Maternal and Child Health Nurse Reflective Practice

Print version

Contents

Glossary of terms

This glossary sets out a range of practices that are focused on improving working relationships and practice to achieve better outcomes for clients.

All of the following practices set out to improve relationships. All involve forms of reflective practice. Characteristic of each practice is a focus on learning and a sense of reciprocity and accountability. The creation of shared meaning and use of reflective practices is an important early step to leading and managing change.

Action Learning: Action learning is a small group process (usually no more than five people) that focuses on the exploration of "problems" and "creative solutions" through an individual's connection to that problem. A strict protocol is followed with people taking turns at different roles in the process (ie. listener; questioner; teller). Dedicated time and space to the process must be adhered to. Clinical Supervision offers a possible site for the use of action learning sets.

Action Research: Reflective practice overlaps and is extended by "action-research" methods which involve the systematic application of an "observe, reflect, plan, act, observe" cycle of inquiry. Done on a small or large scale action research seeks to produce improvement in practice while at the same time increase knowledge and understanding of practices. Done well, action research is a highly participatory inclusive process.

Appreciative Inquiry: Appreciative inquiry is similar to action research but focuses on what is already working in a particular context. Advocates of this form of reflective practice argue that many change interventions are "deficit" focused which can leave people feeling demoralised by past and current efforts. Appreciative inquiry is guided by four process phases: discovery (what is already working); dream (envisioning what might be); design (collectively determining what might be); delivery (planning for action).

Clinical Supervision: Clinical supervision uses reflective practice approaches but with the specific focus to improve clinical practice.

Coaching: Coaching is a supportive relationship between a coach and another person. Unlike mentoring and other forms of reflective practice coaching can be a spontaneous, short-lived relationship around a specific issue; skill or learning focus between two co-workers. Emphasis is on the needs of the person seeking the coaching: not the coach. A coach needs specific knowledge and skills for facilitation of the process to be maximised, for example, reflective questioning techniques. Coaching is not counselling; punishing; teaching or telling another colleague what or how to approach a situation. Preceptorship offers a possible site for coaching relationships.

Mentoring:	Mentoring is a supportive relationship between two people: not necessarily from the same workplace or field. One person is generally more experienced and assumes the role of mentor and the other less experienced person assumes the role of mentoree. Areas of focus for the relationship generally relate to career and personal development.
Preceptorship:	Preceptorship is an intense support period, generally, as part of an induction to the Maternal and Child Health Service. The focus is on technical clinical skill acquisition and competence.
Professional Learning Community:	A professional learning community uses processes that promote continuous individual and collective learning that improves the outcomes for families. What facilitates the development of professional learning communities is individual staff commitment and motivation; formal and informal connections with other workplace sites and focused continuous professional development that promotes collaborative work and learning relationships.
Reflective Practice:	A bottom-up self directed process of learning which can be formal or informal in its approach and individual or collaborative in nature. Characteristics of reflective practice include it being approached in a conscious, planned and systematic manner. Most well known is Donald Schön's formative "reflection-in-action" and summative "reflection-on-action" approaches.

Setting the scene – Being a learner

Have you ever stopped to think about how you "learn" things and then how you use these "things" in your work, or in fact if you use these "things" at all? It is easy to get caught up in the "doing" with no time to stop and think about the why and how.

Your daily experiences help build your knowledge and skills. Your previous participation and interaction with families, co-workers and other professionals can change the way you handle a situation and/or prepare you for the next new situation. If you are not challenged to stop and think about your learning, you and your clients may not be getting the total benefit. Have you ever stopped to think about how your clients learn?

We want you to take the time to stop and think about the ways you learn because this will help you to improve the way you practice, your working relationships and ultimately achieve better outcomes for you and your clients.

In this section we want to challenge you to think about how you learn and therefore what impact this has on what you learn and how you apply your learning.

Think about:
The following collection of activities will support you to think about:
- ✓ The connection between work and learning
- ✓ Factors that influence your learning
- ✓ Possibilities for learning

This section contains five activities, these being:
- A day in the life
- My learning history
- Learning how to learn
- A portrait of my learning at work
- Mentoring – a way of learning

A day in the life

Aims:

- To understand the connection between work and learning.
- To reflect on the different relationships and purposes of relationships in a typical day.
- To locate possibilities for learning within your own "work" experiences and context.

Individual Action:

1. Below is a brief audio from three MCH Nurses describing the workplace, including the rewards, challenges and interactions with others.

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3

2. Take a moment to think about (or discuss with colleagues):

✓ How does your experience compare to those in the audio?
✓ Who do you connect with during a typical day?
✓ What are the possibilities for learning in each type of relationship you encounter?
✓ What possible places or spaces for learning might there be in your workplace?
✓ Have you previously thought about what you learn from your clients?

3. Click on "My reflections" to listen to each MCH Nurse talk about ways they have learnt and their reflections on their work and learning.

Example 1 My reflections	Example 2 My reflections	Example 3 My reflections

✓ How do your reflections compare to these examples?
✓ Do you think about your broad range of learning experiences in the workplace?

My learning history

Aim:

- To understand yourself as a learner by reflecting on how you learnt during your life.

Individual Action:

1. Create your own learning history timeline. Click here to view and print the "My Learning History" activity sheet to complete. See a sample below.

Stage	***Write about a time when you remember learning something***	***How did I learn?***
Before school	I remember learning to open my lunchbox in preparation for going to school.	Mum had shown me and then I tried it for myself, and kept trying until I could do it easily.

When filling in the activity sheet think about something you can remember "learning" during the different stages of your life. Briefly describe that experience and then try to "categorise" how you were learning. To assist you to "categorise" how you were learning, you can click here to view the "Examples of learning styles" information sheet.

2. Take a moment to think about (or discuss with colleagues):

- ✓ What does your learning history tell you about yourself as a learner? What is your preferred learning style?
- ✓ What do you find helps you learn?
- ✓ What do you find hinders your learning?
- ✓ What are the possibilities for using different learning strategies in your workplace?

Group Action:

This activity can be done as a round-robin exercise with a group of colleagues and a facilitator.

Each table represents a particular stage (pre-school, tertiary). Participants rotate round the room visiting each table. At the table they discuss and fill in a large learning history activity sheet. The activity sheet on each table relates to the particular stage. Click here to view and print a copy of the "Stages – Learning History" activity sheets for the tables.

Once all participants have visited all tables, a facilitated discussion is held. Use the questions below to draw out some comparisons between the responses:

- ✓ Is there a preferred learning style at the different stages?
- ✓ Is there a preferred learning style for this group?
- ✓ What may be the benefits to a MCH nurse in having an auditory learning style? (Why is being able to learn through hearing and listening important?)
- ✓ Have you ever stopped to think about how your clients or colleagues learn?
- ✓ How do you explain things to parents?
- ✓ How do you explain things to colleagues?

My learning history

Stage	***Write about a time when you remember learning something.***	***How did I learn?***
Before school		
Primary / secondary		
Tertiary studies		
Professional life		

Examples of learning styles

Learning strategies and styles are described in a range of ways. In the literature, whilst there are variations in the different learning style "models", there are also many similarities. Following are two examples of ways to categorise different learning strategies and styles. The aim of providing these examples is to stimulate you to think about different learning styles, it is not meant to infer that these "models" are "better" than any others.

