewis

Date:.....

**I have received an ethics statement from Joanne Lewis.**

Signed:.....

Date:.....

**I give permission for Joanne Lewis to use data collected relating to me for the purpose of this research study only.**

Signed:.....

Date:.....

## **Bibliography**

- Adler, J.M. & McAdams, D. P. (2007) Time, Culture and Stories of Self. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18 (2) 97 – 128.
- Baldwin, C. (2005) *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*. Novato, New World Library.
- Bates, A. (2000) *Managing Technological Change: Strategies for Colleges and University Leaders*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Bateson, G. (1973) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. London, Paladin Books.
- Belenky, M.F. & Stanton, A. V. (2000) Inequality, Development and Connected Knowing. In Mezirow, J. & Associates (eds.) *Learning as Transformation*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, pp. 71 – 102.
- Berlin, I. (1998) *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*. London, Pimlico.
- Bleakley, A. (1999) From Reflective Practice to Holistic Reflexivity. *Studies in Higher Education*, 24, (3), 215 – 330.
- Bolton, G. (2001) Open the Box: Writing – a Therapeutic Space. In: Milner, P. (ed) *BAC Counselling Reader*, 2, 106 – 112.
- Bolton, G. (2005) *Reflective Practice: Writing & Professional Development*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London, Sage.
- Bolton, G. (2010) *Reflective Practice: Writing & Professional Development*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London, Sage.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R. & Walker, D. (1985) *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London, Kogan Page.
- Boud, D. & Walker, D. (1998) Promoting Reflection in Professional Courses: The Challenge of Context. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23, (2), 191 – 207.

British Educational Research Association (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. London, BERA.

Broken Rainbow (2008) Systemic Therapy. [Online]. Available from: [http://taeterinnen.org/material/systemic\\_therapie\\_en\\_pdf](http://taeterinnen.org/material/systemic_therapie_en_pdf). [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013].

Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Brockbank, A., McGill, I & Beech, N. (eds.) (2002) *Reflective Learning in Practice*  
Aldershot, Gower Publishing Company.

Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

Byrne, D. (1998) *Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences: An Introduction*. London, Routledge.

Capelin, H. (2012) Reflective practice in a very busy world: what's the essence? *The Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy*, 15 (1), 36 – 42.

Clegg, S. (2000) *Knowing through Reflective Practice in Higher Education*. *Educational Action Research*, 8 (3), 451 – 469.

Clifford, J. (1986) Introduction: partial truths, and On ethnographic allegory. In J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (eds) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Coghlan, D. & Brannick, T. (2005) *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*. London, Sage Publications.

Criticos, C. (1993) Experiential Learning and Social Transformation for a Post-Apartheid Learning Future. In: Boud, D., Cohen, R., & Walker, D., (eds.) *Using Experience for Learning*. Buckingham, Society for Research into Higher Education and University Press, pp. 159 – 165.

Cunliffe, A.L. (2004) On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner. *Journal of Management Education*. [Online] 28, 407 – 426. Available from: <http://jme.sagepub.com/content/28/4/407> [Accessed 28th March 2013].

Denzin, N.K. (1989) *Interpretive Interactionism*. California, Sage Publications.

Denzin, N.K. (1992) The Many Faces of Emotionality: Reading Persona. In: Ellis, C and Flaherty, M.G. (eds) *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*. London: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Dewey, J. (1910) *How We Think*. Boston, D.C. Heath & Co.

Dewey, J. (1916) *Democracy and Education: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. USA, Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (1933) *How we Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. Chicago, Henry Regnery.

Dewey, J. (2004) *Democracy and Education*. New York, G. P Putnam & Sons.

Dirkx, J. M. (1997). Nurturing Soul in Adult Learning. In: Cranton, P. (ed.) *Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 79-88.

Doty, M. (1996) *Heaven's Coast*. New York, Harper Collins.

Eccleston, K. (1996) The Reflective Practitioner: mantra or a model for emancipation? *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 28, 145-61.

Egan, K (1988) *Teaching as Story Telling: An Alternative Approach to Teaching and Curriculum*. London, Routledge.

Emslie, M. (2009) Researching Reflective Practice: a case study of youth work education. *Reflective Practice*, 10 (4), 417 – 427.

Foucault, M. (1997) Technologies of the Self. In P. Rabinow (ed) *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954 -1984*, 1 223 – 252. London, Penguin.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London, Penguin Books.

Freire, P. (1973) *Education for a Critical Consciousness*. New York, Seabury Press.

