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**Guidelines for the Production
Analysis element of Media
Production degree work –
with particular regard to its
reflective aspects.**

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Introduction

In the final year of their undergraduate degrees Media Production students are normally expected to create a product – whether in film, video, interactive media, audio, or any other creative programme using electronic media. This is assessed, and part of the assessment is based on a piece of written work that is intended to provide an account of the work, with reflection on it and evaluation of it. A common problem is that students can write a good description of what they have done but often they seem unable to represent reflection on it, and hence the evaluative element is inadequate.

There may be many reasons for this being the case, for example:

- **Students may feel too close to their own creative work to be able to stand back and reflect critically on it. It can be difficult to be objective about a project that is so personal – conceived, managed and presented entirely by oneself.**
- **There may exist a popular view that any creative work should ‘speak for itself’, and that an attempt to analyse is futile and reductionist (in Wordsworth’s words, ‘We murder to dissect’). This may lead to an unconscious resistance in some students to the requirement of a production analysis. In fact, of course, major creative artists (including Wordsworth!) have always reflected at length on their work, discussing what it is they want to achieve, and to what extent they feel they have succeeded.**
- **Media Production undergraduates will have come from a variety of academic backgrounds in school or college. For example, those who have previously followed English Literature or Art History courses will have been expected to be aware of the need for critical appreciation and evaluation, as opposed to the simple relating of factual information. On the other hand, there are others for whom the kind of critical, reflective writing required in the Production Analysis may be quite alien.**

We have considered this problem and below we suggest a format for the Production Analysis and some teaching materials that together should contribute to the improvement of student work in the areas that we have described.

This guide is presented in three sections: Section A is a suggested format for the Production Analysis; Section B is a Generic Framework for Reflective Writing; Section C consists of two resources on reflection – a classroom activity which introduces students to the qualities of reflective writing, and some initial guidance on reflection for students in the form of a handout.

We would stress that we see the use of the reflective teaching materials at the end of this guide (Section C) not just as an optional add-on, but intimately linked to the production analysis. Use of an exercise such as The Park, in particular (see later, in Section C), provides a means of talking about the qualities of reflection that are expected in the Production Analysis. The Generic Framework for Reflective Writing (Section B) provides a means of judging the quality of reflective work and, in effect and if required, some of the assessment criteria for the Production Analysis.

Section A

A Suggested Format for the Production Analysis

The structure that we envisage consists of three parts. The first part (Part 1) provides a detailed review of the background thinking, literature base and planning for the project. The second part (Part 2) consists of a learning journal, preferably written from the earliest thinking about the project (i.e. while Part 1 is being composed) but focusing on reflection on the active production process. The third part (Part 3) is the culmination of the reflective and evaluative work, attempting to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses in the finished product.

Parts 1 and 3 of the student work will be marked in the conventional manner. Part 2 – the journal – will not be marked directly, but we suggest that it should be subject to some mandatory criteria, such as minimum length, etc. (see below) as well as more general guidelines. If the journal does not meet the mandatory criteria, Part 3 will not be marked, as Part 3 is designed to rely heavily on the content and quality of the journal.

Word Length

We suggest that Part 1 should consist of around 1500 to 2000 words and Part 3 should consist of around 3000 words. With regard to the journal, we are suggesting that there is no maximum word length, but that it should consist of a minimum of 1500 words, and less than that should be considered unacceptable.

Rationale for and aim of the whole Production Analysis

We consider the overall aims of the whole production analysis are as follows:

- It should relate to the whole project, from the first thoughts to the final retrospective evaluation.
- The three parts of the production analysis should interrelate. In particular, we would expect Part 3 to relate the production activity (hopefully recorded in the journal – Part 2) to the planning and background work in Part 1.
- It should contain reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the idea, the initial thinking processes, the design, the preparation and production, the management of any teamwork involved and evaluation of the whole against initial aims.
- Weaknesses should be explored on the basis of 'what would I do differently next time'.
- Strengths should be noted as learning points for the future.
- The analysis of specific matters (e.g. production issues) should be detailed and comprehensive within the constraints of word length.