Use this information to think about the ways you may have learnt and identify your preferred approach. Once you have identified your preference you can put into place strategies to assist you to learn more effectively.

Example One: Visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles

Visual learning styles – this means you learn by seeing and looking.

You will:
- Take detailed notes rather than get involved in discussions
- Tend to sit in the front so you can see clearly
- Benefit from illustrations and presentations, and especially those in colour
- Make comments like:
  - "How do you see the situation?"
  - "What do you see stopping you?"
  - "Do you see what I am showing you?"

Auditory learning style – this means you learn by hearing and listening.

You will:
- Enjoy discussions and talking things through and listening to others
- Acquire knowledge by reading aloud
- Hum and/or talk to yourself
- Make comments like:
  - "I hear you clearly."
  - "I'm wanting you to listen."
  - "This sounds good."

Kinesthetic learning style – this means you learn by touching and doing.

You will:
- Need lots of breaks and will want to move around
- Speak with your hands and gestures
- Remember what was done, but have difficulty with what was said or seen
- Learn through doing activities
- Make comments like:
  - "How do you feel about this?"
  - "Let's move forward together."
  - "Are you in touch with what I am saying?"

Example Two: Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model

Sensing learners Concrete, practical, oriented towards facts and procedures.	**Intuitive learners** Conceptual, innovative, oriented toward theories and meanings.
Visual learners Prefer visual representations of presented material – pictures, diagrams, flow charts.	**Verbal learners** Prefer written and spoken explanations.
Inductive learners Prefer presentations that proceed from the specific to the general.	**Deductive learners** Prefer presentations that go from the general to the specific.
Active learners Learn by trying things out, working with others.	**Reflective learners** Learn by thinking things through, working alone.
Sequential learners Linear, orderly, learn in small incremental steps.	**Global learners** Holistic, systems thinkers, learn in large leaps.

Stages – Learning History

Before school

Write about a time when you remember learning something.	*How did I learn?*

Stages – Learning History

Primary / Secondary

Write about a time when you remember learning something.	***How did I learn?***

Stages – Learning History

Tertiary studies

Write about a time when you remember learning something.	*How did I learn?*

Stages – Learning History

Professional life

Write about a time when you remember learning something.	***How did I learn?***

Learning how to learn

Aim:

- To reflect on the notion of "learning about learning" and what this means for the individual.

Individual Action:

1. Bill Lucas is a Learning Strategist and Facilitator from England. He poses the following questions to professionals in the many workshops he facilitates:

> "Think about what you do when you don't know what to do. Do you fall back on your knowledge of a subject? Do you try and remember what you did last time you were stuck?"

Take a moment to think about (or share your thoughts with colleagues):

✓ What do you do when you don't know what to do?

2. Click on the photo of Bill Lucas and listen to what he has to say about learning how to learn.

You can also view and print a transcript of his talk "Learning how to learn" by clicking here.

3. In the audio Bill Lucas talks about the 5Rs – your learning muscles, these being:

- **Resourcefulness:** Knowing what to do when you don't know what to do!
- **Remembering:** This involves getting better at recalling processes and techniques that have helped you in the past and applying them in the present.
- **Resilience:** Developing staying power so that you can deal with the uncomfortable feelings you will get when you really stretch yourself.
- **Reflectiveness:** This involves harvesting the meaning from your learning so that you are continuously improving.
- **Responsiveness:** This involves adapting and changing as you put what you have learned into practice.

Take a moment to think about the following questions. You may want to print out a simple activity sheet, which includes the following questions, if so click here.

✓ Have you ever heard about the 5Rs – your learning muscles – before?
✓ Can you think of situations when you have used each of the 5Rs?
✓ Do you use one of your learning muscles more than the others?
✓ What might assist you to become a "better" learner?

4. Click here to read the "About Bill Lucas" information sheet. You can also go to his website www.bill-lucas.com

Learning how to learn

Talk from Bill Lucas

Have you ever stopped to think about what is actually happening when you are learning? A child tentatively takes a short, wobbly step forward but in a few days has begun to walk confidently. A teenager learns how to drive a car. An adult discovers how to empathise with someone who is distressed. A grandparent works out how to send an e-mail for the first time at the age of 80. In each of these examples, learning is clearly taking place.

But what's going on? Is a child learning to walk the same as learning to empathise with a mother who is distressed? Is learning the names of new medication and products the same as mastering a new programme on your computer? Do we all learn in the same way? For several thousand years, people have been trying to work out what is going on when you are learning. And in the last hundred years there have been many different theories put forward.

Recently it is becoming clearer that, just as you can learn how to walk, use the computer, or work with families with complex needs, so you can also learn how to learn.

The 5Rs

If you want to get physically fitter you take exercise. So what do you do if you want to get better at learning? Answer – you exercise your learning "muscles". Let me introduce you to the five muscles which I believe are most important. I call them the 5Rs, today's version of the old 3Rs of wRiting, Reading and aRithmetic! They are:

- **Resourcefulness:** Knowing what to do when you don't know what to do!
- **Remembering:** This involves getting better at recalling processes and techniques that have helped you in the past and applying them in the present.
- **Resilience:** Developing staying power so that you can deal with the uncomfortable feelings you will get when you really stretch yourself.
- **Reflectiveness:** This involves harvesting the meaning from your learning so that you are continuously improving.
- **Responsiveness:** This involves adapting and changing as you put what you have learned into practice.

Let me give you an example of what I mean in practice. The TV show *Who wants to be a millionaire* is now seen all over the world. In the show contestants are asked questions of increasing complexity and each time they answer the money they win doubles until they win a million pounds – or dollars in Australia.

At each stage contestants have four choices as to how they answer a question:

- They can answer it on their own.
- They can ask the audience, in the hope that someone will know the answer.
- They can phone a friend, an expert on the subject.
- They can opt to go 50:50, narrowing the odds by being offered two answers, one of which is the correct one.

Each of these is a smart learning strategy for a quiz show. And resourceful learners will not just have four strategies for any situation they find themselves in. Resourceful learners have many strategies they will use throughout their lives. Maternal and Child Health Nurses deal with many different families and family situations. What strategies do you call on when dealing with, for example, a teenage single parent? Are these the same strategies you would use with an adult single parent? Different strategies might include things like:

- Sleeping on it
- Analysing options using, for example, a strengths, weakness, opportunities or threats SWOT analysis or any similar tool
- Using a mind map
- Making a list
- Searching on the web
- Coming up with a set of challenging questions
- Using a reference book
- Developing a small problem solving group with peers
- Keep a diary

and so on.

Think about your approach to learning at work as a Maternal and Child Health Nurse.

When choosing a method, effective learners tend to consider these questions:

- What kind of a learner am I? For example an activist tends to prefer trial and error, while reflective and theoretical learners will go to read a manual first!
- What kind of learning activity is it? If it is a matter of acquiring a new skill, demonstration or imitation followed by regular practice may work. If the learning is more complex, it may be helpful to have someone to advise you and give you helpful feedback.
- Where is it taking place? If at home, certain methods may be more appropriate. If at work, these may be different.