Fry, H., Ketteridge, S., & Marshall, S. (2003) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York, Routledge.

Ghaye, T. (2000) Into the Reflective Mode: Bridging the Stagnant Moat. *Reflective Practice*, 1 (1), 5 – 9.

Ghaye, T. & Lillyman, S. (2000) *Reflection: Principles and practice for healthcare professionals*. Trowbridge, Cromwell Press.

Ghaye, T. & Lillyman, S. (2006) *Learning Journals and Critical Incidents: Reflective Practice for Health Care Professionals*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London, Quay Books.

Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

Hanson, K. J. (2011). 'Reflect – is This Too Much to Ask?' *Reflective Practice*, 12 (3), pp. 293 – 304.

Hanson, K. J. (2012) *How Can I Support Early Childhood Studies Undergraduate Students To Develop Reflective Dispositions?* PHD Thesis. University of Exeter.

Hanson, K. J. ([k.hanson@worc.ac.uk](mailto:k.hanson@worc.ac.uk)). 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013) *Catch Up from Jo Lewis*. E-mail to: Lewis, J. ([j.lewis@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.lewis@worc.ac.uk)).

Herman, M. (2012) Thinking Space: Reflective Practice Meets Youth Work Supervision. *Youth and Policy*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.youthandpolicy.org> [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013]

Jasper, M. (1998) Assessing and Improving Student Outcomes through Reflective Writing. In: Rust, C. (ed.) *Improving Student Learning, Improving Student Learning Outcomes*. Oxford: OSCLD, Oxford Brookes University, pp 1-15.

Jasper, M. (2003) *Beginning Reflective Practice: Foundations in Nursing and Health Care*. Cheltenham, Nelson Thornes Ltd.

Johns, C. (2002) *Guided Reflection: Advancing Practice*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.

Johns, C. (2009) *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.

Johns, C. (2010) *Guided Reflection: A Narrative Approach to Advancing Professional Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.

Josselson, R. (1988) The Embedded Self: I and Thou Revisited. In: Lapsley, D.K., Power, F.C. (eds) *Self, Ego and Identity, Integrative Approaches*. 91 – 106. New York, Springer Verlag.

Josselson, R. (1996) On Writing other People's Lives. In R. Josselson (ed) *Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives*. 60 – 76. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Kegan, R. (1982) *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. (1994) *In Over our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press.

Kegan, Robert (2000). "What 'form' transforms?: A Constructive-developmental Approach to Transformative Learning". In: Mezirow, J. *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, pp. 35–70.

King, P.M & Kitchner, K.S. (1994) *Developing Reflective Judgment*. San Francisco, Jossey Bass.

Kinman, G. & Jones, F. (2004) *Working to the Limit*. London, Association of University Teachers.

Knight, P.T. (2002) *Being a Teacher in Higher Education*. Buckingham Society for Research in Higher Education, Open University Press.

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall.

Koshy, V. (2005) *Action Research for Improving Practice: A Practical Guide*. London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Kovan, J.T & Dirkx, J.M (2003) "Being Called Awake": The Role of Transformative Learning in the Lives of Environmental Activists. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53 (2), 99 – 118.

Lamm, S. (2000) *Transformative Learning*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.limglobal.net/transformative-learning-Sharon-Lamm> [Accessed 28th April 2013].

Lewis, J. Interviewed by Leach, K. (4<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

Magnet, M. (2003) What Use is Literature? [Online]. Available from: [www.city-journal.org/html/13\\_3\\_what\\_use.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/13_3_what_use.html). [Accessed 15th June 2013].

Marshall, J. (2004) Living Systemic Thinking: Exploring Quality in First-Person. *Action Research*, 2 (3), 305 – 325.

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2011) *All You Need To Know About Action Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London, Sage.

Mellor, N. (1998) Notes from a Method. *Educational Action Research*, 6 (3), 453 – 470.

Merriam, S. B. (2004) The Role of Cognitive Development in Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*. [Online] 55, (1), 60 – 68. Available from: <http://www.aeq.sagepub.com/content/55/1/60> [Accessed 28th April 2013].

Meyerson, D.E. & Scully, M.A. (1995) Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change. *Organization Science*, 6 (5), 585 – 600.



Mezirow, J. (1978) *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women Re-Entry Programs in Community College*. New York: Centre for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Mezirow, J. (1981) A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education. *Adult Education*, 32 (1), 3 – 24.