Assessment criteria could be based on the bulleted points above and on the more specific bullet points in the following detailed descriptions of the three parts of the production analysis.

Part 1

It has to be stressed that students need to reflect in considerable depth on the overall aims of their project, and to research the treatment of similar themes in related genres as widely as possible. Without such initial reflection and research their creative product is likely to lack focus; changes and adaptations that may be made during the production process should always be related to the original conception outlined in Part 1.

It is for this reason that we suggest Part 1 is completed and handed in before the practical work on the project is started.

The following are further detailed proposals:

- **Part 1 should consist of between 1500 and 2000 words**
- **It should consist of a detailed account of the reasoning behind the production and its context; a consideration of the relevant literature, filmography, etc. (there should be references included), which will demonstrate critical reflection on the history of the chosen genre.**
- **It should provide a clear indication of plans for the production process, declaration of aims and anticipated outcomes of the project.**
- **It should also show awareness of possible difficulties in production and a consideration of how these may be overcome.**
- **There should be a discussion of the anticipated audience and how the production is designed to take audience into account.**
- **There may be marketing and distribution issues to be considered.**

It is anticipated that Part 1 will be written following some discussion of the ideas with a tutor and possibly other colleagues.

Part 2

Part 2 – the learning journal – is not directly marked. It is handed in and a criterion for assessment of Part 3 is that it will include annotated quotations made from the journal. As we have indicated above, there will be some mandatory criteria for the journal and if it does not meet these, Part 3 will not be marked.

Mandatory criteria for the journal:

- **The journal should be presented at the same time as Part 3**
- **The journal should be available for viewing by a tutor within 24 hours, if requested by the tutor. This is in order to emphasise that it should be kept up to date, as events and reflections occur.**
- **It should be a minimum of 1500 words.**
- **It should be focused on the production activity, although it may also include other related material (see below under Guidance for the journal).**
- **It will be written in the form of a journal - i.e. written over a period of time with multiple entries that date back at least to the inception of production activity - and it will continue at least until post-production activity has been completed.**
- **The entries in the journal will be in a presentable form, comprehensible to the tutor.**
- **Pages will be numbered so that the origin of quotations used in Part 3 can easily be identified.**

Guidance for the journal:

- The importance of the journal should be stressed. While it is not formally marked, it provides the basis for Part 3 and a poor journal will not support good marks in Part 3.
- While there is no upper word limit for the journal, it is recommended that what might be termed a 'good journal' is likely to be more than the lower word limit (1500 words).
- The journal is the raw material for Part 3 of the production analysis. It will provide more useful material if writing of it starts at the beginning of the thinking about the project and is reflective. It can thus become a valuable source of ideas and the place in which problems are thought through. Thus, while the journal should be principally focused on the production activity, it will be better if it covers much wider aspects of the project such as the planning, reflections, the 'notes on the back of envelopes', etc.
- It may contain appended material.
- The journal may be in any form that will be available (at 24 hours notice) and comprehensible to tutors.

More information on the setting up and use of learning journals is available in Moon, J (2006) *Learning Journals for Reflective Practice and Professional Development*, London, Routledge Falmer.

Part 3

- The suggested word count for Part 3 is around 3000 words.
- Part 3 is to be evaluative and reflective and appropriately critical. It may use description to indicate the topic for evaluation and reflection, but description should be concise and to the point.
- The quality of the reflection should be reasonably deep (as depth is conceptualised in the Generic Framework for Reflective Writing – see later in Section B of this paper).
- Part 3 should consider and directly relate to the content of Part 1 – i.e. evaluating the final product in relation to initial aims and anticipated outcomes and concerns.
- It should draw directly (i.e. with direct quotations) from the journal (Part 2). Quotations will be directly relatable to the journal via referencing to page numbers in the journal. (Quotations used could be highlighted in the journal).
- Part 3 will detail specific weaknesses in both the planning of the production and the production itself and contain reflection on weaknesses and how they might be overcome on future occasions.
- It will discuss strengths of the project and reflect on how they may be developed in future projects.
- It will take a reflective and evaluative overview of the student's management of the whole project, including the management of any teams used in the production work. It should note any lessons for future projects.