The good news is that learning is learnable!

You just need to be *Ready, Go, Steady*:

- Emotionally **ready** and determined to stay motivated,
- Able to **go** at it creatively using your first 3 learning muscles (resourcefulness, remembering and resilience), and
- **Steady**, (able to reflect and respond, adapting what you have to do in the light of what you have learned. These are the last two learning muscles.).

Are you ready?? Go. And don't forget… Steady!

Learning how to learn

Bill Lucas talks about the 5Rs – your learning muscles, these being:

- **Resourcefulness:** Knowing what to do when you don't know what to do!
- **Remembering:** This involves getting better at recalling processes and techniques that have helped you in the past and applying them in the present.
- **Resilience:** Developing staying power so that you can deal with the uncomfortable feelings you will get when you really stretch yourself.
- **Reflectiveness:** This involves harvesting the meaning from your learning so that you are continuously improving.
- **Responsiveness:** This involves adapting and changing as you put what you have learned into practice.

Questions

1. Have you ever heard about the 5Rs – your learning muscles – before?

2. Can you think of situations when you have used each learning muscle? Fill in the table below.

Learning muscle	**Personal example**
Resourcefulness	
Remembering	
Resilience	
Reflectiveness	
Responsiveness	

3. Do you use one of your learning muscles more than the others? Explain:

4. What might assist you to become a "better" learner?

About Bill Lucas

Hello, there! I am a facilitator, speaker and strategist. I am passionate about lifelong learning, change, communication, leadership and the operation of the mind.

The simplest way of finding out more about me is to go to my web site, www.bill-lucas.com

I do lots of work for the UK government and its agencies, for corporate clients like Lloyds TSB, Microsoft and for educational organisations of all kinds.

I was the first CEO of the Campaign for Learning where I helped to create the national awareness raising events – Learning at Work Day and Family Learning Weekend.

I appear pretty regularly on radio and TV, for example, The Moral Maze, Newsnight, Night Waves, The Learning Curve, Start the Week and Woman's Hour. In 2001, I was the international guest of Australia's Adult Learners' Week.

I am the author and co-author of more than 50 books. My books have been translated into Spanish, Russian, Bulgarian, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese and Arabic. Recent titles include:

- Power up your mind; learn faster work smarter. Published by Nicholas Brealey Publishing, October 2001. ISBN: 185788275X.
- Be Creative; Essential steps to revitalise your life and work. Written by Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas. Published by BBC Book Pub, February 2004. ISBN: 056348764X.
- Help your child to succeed: the essential guide for parents. Written by Bill Lucas and Alistair Smith. Published by Network Educational Press Ltd, September 2002. ISBN: 1855391112.
- Teaching pupils how to learn: research. Written by Bill Lucas, Toby Greany, Jill Rodd and Ray Wicks. Published by Network Educational Press Ltd, May 2002. ISBN: 1855390981.
- Discover your hidden talents; the essential guide to lifelong learning. Published by Network Educational Press Ltd, April 2005. ISBN: 185539104X.

I am a regular contributor to the national press and write regular columns for Virgin Hotline magazine, for Training Journal and for t mag.

In 2001, I was awarded an honorary doctorate by De Montfort University in recognition of my distinguished contribution to lifelong learning and in 1996 was honoured with a Guardian Jerwood award. I am also a senior visiting research fellow at the University of Surrey's School of Management.

I am a patron of the Campaign for Learning, with Philip Pullman, of Pegasus Theatre in Oxford. I am also Chairman of the not-for-profit organisation, The Talent Foundation, a non-executive Director of the Live Group and a governor of Peter Symonds College in Winchester.

A portrait of my learning at work

Aim:

- To develop an awareness of your learning opportunities at work by examining the people, the place, the purpose of your work and the processes that are followed.

Individual Action:

1. Click here to view and print the activity sheet "A portrait of my learning at work". It looks like this:

Learning Statements	***Regularly***	***Often***	***Some times***	***Rarely***
My learning				
I reflect on what works well in my day-to-day practice.				
I observe other colleagues in their practice.				
I record what I am learning from my day-to-day practice.				

2. Place a ✓ in the column that most resembles your learning experience.

Blank spaces are provided for you to include other statements of relevance to your context.

3. Take a moment to think about (or discuss with colleagues):

✓ What is your experience of learning with and from other MCH Nurses?
✓ What is your experience of learning with and from your clients?
✓ What is your experience of learning from your own actions and reactions?
✓ What is your experience of learning with and from other professionals?
✓ What processes do you have in place to support your learning?
✓ What resources can you draw upon to support your learning?
✓ Where do you think that most of your learning opportunities occur?
✓ What is the purpose of your learning?

Group Action:

This activity works well using a "Think Pair Share" approach with at least one other colleague. *Think* about your experience, *pair* up with another colleague and *share* it with that colleague or the wider group.

The activity can be used to identify points of difference and similarity. These can drive discussion about MCH practices and "hot spots" of activity or inactivity. This discussion can help you make sense of your practice and the practice of others. This is a step in the development of supportive learning environments and relationships.

A portrait of my learning at work

Learning Statements	*Regularly*	*Often*	*Some times*	*Rarely*
My learning				
I reflect on what works well in my day-to-day practice.				
I observe other colleagues in their practice.				
I record what I am learning from my day-to-day practice.				
I seek feedback from other colleagues about my practice.				
I clarify expectations about my role with colleagues.				
I clarify expectations about my role with family members.				
I do my own professional reading.				
I participate in professional development in my own time.				
I use mentoring to improve my practice.				
I feel confident in dealing with families.				
I use forms of reflection to improve my practice.				
I use published research to improve my practice.				
My learning with and from others				
I get together, informally, with others to share ideas.				
I give feedback to other colleagues about their practice.				
I have structured time to share ideas with others.				
I visit other Maternal and Child Health centres.				
I discuss key challenges with families.				
I look to other Maternal and Child Health centres for good ideas to improve my practice.				
I participate in enquiry groups that look at a particular area of need for our centre.				
I get together with other non-Maternal and Child Health professionals to problem-solve a situation.				
I involve family members in improving my practice.				
I learn from the families I work with.				
I decide with others what type of professional development to use.				

Mentoring – A way of learning

Aim:

- To support you to examine the idea and practice of mentoring further.

Individual Action:

1. Take a moment to consider or write down a definition of mentoring. Click here to view some definitions about mentoring. Print the definitions.

Compare these definitions to your response using the following questions. (These questions are also on the "definitions" sheet).

- ✓ How does your definition of mentoring compare to these mentoring definitions?
- ✓ Do you think that mentoring may be a "way of learning" for you?
- ✓ Could mentoring support you to meet different needs of your clients?

2. Click here to view and print the three-page information sheet "A spotlight on mentoring". This material gives a simple overview of mentoring.

Read the information sheet and consider the following questions. (The questions are on the information sheet.)