Mezirow, J. (1995) Transformation Theory of Adult Learning. In: M.R. Welton (ed.) *In Defense of the Lifeworld*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, pp. 39 – 70.

Mezirow, J. (1998) On Critical Reflection. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48 (3), 185 – 191.

Mezirow, J. (2000) Learning to Think like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory. In: Mezirow, J & Associates (eds.) *Learning as Transformation*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, pp. 3 – 34.

Mezirow, J. & Associates (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Miller, B (2010) *Brookfield's Four Lenses: Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*[Online]. Available from:  
[Sydney.edu.au/arts/teaching\\_learning/academic\\_support/Brookfield\\_summary.pdf](http://Sydney.edu.au/arts/teaching_learning/academic_support/Brookfield_summary.pdf)

Moon, J. A. (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. Abingon, Routledge.

Moustakas, C. (1990) *Heuristic Research: Design Methodology and Applications*. California, Sage.

Peshkin, A (1988) In Search of Subjectivity – One's Own. *Educational Researcher*, 17 (7), 17 – 22.

Piaget, J. (1972) Intellectual Evolution from Adolescent to Adulthood. *Human Development*, 16, 346 – 370.

Pollner, M. (1991) Left of ethnomethodology: the Rise and Decline of Radical Reflexivity. *American Sociological Review*, 56, 370 – 380.

Raelin, J.A. (2000) *Work-Based Learning: The New Frontier of Management Development*. New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (ed.) (2001) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry & Practice*. London, Sage Publication.

Richards, L. & Richards, W. (2012) School for Education & Institute of Health and Society. *Sponges Don't Make their Own Water. Reflective Practice*, (In print). University of Wolverhampton & University of Worcester.

Richards, R. (2012) Assembling Diversity: Self Assembly: Identities. Presented at *MA Systemic Youth Work lecture*. Worcester of University.

Rogers, C. (1969) *Freedom to Learn: a View of What Education Might Become*. Columbus, Charles E. Merrill.

Rosenfield, I. (1988) *The Invention of Memory*. New York, Basic Books.

Ross, R. (1994) *The Ladder of Inference*. London, Nicholas Brealey.

Russell, T. (2005) Can Reflective Practice be Taught? *Reflective Practice*, 6 (2), pp. 199 – 204.

Said, E. (1994) Representations of the Intellectual: *the 1993 Reith Lectures*. London, Vintage.

Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York, Basic Books.

Schon, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Towards a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Senge, P. (1992) *The Fifth Discipline*. London, Century Business.

Shawne, C. (2013) *Folk Stories about Mirrors*. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.ezinearticles.com/?expert=Claire\\_Shawne](http://www.ezinearticles.com/?expert=Claire_Shawne) [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

Sinclair-Bell, J. (2002) Narrative Inquiry: More Than Just Telling Stories [and] Narrative Study: Whose Study is it Anyway. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, (2), 207 – 213. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/journals/tesol/html> [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

Sparknotes Editors (2004) *Sparknote on The Importance of Being Ernest by Oscar Wilde*. Available from: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/earnest/> [Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

Stringer, E. (2008) *Action Research in Education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New Jersey, Sage.

Student C (Confidentiality). Interviewed by: Lewis, J. (21<sup>st</sup> April 2011).

Sung-Chan, S & Yuen-Tsang, A. (2006) Reflections on building a reflective practice community in China. In White, S., Fook, J., & Gardner, F. (eds.) *Critical Reflection in Health and Social Care*. Maidenhead, Open University, pp. 57 – 72.

Taylor, A. E. (1955) *Aristotle*. New York, Dover Publications Inc.

Taylor, E. (1997) Building upon the Theoretical Debate: a Critical Review of the Empirical Studies of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48 (1), 34 – 59.

Trelfa, J. & Richmond, D. (2008) Getting the Balance Right: training and education with NVQ and HE routes to youth work. *Youth and Policy* Nos 97 – 98, pp. 119 – 134.

Universities UK. (2012) *Universities and Higher Education Establishments in the UK*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/UKHESector> [Accessed 21st February 2013].

University of Worcester (2011) *Ethical Guidelines*. University of Worcester.

Ward, L.G. (2013) How We Think: Chapter 3: Natural Resources in the Training of Thought. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey\\_1910a/Dewey\\_1910c.html](http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey_1910a/Dewey_1910c.html). [Accessed 8th June 2013].

Wheatley, M. (1999) *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. San Francisco, Berrett Koehler.