Section B

The Generic Framework for Reflective Writing

The Generic Framework for Reflective Writing provides a background to the work on reflective writing by giving detail of what reflective writing looks like at different levels of sophistication. It is unlikely that many undergraduates' writing will have the characteristics of 4. Reflective Writing (2). The Framework (described in more detail in Moon, 2004 and 2006 – see below) was initially developed alongside exercises like The Park (see later). It can be useful for staff and student use and can provide a set of assessment criteria for reflective writing if this is required.

The Framework

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

1. Descriptive Writing

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

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

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

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

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

2. Descriptive account with some reflection

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Reflective writing (1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Reflective writing (2)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section C

Resources on Reflection

The following resources are designed to support the reflective work in the Production Analysis.

Resource 1 – 'The Park'

Exercise for the improvement of the quality and depth of reflective learning and writing. This exercise also requires Section B (The Generic Framework for Reflective Writing).

Resource 2 – Handout on Reflective Writing

Some initial guidance for students in the form of a handout.

Resource 1

The Park

To use 'The Park' exercise you will need the following, all of which are included in this resource:

- **the instructions for the exercise (pg 8)**
- **the text of the exercise 'The Park' (pg 9)**
- **an indication of the shifts that occur between the four parts of 'The Park' that – in effect – are the signifiers of deepening reflection (pg 12)**
- **a commentary on the reflective content of the accounts of 'The Park' (pg 12)**
- **you will also need Section B: The Generic Framework for Reflective Learning (pg 5)**

It can be useful to use exercises such as 'The Park' twice, once to give the general idea of reflective writing and a later exercise to reinforce reflective writing and to deepen the reflection. 'The Park' is in Moon, 2004. Other exercises are available in the following books (from which they can be freely copied):

Moon, J (2004) A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning, London, Routledge Falmer

Moon, J (2006) Learning Journals for reflective practice and professional development, London, Routledge Falmer

In terms of the use of other exercises, the instructions, indication of shifts and the Generic Framework are common to all.

It may seem odd to use material that is not relevant to media practice – in this case a story about an event in a park – but from extensive experience of running the exercise, this is the best way to do it. Learners become caught up in the subject matter of the stories if they are in their own discipline and do not engage as much with the changes in reflective content.

Instructions for 'The Park'

The aim of exercises of this kind is to enable participants to see what reflective writing looks like, to recognise that reflection can vary in depth and that there is more potential for learning from deeper rather than superficial reflection. The exercise is developed in response to the observation that students, who are asked to reflect, tend to reflect rather superficially. In the exercises there are three or four accounts of an incident. In each case someone is reflecting on the incident as she might if writing in a journal. The accounts are written at increasingly deeper levels of reflection. From the writer's experience of wide use of these exercises, the subject matter does not matter. It is even disadvantageous to give an exercise with subject matter that relates to the discipline of the group because the group will then tend to put on their disciplinary hats and examine the issues from that point of view, rather than consider the quality of the reflective learning.

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

▪ **The exercise is introduced as means of helping the group to see what reflective writing looks like and to demonstrate that there are different depths in reflection and that deeper reflection probably equates with better learning.**

▪ **Small groups are formed (no more than six in each).**

▪ **The groups are told to turn to the first account and read it quietly to themselves, considering which features they deem to be reflective.**

▪ **When it is evident that most people have read the first account, the groups are invited to discuss the account and identify where and how it is reflective. They are given about five to seven minutes for each discussion session. They may need less time for the earlier accounts.**

▪ **After the discussion session, the participants are asked to read the next account in the sequence (and they are reminded not to turn pages beyond the account in hand).**