- ✓ In what ways is mentoring similar or different to activities such as chatting with colleagues? Would you consider any of your current work relationships with colleagues or other professionals outside your workplace to be mentoring relationships? Think about the relationship from the perspective of whether it is a formal and/or informal relationship, and whether you consider yourself the mentor and/or mentee.
- ✓ Compare a mentoring relationship with other workplace relationships. In what way(s) might a mentor role be different from a manager / coordinator role? In what way(s) might it be similar?
- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentee, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?
- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentor, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?
- ✓ Do you think that some of these principles for establishing and managing an effective mentoring program would be difficult to implement in your workplace? If so, which ones and why?

3. Many organisations and associations offer mentoring programs. Below is a list of just a few. To read more about these programs you may wish to visit:

- The Australian Mentor Centre at http://www.australianmentorcentre.com.au/. This centre is the creation of Gillian Johnson who has been responsible for the design and development of national mentoring programs supporting tertiary nursing students, including conducting training for 100 mentors in 2004. The Royal College of Nursing, Australia has a number of innovative mentoring programs in which nursing students as well as practicing nurses in cities and rural areas are linked with experienced nurses and other health professionals. Among the purposes of these initiatives is to ensure that participants feel valued and remain in the field.

- Mentoring Australia. The official website of the National Mentoring Association of Australia Inc. http://www.dsf.org.au/mentor/index.htm

- MentorLink-Allied Health set up by the Allied Health Professions Alliance (Victoria). It offers a facilitated mentoring program to allied health professions. http://www.mentorlinklounge.com/

- The Association for Australian Rural Nurses and Midwives http://www.arnm.asn.au/index.php?/content/view/23/54/

- The Royal College of Nursing http://www.rcna.org.au

More references to mentoring are contained in the further reading list of this resource.

Group Action:
1. To further challenge the definitions and understanding of mentoring, undertake the "Assumptions challenge". Display the statements about mentoring and ask the participants to indicate whether they agree or disagree. Click here for the statements to be displayed or distributed to the participants.

Nominate a person from your team to act in the role of facilitator.

Make four large signs "Agree", "Disagree"; "Strongly Agree"; "Strongly Disagree". Click here to print these four signs. Place one sign in each corner.

Ask participants to move to the corner that most reflects their view. Those who are undecided go to the middle of the room. Participants put forward their view in their small groups and then to the whole group. Participants are given an opportunity to shift their position after listening to other participants' views. The facilitator throughout the activity can draw out points of similarity and difference, and compare with the definitions that were examined individually.

2. The material "A spotlight on mentoring" could be distributed to staff to read prior to attending a workshop/discussion group. Each staff member would also complete the "consider questions" and bring these to a group discussion. These questions are provided as a separate activity sheet and space is provided on the sheet to write down your reflections.

Definitions about mentoring
What others have to say about mentoring …

"Mentoring is a sustained partnership that is necessarily multifaceted and is enhanced by mutual respect and concern."

"Mentoring does not happen by accident, nor do its benefits come quickly. It is relationally based, but it is more than a good friendship… mentoring is not two people who just spend time together sharing."

"What distinguishes facilitated mentoring is that the mentor generally belongs to the organisation and is not involved in managing their mentoree's performance. The mentor brings a significant inside perspective on organisational life and can create an independent space for the mentoree to reflect on their experiences at work unconstrained by career imperatives to make a good impression."

"The purpose of mentoring is always to help the mentee to change something - to improve their performance, to develop their leadership qualities, to develop their partnership skills, to realise their vision, or whatever. This movement from where they are ('here'), to where they want to be ('there')."

Take a moment to ask yourself:

- ✓ How does your definition of mentoring compare to these mentoring definitions?
- ✓ Do you think that mentoring may be a "way of learning" for you?
- ✓ Could mentoring support you to meet different needs of your clients?

A spotlight on mentoring

Mentoring is a relation-based method of learning, but it is more than a friendship. Mentoring requires that there is a mentor and a mentee (referred to in some programs as the "mentoree").

Mentoring models and the relationships that develop can vary to suit the needs of individuals and workplaces. There are both formal and informal mentoring approaches.

A formal mentoring approach is set up, usually deliberately, and the participants (mentor and mentee) are matched up on a one-to-one basis (by the program coordinator). There is a clear purpose for the relationship, and through the relationship the mentor and mentee establish a habit of learning and evaluation of that learning. In a formal mentoring program, the mentor and mentee are usually given additional support and guidance to ensure that both parties are contributing and gaining equally from the relationship. Mentor preparation programs are likely to cover the following areas:

- Clarification of what time, energy and so on a mentor might reasonably be expected to commit to the mentee
- Clarification of the purpose(s) of the relationship
- Clarification of the recruitment, matching and monitoring procedures with a prospective mentee
- Information about confidentiality and liability
- Developing knowledge and understanding about the boundaries and limitations for the mentor's contact with the mentee
- Identifying what benefits a mentor may gain from participating in a mentoring relationship
- Skills training in areas such as listening, questioning and problem-solving
- Crisis management and dealing with difficult situations
- Options for ongoing support and development
- Ending the mentoring relationship

A critical success factor is the development and support of the mentors and mentees. Areas of preparation for mentors are also likely to be relevant to mentees, but each role will have a different perspective and responsibility within the relationship.

There may also be situations where informal mentor relationships develop. Characteristics of an informal mentoring relationship are likely to be loose inter-personal relationships that are more opportunistic, irregular; arise spontaneously and are based on good rapport and mutual attraction which usually leads to, if not already, strong ties.

Sometimes people question what the difference is between a coaching and mentoring relationship. Depending on what you read, or whom you listen to, the distinction can be clear-cut or fuzzy. They appear to be similar in that they both aim to support and develop a protégé. They appear to be different in that coaching tends to focus on technical skill (eg. feeding) or knowledge acquisition (eg. child development) and implementation (eg. approaches to parenting). Mentoring is likely to involve some of the skills of coaching, such as the use of open-ended and non-judgemental questioning but it takes a broader focus to the growth and development of the individual. View the "Glossary of terms" which provides a definition for coaching and mentoring.

Take a moment to consider:

✓ Would you consider any of your current work relationships with colleagues or other professionals outside your workplace to be mentoring relationships? Think about the

relationship from the perspective of whether it is a formal and/or informal relationship, and whether you consider yourself the mentor and/or mentee.

✓ Compare a mentoring relationship with other workplace relationships. In what way(s) might a mentor role be different from a manager / coordinator role? In what way(s) might it be similar?

The potential for a high quality mentoring arrangement that supports learning depends on a number of factors, such as:

- Clear purpose
- Dedicated time
- Recognition of participation
- Identification of limitations

What problems and challenges can mentors and mentees encounter?

Brian Hansford and colleagues (2003) reviewed over 150 mentoring studies. Nearly all the studies identified at least one problem encountered through mentoring. The problems identified for mentors and mentees went something like this:

Problem Experienced	For Mentor	For Mentee
Lack of time	✓	✓
Professional expertise / personality mismatch	✓	✓
Mentor's lack of skill and understanding of the goals and processes within mentoring (eg. guidance, sharing, feedback, modelling)	✓	✓
Found it challenging to meet, be observed and observing		✓
Lack of interest and commitment to mentoring	✓	✓
Lack of proximity	✓	✓
Found it challenging to seek and receive critical feedback		✓
Feelings of inadequacy		✓
Unrealistic expectations from the relationship	✓	✓
Perceptions of an unequal status	✓	✓
Conflicting mentor role – advice versus assessment	✓	
Emotionally draining / stressful	✓	
Colleagues feeling jealous	✓	
Mentoring not always necessary	✓	

Janine Knackstedt's (2001) Canadian study identified six types of health care professional needs that mentoring was used for:

- Professional development
- Sponsorship and recognition
- Equal partnership
- Friendship
- Coaching on work issues
- Role modelling

Knackstedt found gaps between what mentees needed and what they actually received from the mentoring experience. It seems that clarifying expectations from mentoring is an obvious, but often overlooked, consideration.

Take a moment to consider:

- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentee, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?
- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentor, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?

Establishing and managing an effective mentoring program

Mentoring Australia is the official website of the National Mentoring Association of Australia Inc. It outlines a core set of 15 principles for establishing and managing an effective mentoring program. Mentoring Australia claim that a responsible mentoring program requires:

1. A well-defined mission statement and established operating principles.
2. Regular, consistent contact between mentor and mentee.
3. Establishment under the auspices of a recognised organisation.
4. Paid or volunteer staff with appropriate skills.
5. Written role statements for all staff and volunteer positions.
6. Adherence to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) requirements.
7. Inclusiveness in relation to ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, gender and sexuality as appropriate to the program.
8. Adequate ongoing financial and in-kind resources.
9. Written administrative and program procedures.
10. Documented criteria which define eligibility for participation in the program.
11. Program evaluation and ongoing assessment.
12. A program plan that has input from stakeholders.
13. Risk management and confidentiality policies.
14. Use of generally accepted accounting practices.
15. A rationale for staffing arrangements based on the needs of all parties.

(See http://www.dsf.org.au/mentor/benchmark.htm)

Take a moment to consider:

- ✓ Do you think that some of these principles for establishing and managing an effective mentoring program would be difficult to implement in your workplace? If so, which ones and why?

Group activity sheet

Assumptions challenge

Look at the statements below. Indicate what you believe about mentoring and mentors, by placing yourself in the appropriately marked place in the room – ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Statements

Mentoring*:*

- Mentoring is a mutual learning situation.
- Mentoring assists the mentee advance their career.
- Mentoring is a voluntary practice.
- Mentoring is more effective when mentors have an understanding of what the mentee is experiencing.

Mentors*:*

- Mentors help mentees to uncover solutions themselves.
- Mentors are the expert and mentees are the novice.
- Mentors are usually older than those they mentor.
- Mentors need to be a skilled coach.

Group activity sheet

"A spotlight on mentoring" consider questions

Complete these questions in conjunction with reading the handout "A spotlight on mentoring".

- ✓ In what ways is mentoring similar or different to activities such as chatting with colleagues? Would you consider any of your current work relationships with colleagues or other professionals outside your workplace to be mentoring relationships? Think about the relationship from the perspective of whether it is a formal and/or informal relationship, and whether you consider yourself the mentor and/or mentee.

- ✓ Compare a mentoring relationship with other workplace relationships. In what way(s) might a mentor role be different from a manager / coordinator role? In what way(s) might it be similar?

- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentee, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?

- ✓ At this point in time, if you were entering a mentoring arrangement as a mentor, what would you set as the purpose for this type of learning?

- ✓ Do you think that some of these principles for establishing and managing an effective mentoring program would be difficult to implement in your workplace? If so, which ones and why?

Reflective Practice

You have probably heard the term “reflective practice”, but do you really know what this means?

In this section we want to challenge you to think about reflective practice and how you might use reflective practice in your workplace to improve the way you practice, your working relationships and ultimately achieve better outcomes for you and your clients.

Think about:
The following collection of activities will support you to think about:
- ✓ What assumptions do you make about reflective practice?
- ✓ What am I trying to do by using reflective practices in my work?
- ✓ What techniques and tools are more likely to work for my situation?
- ✓ What forms of reflection improve my practice? How do I know?

This section contains five activities, these being:
- Assumptions about reflective practice
- A spotlight on reflective practice
- A Learning Journal
- A Critical Incident Reflection Framework
- Collaborative Action Learning Groups

Assumptions about reflective practice

Aims:

- To introduce you to some statements about reflective practice and challenge your assumptions.
- To support you to examine reflective practice further.

Individual Action:

1. Click here to view and print the "Assumption challenge" activity sheet.

2. Put a mark along the continuum that most represents your view. Consider the following questions. (These questions are on the activity sheet).

✓ Which statements did you strongly agree with?
✓ Which statements did you strongly disagree with?
✓ In which cases is your answer somewhere in the middle?
✓ How do your responses compare with other responses from other colleagues?
✓ What do your responses reveal about your beliefs and assumptions in relation to reflective practice?
✓ In which cases might your answer to the above questions be influenced by how you prefer to learn? (See "Setting the scene: My learning history" – learning styles information sheet.)

Group Action:

This activity can be done by a group with a facilitator. The manager/coordinator may want to nominate a facilitator to manage this activity.

Rather than a paper-based activity, this activity could be run as a "Corners" activity. Make four large signs "Agree", "Disagree"; "Strongly Agree"; "Strongly Disagree". Click here to print these four signs. Place one sign in each corner. Use overhead screens to display each statement about reflective practice. Ask participants to move to the corner that most reflects their view. Those who are undecided go to the middle of the room. Participants put forward their view in their small groups and then to the whole group. Participants are given an opportunity to shift their position after listening to other participants' views. The facilitator throughout the activity can draw out points of similarity and difference.

Activity sheet

Assumption challenge

Look at the statements below. Mark on the continuum what you believe about "reflective practice".

Statements:

- Reflective practice helps you to make sense of an experience.

  strongly agree ⟷ strongly disagree

- Reflective practice is used at the end of an event/activity.

  strongly agree ⟷ strongly disagree

- Reflective practice is fundamental to improving practice.

  strongly agree ⟷ strongly disagree

- Reflective practice is more important for new staff.

  strongly agree ⟷ strongly disagree

- Reflective practice is indulgent.

  strongly agree ⟷ strongly disagree

Consider:

✓ Which statements did you strongly agree with?
✓ Which statements did you strongly disagree with?
✓ In which cases is your answer somewhere in the middle?
✓ How do your responses compare with other responses from other colleagues?
✓ What do your responses reveal about your beliefs and assumptions in relation to reflective practice?
✓ In which cases might your answer to the above questions be influenced by how you prefer to learn? (See "Setting the scene: My learning history" – learning styles information sheet.)

A spotlight on reflective practice

Aims:

- To introduce examples of reflective practice frameworks.
- To reflect on what being a reflective practitioner means for you.

Individual Action:

1. Click here to view and print the two-page information sheet "A spotlight on reflective practice". This material gives a simple overview of reflective practice.

Read the information sheet and consider the following questions. (The questions appear in the two-page paper material).