▪ **After the last account has been read and discussed, groups are asked to go back through all of the accounts and to identify features of the reflection that progressively change through the accounts. For example, the accounts change from being 'story' to focusing on issues in the incident. In the later accounts there is more recognition that there are multiple perspectives etc. The groups are asked to list (eg on flip chart paper) the ways in which the accounts 'deepen' – but not just to describe the qualities of each account.**

▪ **In a plenary, the groups share their lists (as above) and discuss the whole exercise. It is at this stage that the participants can be referred to the Generic Framework for Reflective Writing which provides a general guide to features in deepening reflection. The accounts are not intended to accord directly with the stages described, but both are like continua running in parallel.**

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

'The Park'

An exercise for the improvement of the quality and depth of reflective learning.

The Park (1)

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

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

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

The Park (2)

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

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

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

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

The Park (3)

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

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

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

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

The Park (4)

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

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

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

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

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

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

'The Park': Shifts and Commentary

'The Park': Shifts between the Accounts that Indicate the Deepening of Reflection

The following shifts occur between the first and fourth account – though the shifts may not be represented in each account (for example, the questioning begins in account 2). Shifts occur:

- **from description to reflective account**
- **from no questions to questions to responding to questions**
- **from recognition of emotional influence to handling of it increasingly effectively**
- **there is a 'standing back from the event'**
- **general self questioning and challenge shifts towards challenge of own ideas**
- **there is increasing recognition of relevance of prior experience**
- **there is the taking into account of others' views (last two accounts)**
- **there is evidence of metacognition – awareness and review of own reflective processes (last two accounts)**

'The Park': Comments on the Quality of Reflection

The Park (1)

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

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

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

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

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

The Park (2)

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

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

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

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

The Park (3)

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

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

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

The Park (4)

The account is succinct and to the point. There is some deep reflection here that is self-critical and questions the basis of the beliefs and values on which the behaviour was based.

There is evidence of standing back from the event, of Annie treating herself as an object acting within the context.

There is also an internal dialogue – a conversation with herself in which she proposes and further reflects on alternative explanations.

She shows evidence of looking at the views of others (Tom) and of considering the alternative point of view, and learning from it.

She recognises the significance of the effect of passage of time on her reflection – e.g. that her personal frame of reference at the time may have influenced her actions and that a different frame of reference might have lead to different results.

She notices that the proximity of other, possibly unrelated events (the dinner-time conversation) have an effect either possibly on her actual behaviour and her subsequent reflection – or possibly on her reflective processes only. She notices that she can be said to be reconstructing the event in retrospect – creating a story around it that may not be 'true'.

She recognises that there may be no conclusion to this situation – but that there are still things to be learnt from it.

She has also been able to reflect on her own process of reflecting (acted metacognitively), recognising that her process influenced the outcome.

Resource 2

Handout on Reflective Writing

Introduction – reflection and reflective writing

Reflection lies somewhere around the notion of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting. Reflective writing is the expression on paper/screen of some of the mental processes of reflection. Other forms of expressing reflection are in speech, in film, in graphic portrayal, music etc. The expression of reflection is not, however, a direct mirror of what happens in the head. It is a representation of that process within the chosen medium - and reflection represented in writing, for example, will be different to that encompassed in a drawing. In other words, in making a representation of reflection, we shape and model the content of our reflection according to many influences. Factors that could shape your reflection into reflective writing might include:

- **the reason why you are writing reflectively (personal reasons – eg in a diary or for academic purposes etc.)**
- **whether others are going to see what you have written and who they are (eg no-one else; a tutor who will mark it; a tutor who will not mark it, friends etc.)**
- **your emotional state at the time of writing, and emotional reaction to what you are writing (eg - a disturbing event that you do not want to think about or something you did well and want to enjoy in the rethinking process)**
- **related to the above, how safe you feel about the material and anyone seeing it**
- **what you know about reflective writing and how able you are to engage in it (see below)**

– and so on. It is also worth noting that you will learn not only from the 'in the head' reflection but from the process of representing the reflection itself. Also, you will learn different things according to the manner in which you represent your reflection. For example, what you would learn from drawing a picture to represent reflections will differ from what you will learn in writing about the same content.