- ✓ In what ways is reflective practice similar or different to activities such as chatting with colleagues and families?
- ✓ Do I use reflection in my practice?
- ✓ What do I need to know and be able to do as a reflective practitioner?
- ✓ What kind of reflective practitioner am I?
- ✓ How do I, or can I, use reflection in my practice?

If you would like a copy of the above questions on an activity sheet with spaces for you to respond to the questions, click here.

Group Action:

The material "A spotlight on reflective practice" could be distributed to staff to read prior to attending a workshop/discussion group. Each staff member would also complete the "consider questions" and bring these to a group discussion. These questions are provided as a separate activity sheet and space is provided on the sheet to write down your reflections.

Information sheet

A spotlight on reflective practice

Consider:

- ✓ In what ways is reflective practice similar or different to activities such as chatting with colleagues and families?
- ✓ Do I use reflection in my practice?

Introduction

We all reflect but in different ways and about different things. Often the reflection provides the "story of the day" that we may muse over by ourselves or tell a sympathetic ear, but ultimately the "story of the day" we want others to know about, because it has some sort of significance. The "story of the day" is usually described in a context that connects the past, present and future and is characterised by an experience, event and/or ongoing issue. More often than not we tend to focus on what we perceive did *not* work in the "story" rather than on what *did* work – let alone extracting lessons learnt.

Reflective activities need not be intrusive or complicated. Reflection encompasses many combinations of forms and mediums in the health and education fields. Journals, diaries (video, written, photo), logs, critical incidents; critical incident interviews; observation; metaphors; action learning sets; mentoring; coaching; visits to other organisations and on-line discussion groups all can facilitate reflection. Self and/or group processes can support deeper understanding and improvement of practice. Use of different reflective practices can help develop skills in self-awareness; analysis and evaluation.

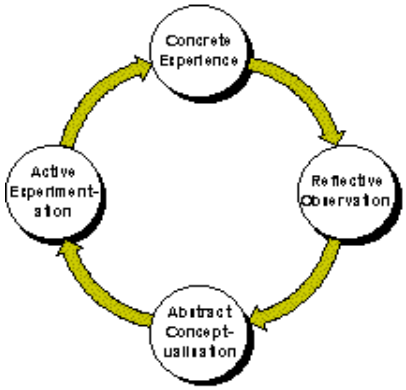
There is a plethora of literature related to reflective practice. Different thinking and models of reflective practice may help structure your own approach to reflection.

Reflective practice theories

Thinkers, such as Brookfield's (1986) "Adult learning", Kolb's (1984) "Experiential learning" and Schön's (1983, 1987) reflection, in and on action have informed reflective practice theories. Early work around developing a "cycle of learning" can be found in John Dewey's promotion of the use of abstract concepts in everyday life and Kurt Lewin's exploration of the relationship between person, place and situation. Two examples are presented for your consideration.

Example 1

David Kolb's (1984) model proposed a learning cycle of "concrete experience, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualisation leading to further active experimentation".



It is possibly the most well-known of the models (adapted by many others) with the cycle applicable to different timeframes (eg. minutes, days, weeks and months) and other "cycles of learning" within each phase.

The type of model or approach to reflective practice that best suits you will vary. Peter Honey and Alan Mumford (1992) adapted Kolb's framework and identified four different individual learning preferences or styles emerging from the cycle of learning:

Kolb:	**Honey and Mumford:**
Concrete experience	Activist (prefers doing and experiencing)
Reflective observation	Reflector (prefers to observe and reflect)
Abstract conceptualisation	Theorist (prefers to understand underlying reasons, concepts and relationships)
Active experimentation	Pragmatist (prefers to "have a go", try things, see if they work)

(Atherton, 2006)

Example 2
Johns (1994) structured model of reflection asks individuals (or groups) to write a description of an experience, for example, meeting a family for the first time. Key questions are used to interrogate the experience.

Aesthetics	✓ What was I trying to achieve? ✓ Why did I respond as I did? ✓ What were the consequences of that for the family, others or myself? ✓ How was this person(s) feeling? ✓ How did I know this?
Personal	✓ How did I feel in this situation? ✓ What internal factors were influencing me?
Ethics	✓ How did my actions match with my beliefs? ✓ What factors made me act in incongruent ways?
Empirics	✓ What knowledge did or should have informed me?
Reflexivity	✓ How does this connect with previous experience? ✓ Could I handle this better in similar situations? ✓ What would be the consequences of alternative action for the family, others or myself? ✓ How do I feel about the experience? ✓ Can I support others and myself better as a consequence? ✓ Has this changed my ways of knowing?

Adapted from: North Bristol NHS Trust http://www.nbt.nhs.uk/

Consider:
- ✓ What do I need to know and be able to do as a reflective practitioner?
- ✓ What kind of reflective practitioner am I?
- ✓ How do I, or can I, use reflection in my practice?

Activity sheet

A spotlight on reflective practice

Consider questions

Complete these questions in conjunction with reading the handout "A spotlight on reflective practice".

- ✓ In what ways is reflective practice similar or different to activities such as chatting with colleagues and families?

- ✓ Do I use reflection in my practice?

- ✓ What do I need to know and be able to do as a reflective practitioner?

- ✓ What kind of reflective practitioner am I?

- ✓ How do I, or can I, use reflection in my practice?

A learning journal

Aims:

- To consider whether you might use a learning journal.
- To consider in what form you might use a learning journal.

Individual Action:

1. Click here to view and print the "Exploring a learning journal" information sheet. This short document provides a rationale for, and examples of, a learning journal.

2. Take a moment to consider these questions:

✓ How do I record what I learn through my practice currently?
✓ Why might I use a learning journal?
✓ Why might I not use a learning journal?
✓ What would my learning journal look like? How would I use it?

Exploring a learning journal

Why keep a learning journal?

Sometimes people's eyes can glaze over at the thought of keeping a journal. However, a learning journal can be:

- a "treasury of good practice";
- help evaluate actions tried;
- a way of capturing things which have been learned;
- a way to demonstrate impact;
- it's not the only way but it is one way that makes you think.

The premise behind keeping a journal is that you cannot improve and change something you are not aware of in the first place! As a method of reflection, a learning journal can help you "slow-down" and evaluate a learning experience at your own pitch and pace.

How can a learning journal be used?

A learning journal is essentially a learning tool for the individual. A learning journal might be used, for example, by individuals to "make" notes about an experience. This is different from "taking" case notes. The emphasis on the former is on "sense-making", while the emphasis on the later tends to be on description of the event. Over time, patterns and themes emerge about your experiences.

A learning journal can become a tool which opens learning beyond the individual. It is sometimes useful to share issues with others. This might be in conjunction with other reflective practices, such as within a coaching or mentoring relationship.

What does a learning journal look like?

There is no set "look" to a learning journal. Essentially a learning journal structure and form will be what works best for you. What follows are some examples of a learning journal. These may provide a basis from which you develop your own.

Learning journal examples

Example 1: Note taking and sense making

"The experience"	**"Sense-making" and "Futures-planning"**
In this section you might include: • notes about the type of activity (ie meeting, professional development) and/or • task; • location; • date; • duration of activity; • who is involved in the activity/ task; • purpose of the activity/ task; • new ideas/ resources/ concepts.	In this section reflect on: • what the experience meant to you, and • what it might mean for you in the future. For example, the experience may: • affirm particular behaviours or strategies; • identify new ways of looking at similar experiences in the future leading to the utilisation of different concepts and practices.

Example 2: Guided questions
Some people find staring at a blank journal page intimidating. The questions below may help you get started.

Learning Journal

What happened? Describe the experience.

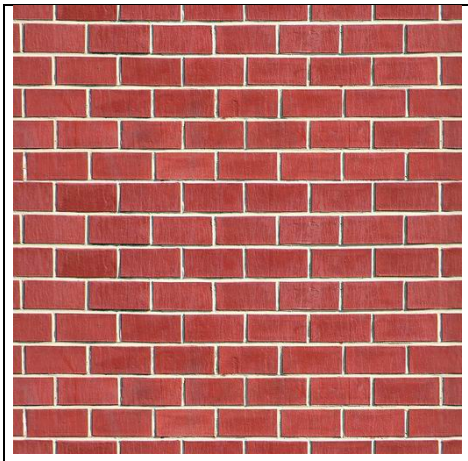
How do I feel about the experience (before, during, after)?

What insights have I gained through this experience? (eg. self and others)

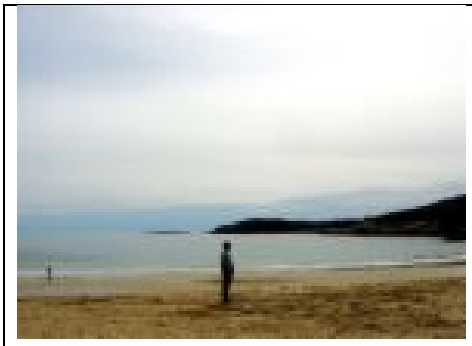
What do I think helped or hindered my learning? (eg. other people's learning)

What will I do the same/different because of this experience?

Example 3: Photo journal
A picture may be a useful demonstration of an experience/event, and support you to reflect. The picture may represent the experience or your feelings.



Notes:
- What happened and why do I feel like this?
- What have I learnt?



Notes:
- What happened and why do I feel like this?
- What have I learnt?

A critical incident reflection framework

Aim:

- To consider the use of a critical incident reflection framework.

Individual Action:

1. Click here to view a brief description and an example of "A 'Critical' Reflection Framework" information sheet.

2. Take a moment to consider these questions:

✓ How does the underpinning concept of critical incident reflection compare to my understanding and practice of it currently?
✓ Why might I use critical incident reflection at work?
✓ Why might I not use critical incident reflection at work?
✓ Would there be a space and place for this form of critical incident reflection in my practice? If so, how could it be used and for what purpose?

A "Critical" Reflection Framework

Why use critical reflection?

Analysing a critical incident may help you to:

- "reflect-on-action" (ie past experience),
- "reflect-in-action" (ie as an incident happens), and
- "reflect-for-action" (ie actions you may wish to take in future experiences)

Often "reflection" and "critical reflection" are used inter-changeably in the literature. However, critical reflection denotes another level of reflection beyond what you might or might not cover in other forms of reflection (eg. diary, journal). Sometimes action is just "too hot" for us to consciously reflect-in-action (as the incident happens) (eg. Eraut, 1994). This is why a critical reflection framework may be better suited as it requires reflection in relation to past and future action.

A default use of this technique and tool, particularly in "health", is as a way of reflecting on "what was perceived to go wrong". While this is a valid purpose, the scope of this framework has broader applications – namely as an appreciative form of inquiry. This framework of reflection starts from a basis of what has worked well and why.

Critical reflection is an extension of "critical thinking". It asks us to think about our practice and ideas and then it challenges us to step-back and examine our thinking by asking probing questions. It asks us to not only delve into the past and look at the present but importantly it asks us to speculate about the future and act.

What theory underpins this form of reflection?

Critical incident reflection sits well within the action research field or it can "stand-alone" as a learning method. While there is little agreement in the literature about what is reflective practice there does seem to be agreement that critical reflection can be taught to adults.

John Flanagan, who founded the American Institutes for Research in 1946, introduced critical incident reflection. He set out a 20 year plan to improve the effectiveness of organisations and their leaders. His strategy:

- To formulate problems in general terms so that they could apply findings to a broad class of issues;
- To emphasise new research methods to be of central importance;
- To develop "the critical incident technique" to identify contributing factors to the success or failure in specific situations.

Critical incident reflection is used in health, for example, seeking patient views and in multi- and inter-disciplinary team situations.

How can critical incident reflection be used?

Critical incidents can be either positive or negative; an interesting interaction or an ordinary everyday occurrence. Sometimes, depending on the focus and the "rawness" of a critical incident, it may feel uncomfortable to undertake a critical reflection because it highlights our assumptions, views and behaviours.

The critical reflection framework is a guided process to aid analysis and increase the potential for positive outcomes. Analysis of a critical reflection can take place at any point and therefore is useful particularly in development and enquiry orientated programmes (ie. learning and insights can be drawn from, fed back in and across programmes in sync with the rhythm of participant experience and need).

Possible outcomes from undertaking critical reflection include:

- Congratulation and affirmation. Even within a critical incident that someone frames as "unsuccessful" there is usually some part of an adverse situation that has been handled well and this should be acknowledged;
- Immediate action;
- Not resolved;
- No action but the person feels better for talking about it.

Critical incident reflection can be used in different ways to produce narratives (individual and/or group) based on the recall of an experience. For example, critical incident reflection can be of a "one-off" event/experience or of different experiences about the same issue/focus.

Variations in the use of critical incident reflection can be introduced through, for example:

- the combinations of people participating in the critical reflection (eg. different roles or connections to the same experience or issue);
- time (eg. one single incident that occurs on a regular basis; a specified time period, such as six months or at the end of each week).

A critical incident reflection framework

The framework below is a guide for your own reflection and learning from events that have significance to you. The questions under each heading are "prompts" only. The framework is there to support you identify and develop options. There are no right or wrong responses although the overarching frames of "The what?", "So what?" and "Now what?" are important components in a critical incident reflection.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">The what?
A description of the incident/experience with just enough detail to support doing your "So what?" section. For example, description about who, what, why, when, where.</td></tr>
<tr><td>So what?
This is the sense-making section that asks you to surface general meaning, significance, your position / view point; actions; emotions (pre-during-post).</td><td>Now what?
This section makes connections from the experience / incident to further actions. For example, what would you do differently / the same next time? How come? What are key points, lessons learnt to share with your colleagues, network and/or group outside the network? (eg. idea, product, process, concept)? How will you do this?</td></tr>
</table>

Collaborative action learning groups

Aims:

- To consider your engagement in collaborative action learning.
- To reflect on particular skills, such as listening, questioning, and debate and dialogue, in group approaches to learning.

Individual Action:

1. Click here to view the information sheet "A collaborative action learning group".

2. Take a moment to consider these questions (these appear in the text of the handout):

✓ How does the underpinning concept of collaborative action learning compare to my understanding and practice of it currently?
✓ Why might I participate in collaborative action learning at work?
✓ Why might I not participate in collaborative action learning at work?
✓ Would there be a space and place for this form of learning in an existing practice? If so, how could it be used and for what purpose?