It is a part of the process of writing reflectively to be as aware as possible of the influences that are shaping the writing that you actually do.

What is reflective writing?

We will start from what reflective writing is not. It is not:

- **conveyance of information, instruction or argument in a report, essay or 'recipe'**
- **straight-forward description, though there may be descriptive elements**
- **a straight-forward decision eg about whether something is right or wrong, good or bad etc**
- **simple problem solving like recalling how to get to the nearest station.**

In the context of your higher education programme, reflective writing will usually have a purpose (eg you will be writing reflectively about something that you have to do or have done). It will usually involve the sorting out of bits of knowledge, ideas, feelings, awareness of how you are behaving and so on. It could be seen as a melting pot into which you put a number of thoughts, feelings, other forms of awareness, and perhaps new information. In the process of sorting it out in your head, and representing the sortings-out on paper, you may either recognise that you have learnt something new or that you need to reflect more with, perhaps further input. Your reflections need to come to some sort of end point, even if that is a statement of what you need to consider next.

It is also worth recognising that reflective writing may be a means of becoming clearer about something. For example, you might use reflective writing to consider the kind of career direction that you might take. Into the 'melting pot' you might then 'put' ideas, information, feelings, other people's perspectives and advice. A metaphor for reflection or its expression in reflective writing in this context is 'cognitive housekeeping' to imply its nature as a sorting out, clarifying process.

From what has been said above, it will be obvious that reflection is not a straight-forward and 'tidy' process itself. When you have to represent the process for someone else to read, you will inevitably tidy it up – but if a tutor is expecting reflective writing, s/he will not be looking for a dry 'single-track' account, or just a conclusion. It is also all right to use the first person – 'I' – in reflective writing.

Let us assume that you are reflecting on a presentation that you have just done in class. We said, above, that reflective writing is not a 'straight-forward' description. You will probably have to describe what you are about to reflect on and perhaps relate it to the purpose for which you are reflecting. But reflection is more than that. You might want to evaluate your performance in the presentation, for example. This may be represented by you questioning yourself, perhaps challenging yourself. You may consider your reactions, and even the manner in which you have initially viewed the situation and written about it. Your writing may recognise that others may have different views of the same event. So with regard to the presentation, you might think about the performances of others – and so on.

Some subject matter for reflective writing

Reflective writing may apply to anything that is relatively complex. You might reflect on:

- **how to go about your dissertation topic**
- **how well you wrote an assignment**
- **experiences gained in your part time work**
- **what your essay title means and how to go about writing it**
- **how to present some project work**
- **how you want to behave differently in some context**
- **the way in which your non-work activities relate to the programme that you are on**

▪ **the quality of a relationship with someone (to do with your programme or home or family etc)**

▪ **how well you got on in your programme last term**

▪ **your process in solving a difficult problem (eg in academic work)**

▪ **what you need to do to improve your study processes**

▪ **and anything and everything...**

You will often find there to be unexpected rewards in working in this manner. You will find out things that you had not considered, you even find that your academic writing becomes more fluent; you may find that you can solve problems more easily when you have reflected on your processing of similar problems.

The quality of reflective writing

It is worth thinking of the quality of reflective writing as being on a continuum from rather superficial writings that are largely descriptive, too much deeper writings in which the questioning is more profound. Neither is necessarily right or wrong – they are just different. Reflective writing needs to be 'pitched' according to the purpose for which the task is done. Those who are learning to become counsellors and need to question their motives for the way they work will require a much more profound approach, for example, than most others in higher education programmes. The challenge is at least to 'go beyond' descriptive writing.

Further Resources

Further resources to support reflective learning are available to photocopy from:

Moon, J (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, London, Routledge Falmer (50 page resource section)

Moon, J (2006) *Learning Journals*, London, Routledge Falmer (30 page resource section)