Information sheet

A collaborative action learning group

What is a collaborative action learning group?

A collaborative action learning group is when a group of people (typically 3-5 people) come together over a period of time (determined upfront and then reviewed along the way) and learn through reflecting on real current problems or areas of inquiry. This approach must be underpinned by mutual respect and trusting relationships. You may know this type of group and form of learning by another name.

What's behind this form of learning?

The premise behind collaborative action learning is that if we engage genuinely in this form of reflection and learning then we will develop a deeper understanding of our self and others thereby unleashing more creative solutions. There are no "right" or "wrong" responses, rather possibilities to be explored and resolved in light of your local situation.

What can this form of learning look like in practice?

Usually, these groups are facilitated by someone from within or external to the group (eg. an external consultant). Some find setting up an expectation to rotate the facilitation every six to 12 months is helpful to the learning experience because:

- It promotes the idea of wider participation;
- Learning needs and areas of focus of the group evolve and so a facilitator "fit-for-purpose" becomes an important consideration;
- It minimises people pushing the "default" button of perceiving the facilitator as "the expert" and therefore "holder of knowledge" – it moves people away from a dependency model of learning;
- It provides an opportunity for everyone to develop their skills in facilitation and experience the group from this perspective.

Some groups deliberately rotate the venue of the group learning session conscious of promoting a sense of equity.

The group needs to set formal and jointly agreed protocol. For example:

- Each person has their own dedicated "airtime" in the group.
- There will be no interrupting in a colleague's dedicated airtime space.
- We discourage the offering of solutions, as we are trying to explore solutions together through reflection.

Sometimes a key facilitator role is keeping people accountable to the protocols they agreed together.

Each group will come to their own view and practice of what works for them. For example, in a group of 3 people dedicated "airtime" might be created through the use of rotating roles of "teller" (the person who tells the others their problem); "the listener/questioner" (the person who actively listens and notes down questions to ask the teller at the end of their "airtime") and "the reflector" (the person who acts as a time-keeper for the other two colleagues and synthesises the other colleague's exchange). The overall timeframe will vary. Some find 15 minutes for each person is adequate: others find less or more time is needed. Experiment and review as you go.

What processes and skills are used within a collaborative learning group?

This form of learning employs both support and challenge processes. The emphasis of these processes will vary, but participants will need to develop and use the following skills to support and challenge their group members:

- active listening,
- skills in dialogue rather than debate,
- questioning for understanding, and
- critical thinking.

- ***Active listening***

  Active listening is when you are focussed on who you are listening to, in order to understand thoroughly what he/she is saying.

  - Be "other" directed: focus on the person who is speaking. Follow and understand the speaker, as if you were walking in their shoes. Listen with your ears but also your eyes and other senses. Suspend your other thoughts and emotions and concentrate on the other person who is speaking.
  - Be encouraging: non-verbally acknowledge the points made by the person speaking. Let the presentation run its course. Don't agree or disagree, but encourage the train of thought.
  - Be involved: use your body position (eg. leaning forward) and an attentive approach to encourage the speaker and signal your interest.

  As the listener you should be able to repeat back in your own words what has been said. You may agree or disagree with the speaker, but before you can do either you need to know exactly "what it is". You need to listen.

- ***Skills in engaging in dialogue rather than debate***

  A key learning process within a group reflective practice is the use of dialogue. A dialogue differs from a debate in one crucial way – in a debate you seek to win the argument whereas in a dialogue you seek to understand difference in order to build common ground and push thinking along. Below is a list of characteristics about debate versus dialogue.

What is Debate?	What is Dialogue?
Assuming that there is one right answer (and you have it).	Assuming that others have pieces of the answer.
Combative: attempting to prove the other side wrong.	Collaborative: attempting to find common understanding.
About winning.	About finding common ground.
Listening to find flaws.	Listening to understand.
Defending your assumptions.	Bringing up your assumptions for inspection and discussion.
Criticising the other side's point of view.	Re-examining all points of view.
Defending one's views against others.	Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own.
Searching for weaknesses and flaws in the other person.	Searching for strengths and value in the other position.
Seeking an outcome that agrees with your position.	Discovering new possibilities and opportunities.

(Source: Canadian Policy Research Networks, Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future, Mary Pat MacKinnon, 2004, CPRN Social Architecture Papers, Research Report F/42, Family Network)

- ***Questioning for understanding***
  Sometimes people find the use of "why" questions threatening, particularly if:
  - there is a history of mistrust;
  - it is a new relationship;
  - there is a relationship related to accountability rather than learning;
  - there is a lack of confidence.

  However, finding out "why" is a key to unlocking our deeper beliefs, values and purposes for different actions. Instead of "why did you do that?", see what happens if you substitute:
  - "What led you to do that?", or
  - "How come you did that?".

- ***Critical thinking***
  Critical thinking helps us make the familiar strange. It helps us to debunk phrases, such as, "Well, that's just the way it is round here", by surfacing and confronting potentially deep institutional beliefs; structures and processes.

What processes can be used between group "get-togethers"?

Keeping a personal journal is one way of continuing to reflect and learn between group "get-togethers". Other suggestions used by groups that you might consider are:

- "Learning for action" postcards: A group of teachers had postcards made up for their group. As part of the session they would each write a "learning for action" point(s) and then post it to themselves. A couple of days later when they were back in the mix of busyness this postcard would arrive acting as a prompt and visible symbol to other colleagues about their learning experience and commitment to learning. They also said it was "fun"!

- "Learning buddy": Participants make a commitment to another person in the group to hold them accountable to their action for learning and to be a peer support in between the group sessions.

- "Gallery of learning": Participants develop a joint learning portfolio for the group. This is shared around the group for the duration of the group's focus.

Consider:

- ✓ How does the underpinning concept of collaborative action learning compare to my understanding and practice of it currently?
- ✓ Why might I participate in collaborative action learning at work?
- ✓ Why might I not participate in collaborative action learning at work?
- ✓ Would there be a space and place for this form of learning in an existing practice? If so, how could it be used and for what purpose?

References

Setting the scene – being a learner references

- Hansford, Brian C and Tennent, Lee and Ehrich, Lisa C (2003). Educational Mentoring: Is it worth the Effort?. *Education Research and Perspectives* 39(1):pp. 42-75.
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Websites

Setting the scene – being a learner Useful websites

- The Australian Mentor Centre http://www.australianmentorcentre.com.au/
- Mentoring Australia. The official website of the National Mentoring Association of Australia Inc. http://www.dsf.org.au/mentor/index.htm
- MentorLink-Allied Health set up by the Allied Health Professions Alliance (Victoria). http://www.mentorlinklounge.com/
- The Association for Australian Rural Nurses and Midwives http://www.arnm.asn.au/index.php?/content/view/23/54/
- The Royal College of Nursing http://www.rcna.org.au
- Dr Mike Turner, Mentoring for Change, www.mikethementor.co.uk

Reflective Practice Useful websites

- North Bristol NHS Trust http://www.nbt.nhs.uk/

Further reading

Setting the scene – being a learner further reading

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Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree