Diploma in informal education unit 1:

Reflecting on our experiences
Reflecting on our experiences

Contents

About this Unit

1. Reflecting on practice
   Huw Blacker

2. Recording as reflection
   Mark K. Smith

3. Supervision
   Huw Blacker

4. Reading to reflect
   Chandu Christian, William Mitchell, Linda Deer Richardson and, Mark K. Smith

5. Interests, values and reflection
   Huw Blacker

6. Reflecting forwards – planning
   Huw Blacker and others

Further activities and reading
Unit 1 Reflecting on our experiences

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Unit 1 Reflecting on our experiences

About this Unit

It is a cliché to say that we ‘learn from experience’. The statement is true, but the learning is not automatic…. if it was, we wouldn’t keep making the same mistakes over and over again!

What enables us to draw out learning from experience is the process of reflection that follows – or sometimes goes alongside – our actions. This Unit focuses on understanding the importance of reflection, and developing skills and strategies to integrate it into your practice.

Knowing ourselves, knowing others

In working with people, the main ‘tool’ we have is ourselves. The better we know ourselves, the clearer we recognize our feelings and the roots of our values, the more able we are to ‘tune in’ to other people’s thoughts and feelings. We are able truly to listen to others, when we are not being distracted by our own internal questions and emotions.

Getting to know ourselves involves thinking through our actions and understanding what motivated them. This requires us to commit time and develop strategies to maximise the value of the process of reflection.

Developing as workers and leaders

Self awareness is at the core of effective practice in informal education and helping; reflection can play a key role in building that awareness. In this Unit, we focus on processes we can use to make sense of our selves and our work. To do this – and, thus, to improve our effectiveness as workers – we need to develop some basic routines and habits. These include:

• giving time to thinking about our experiences and actions;
• keeping a journal and recording our work;
• making use of supervision;
• reading around the work so that we have a deeper pool of ideas to draw upon when we try to make sense of situations;
• reflecting forwards, as well as back, and organizing our time, so that what is important gets done.

These processes each have a section devoted to them - and are linked by processes common to them all.

William Mitchell, Alan Rogers and Mark K. Smith
I. Reflecting on practice

About this section
Reflecting on practice involves thinking about our work so that we can learn from it, understand and improve upon it. Learning from our experiences is essential, if we are to continue to develop what we do.

In this section we ask:

- What is reflection?
- Why is it important to reflect on our practice?
- How we can reflect on our experiences, in order to learn effectively from them?

Huw Blacker

What is reflection?
Reflection is not new to us. We are involved in it all the time. The Oxford Dictionary describes reflection as ‘turning back’, ‘fixing thoughts’ and ‘deep and serious consideration’.
Reflecting on experience

Reflecting starts with *remembering*. When reflecting on a recent holiday, I thought: ‘That was a nice place, the people were friendly, but the food was a bit expensive’. Here, I was remembering the holiday *and* making an evaluation; reflection involves returning to an experience and making some *judgement* about it.

**For example...**

As I write this, I can think of various examples: whilst sitting on a bus I was thinking about, and trying to make sense of, a situation that had happened the previous day; when I was at work preparing for a meeting, I thought back to the last meeting we had and what happened there; in the evening I was cooking, at one point I remembered the previous time I’d cooked a similar dish and that I had made it too spicy.

Often, what motivates reflection is a problem or difficulty of some kind. Dewey (1933:122) comments that thinking begins in ‘what may fairly enough be called a *forked road* situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives’. Feeling that things aren’t quite right – or having to make choices – often leads us to question and to reflect.

**REFLECTION POINT:** What situations have you reflected on during the last 24 hours? Did you find yourself both *remembering* and *evaluating* experience? Was the reflection motivated by a dilemma or the need to make a choice?
Why is reflection important?

If reflection is something we do as part of our everyday lives, it could be argued that there is no need to give it special attention. However, reflecting in a deliberate and disciplined way is a crucial part of growing as an educator. Giving yourself time to reflect – whether on your own, in supervision, with friends and peers, or in study groups – is of great importance for developing your own practice.

Michael Eraut, in his book *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*, states that reflecting on our practice ‘...is a central part of a professional’s responsibility for the continuing development and ongoing evaluation of their personal knowledge base...failure to engage in such reflection on a regular basis is irresponsible.’ (1994:156)

As informal and community educators, ‘being’ with people is the essence of what we do; how we interact with people makes a difference. Reflecting on our behaviour creates an opportunity to gain greater insight into what we are doing, the reasons for our behaviour and its impact on others.

There are many aspects of a situation that we may not think about, until we take time to reflect. Sometimes we don’t see the alternative actions we could have taken. Sometimes, strong feelings (our own or others’) affect an interaction – and we are not conscious of it at the time.

Reflection can be challenging: how do we ‘take on board’ the fact that assumptions we made affected what happened, that feelings from our own past inappropriately influenced the way we acted – or that a particular intervention proved especially helpful?

However, reflection can also help us to bring clarity to situations in which we experience doubt or confusion. The purpose of reflection is to inform future action. The underlying question is: what can we learn from a situation that will guide us in the future?
REFLECTION POINT: What are your feelings about reflecting on your own practice? What are the challenges and what are the potential benefits for you?
How do we reflect?

Reflection is a process that enables us to learn from experience – to transform experience into knowledge. A useful way of looking at the process of reflection is through the work of David Boud and his associates. He sees reflection as being made up of three aspects:

- **Returning to experience** - recalling, or playing through in your mind the different aspects of the experience.

- **Attending to feelings** - being aware of and acknowledging the feelings you were having during the experience, and working with both the helpful and the unhelpful feelings.

- **Re-evaluating experience** - re-examining the experience and evaluating the various aspects involved in it.

What this model explains is that, if we engage in a structured process, we can transform experience into knowledge.

The model is explored on the following pages. The process is also examined in the section on ‘Learning from experience’ in *Informal Education - conversation, democracy and learning*, (Jeffs and Smith 2005: 64-6) (see, also, Blacker 2001).
Returning to experience

Boud comments on this stage of reflection:

One of the most useful activities that can initiate a period of reflection is recollecting what has taken place and replaying the experience in the mind’s eye, to observe the event as it has happened and to notice exactly what occurred and one’s reactions to it in all its elements. (Boud et al 1985:27)

When replaying an experience we can find that details begin to emerge that we were not aware of at the time. For example, we don’t always notice how we are feeling or we don’t realise the significance or impact of body language. This process of replaying is a useful way to explore our practice as it gives us time to reconsider the event afresh and the behaviours, thoughts and emotions that prompted us to act in the way we did.

When we are remembering in this way, it is important to try to refrain from making judgements, such as – ‘that was a good (or bad) thing to do’. In order to learn from this experience, we need to see the event as it was, rather than how we may have liked it to be. It is important to recall the thoughts we had at the time and what we judged to be happening.

This process also helps us to get the information we need to use in the next element of reflection.

REFLECTION POINT: ‘Returning to experience’….is it likely to be helpful or does it seem pointless going over old ground?
Reflecting on experience

**Attending to feelings**

Remembering the event in detail includes recalling the feelings we experienced at the time. Our emotions are a vital source of learning.

Replaying strong feelings may prove difficult, even painful. You may also find that you replay an experience but have difficulty learning from it, because the feelings you have about it form a strong barrier. It is important to recognise the emotions that are forming barriers, so as to work with them, understand their source(s) and proceed with the learning process. These can be useful areas to explore within supervision.

By talking through these experiences and emotions with another person, you may find it easier to remove the obstacles. Writing is another way some people can do this. The act of putting on paper the emotions that they find difficult to work through can again help remove an emotional obstacle.

Whilst we need to acknowledge and work with the feelings that prevented us achieving our goals, it is equally important to recognise and build upon those that facilitated our aims. We need to focus on what we thought was good about an experience and the things we did which we think were creative or stimulating and helped us towards our goal(s). This enables us to maintain our motivation - if we focus only on what we see as ‘negative’ aspects and emotions, we may miss out on the successes that keep us going!

**REFLECTION POINT:** Can you think of how your own emotions either helped you achieve something or held you back?
Re-evaluating experience

This stage is about using our information on the event to develop our understanding by making connections and judgements.

Re-evaluation may bring to the surface patterns in our behaviour or in our underlying emotions – or those of others. These patterns may point us towards action we may need to take or changes we may need to make.

The connections we make may challenge our existing knowledge and attitudes. We may find that we need to add to, modify or change the knowledge, ideas or attitudes we hold. This process of developing new ideas and attitudes involves making judgements. We are able to judge our existing knowledge in the light of this new experience and our reflection upon it. We need to judge whether our existing knowledge and ideas need to be adapted, or whether they are consistent with this new knowledge.

We may have some questions left unanswered, or areas we think we need to explore further. It may help you to write down your questions and observations to use in supervision or study groups. This is covered in more detail in Section 2 Recording as reflection.

Reflection in practice

The three-stage process for reflecting on practice is a potentially useful model to experiment with. It is not necessarily the only, or even the best way of developing the skills of reflection.

Some changes you experience as a result of your reflection may be quite small. Other times you may encounter learning that is more fundamentally enlightening. An exciting aspect of reflection is that you cannot predict when you will encounter a learning experience ‘large’ or ‘small’. You could be looking at a fairly straightforward situation, only to find your exploration reveals some incredible new understandings about yourself, your work and the world.
You may have developed your own approach to reflecting on your practice that works well for you. It is worth, however, considering some of the above aspects and comparing them to your approach towards thinking about your work. For instance, does it have a clear structure? .... does it engage with feelings?.... does it enable you to challenge your own existing knowledge?

REFLECTION POINT: How could you start to try out a process of reflecting on practice?

In conclusion

Reflection is a challenging, yet essential, process for informal and community educators. As the main ‘tool’ of our work, it is essential that we understand ‘what makes us tick’ and how we can work more effectively with people.

Reflection involves us in analysing our own behaviour, questioning our own thinking and, sometimes, learning new ways of thinking and behaving. It is not an end in itself. The purpose is to learn and to prepare us for further experiences, so that we can act in a more informed, thoughtful and effective way.
Reflecting on experience

Activity

Think of a piece of practice you have recently been involved in that posed some dilemma or problem for you. Now spend half an hour recalling the piece of work, thinking about what you did and why, and your feelings at the time.

After completing the above 2 stages (returning to experience and attending to feelings), spend some time re-examining the experience. Think again about what was happening in that particular situation.

Do you see alternatives to how you acted? Were your feelings helping or hindering the task? What other thoughts do you have upon re-examining your experience?
Bibliography


2. Recording as reflection

About this section

Recording is a vital professional tool for learning from experience.

Recording in itself involves a process of reflection — of ‘re-playing’ the events. An effective recording can also: clarify the experience it records; suggest future action; and aid communication to others. Recording is not — and should not be — the only way to reflect on practice.

In this section we look at two different, but connected, ways of recording practice. The first is a journal - notes and stories about one's actions, thoughts and feelings. The second concerns writing professional recordings - accounts of particular incidents and events.

The connection lies in the fact that both are reflective forms of writing that help with professional development and with maintaining good practice.

Mark K. Smith
The value of recording: Writing to grow

*Writing to Grow* is the title of a book by Mary Louise Holly. She has spent some years working with North American teachers to see how keeping a journal can help their personal and professional development.

Holly argues that, when we 'capture our stories while the action is fresh', we are often provoked to wonder 'Why do I do this?' or 'Why did this happen?' (1989: xi). But what is happening when we write? Three points stand out:

- The first and obvious value of such writing is that helps to **remember something**. It may be that we do not have time to work out what is going on right at this minute - keeping a note helps us to recapture the moment later so that we may look at it more deeply. It may also be that we need to remember to do something e.g. write a letter on behalf of someone we are working with. We jot the job down - and then when we have time we can look back at our journal or notepad and pick out the tasks we are left with.

- Second, by putting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) we **engage our brains**. To write we have to think. This is certainly something that Mary Louise Holly found with teachers - and it is also something that Patsy Little experienced as an informal and community educator:

  By keeping records, I am able to monitor my practice. The act of writing something down often crystallises a particular problem or issue or enables me to see where a particular piece of work has not achieved its objective... Through this process I can identify my strengths and weakness', and areas in which I could benefit from further training, (1995: 36)

- Third, it isn't just that writing stimulates thought - it enables us to **look at ourselves** our feelings and our actions in a different way. By writing things down the words are now 'outside' of us. They are there in black and white on the paper or on the screen. We can almost come to look at them as strangers -
'Did I really think that?', 'How does this fit with that?' In other words, our thoughts and feelings may become more concrete - and this enables us to look at them in another light.

REFLECTION POINT: What do you see as the potential benefits of regularly recording what you do....and what are the potential problems?
Keeping a daily record

When it comes to keeping a daily record of aspects of your work, there can be confusion and overlap between terms such as ‘journal’, ‘diary’ and ‘log’. This isn’t surprising, as the words ‘journal’ and ‘diary’ share the same Latin root, meaning 'day'. (Holly 1989: 15). While there are similarities in what these tools mean in practice, there are differences, too. Mary Louise Holly provides a useful discussion of each:

Log

In common usage a log is a regularly kept record - for example of a ship's progress. In this case, details are noted of speed, direction, distances travelled, particular events and so on. Many youth, community and community education projects keep similar logs, written up after each session. This will often involve a standard form, with set questions - to remind us of some of the more important things to record. A sample form is included below as Figure 1.

Frameworks such as this (Figure 1) may be generated by the employing body - or by the workers and/or participants in the project.

The purpose is to record the information that is considered useful for agency and other workers. Sometimes this sort of log or record can get very involved – especially where the agency needs to report to funders – but we have kept it pretty simple.
Table 1: A sample session log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and time of session:</th>
<th>Workers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places/areas worked</td>
<td>Equipment used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants**
Numbers participating
Profile of participants (age, gender, ethnicity, dis/ability etc.)

**Processes** *(give details of what was going on)*
Conversation
Special groups
Organized activities
Arguments and tensions

**Content**
Main issues and questions raised

**Action**
Action for workers at next session

Feedback / evaluation
Comments from participants

Comments from workers

REFLECTION POINT: Looking at the headings in Figure 1, are there any headings you think would be important (or less important) in your own setting?....are there any headings you would add?

Other forms of log may focus on the behaviour and progress of particular individuals, in order to identify patterns of behaviour. This type of record may point us towards the sorts of situations in which a particular individual flourishes.

Another common type of log is a time log. This is can be especially useful when trying to make judgements as to how we should spend out time as workers. All it entails is keeping a note of what we do where with whom when... (the '5-W' formula - who, what, why, when, where). (See Figure 2 on the next page).
Figure 2: Time log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What/Why</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Comments/Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>10m</td>
<td>Jo &amp; Benje</td>
<td>Asking about trip to Calais</td>
<td>Outside chip shop</td>
<td>Unhappy that they weren’t told. Check with Anje</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Diary**

While logs are usually kept with other readers in mind, diaries are written for the writer in the first instance. Diaries, therefore, can be free-ranging, whereas logs tend to be structured and limited in topic.

In an everyday sense, diaries tend to include lists of events to come and/or observations on past happenings. But anything that can be verbalized can be included. At times, the writer will have a specific topic in mind to write about; at other times, thoughts flow into the page unrestrictedly. The degree of structure... depends entirely on the writer. (Holly 1989: 19)

While it usually harder to get information from diaries than logs, the freedom and privacy of the diary has its own advantages. We may record things there that we may not wish others to see - and as a result may be more frank. The freedom may allow us to capture feelings and thoughts that may never be found in a log (see Rainer 2004). On the other hand, the lack of a framework within which to write may lead to inaction - or to a mess.

**REFLECTION POINT:** Does your diary help you to reflect on your practice?.....could it?


Journal

A journal is a combination of a log and a diary. It can contain the more focused and structured entries of the log and the free-flowing and more impressionistic passages of the dairy (see Smith 2006). Here it is worth quoting Holly at length:

[A journal]…is a reconstruction of experience and, like the diary, has both objective and subjective dimensions, but unlike diaries, the writer is (or becomes) aware of the difference. The journal as a 'service book' is implicitly a book that someone returns to. It serves purposes beyond recording events and pouring out thoughts and feelings... Like the diary, the journal is a place to 'let it all out'. But the journal is also a place for making sense of what is out... The journal is a working document. (Holly 1989: 20)

I use a journal a bit like a notebook. I carry it around in my bag most of the time. I jot things down as I go along. It has been written on a bus or a train, sometimes in the street. It is a bit of a mess. Entries do not follow a standard form - other than having a date and a title. There is a mix of material on work questions: the processes in a particular group, the situation facing an individual, material about a topic I am currently working on (e.g. a current assignment).

I could be more ordered; and keep a separate professional journal. This could then be taken up with my mentor and put to the service of personal and professional growth. Two things have stopped me. The first is simply to do with having to remember to keep track of two notebooks. The second is more considered: I like having a journal that jumps back and forth between daily encounters and ideas that may have been gained from 'academic' reading. I believe it encourages me to look for connections and relationship. Looking at it now I can see:
• Notes on the process of several different groups. These include some sketches showing the interactions in the group and who was sitting where etc.

• Some ideas and page references to books I have read recently.

• Diagrams often around the same theme - as I try to work out an idea or set of relationships.

• My feelings about a particular meeting.

• A plan for a study item like this one.

• Some lists of jobs and tasks.

• Some questions that I need to answer in a piece I am writing.

REFLECTION POINT: When do you think diagrams, drawings and other visual methods could help you record what's going on in your work?

C Wright Mills captures the use to which such journals can be put. As practitioners we are 'intellectual craftsmen and women'. Our work demands systematic reflection - and journals are a key means to achieving this. In them:

There is joined personal experience and professional activities, studies under way and studies planned. In this file, you as an intellectual craftsman, will try to get together what you are doing intellectually and what you are experiencing as a person. Here you will not be afraid to use your experience and
relate it directly to various work in progress. By serving as a check on repetitious work, your file also enables you to conserve your energy. It also encourages you to capture 'fringe thoughts': various ideas which may be by-products of everyday life, snatches of conversation overheard on the street, or for that matter, dreams. Once noted, these may lead to more systematic thinking, as well as lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience. (Mills 1959: 196)

A journal or a day book can be used to keep track of things that you want to discuss with colleagues or with your mentor. It is one way of making a contribution to the learning of others, because the points you raise, and the discussion that follows, can often help to clarify things for them as well as for you.

**Making recordings**

Recordings are workers’ written accounts of their work with their clients. They are a particular type of record used by informal and community educators, and other professionals who work with people. Recordings can help us to reflect upon what we have done and to plan ahead.

**Recording for the agency and the client**

Recordings are often required by our agencies. For example, Patsy Little (1995) had to keep three types of record in her agency: '... basic statistical information routinely gathered on each client; individual case notes describing transactions between client and worker; separate recordings relating to groupwork'.

These recordings have to be written with *other readers* in mind. They are needed so that other team members can be informed about those they are working with; and so that other relevant agencies can be informed. They also play a crucial role in casework-oriented agencies by providing a tool for doing a review of a client's progress and for identifying behaviour patterns.
Recording as reflection

We may use recording as a way of working with clients in more formal settings. For example, at the end of a session we may sit down with the group or the individual and write-up a record - saying what had gone on, our feelings about it, and the actions that need to be taken.

**Recording for professional development**

When we are working with others - and by this I mean the people in the community with whom it is our job to work - we can be very absorbed in what we are doing. Because we do much of our work through relationships, we cannot be detached observers. Not only are our minds involved in the work, but our feelings and emotions too. This is why we often find it difficult to be objective about our work - we are so 'close' to it that we cannot see it clearly.

Although it may be difficult, it is important to think about our work as objectively as we can, in order to give the best service we can to our clients. Only when we take a 'step back', can we see a more complete picture of what we are doing, as well as what is going on around us.

Writing down, as factually as we can, the details of a piece of work - including our own thoughts and feelings at the time - can help us take that 'step back' and gain a clearer perspective on the situation, on ourselves as workers and on our clients. Recordings can also enable us to see more clearly what our next step could be.

Discussing our recordings with someone else - for example, with our supervisor, our study group, or other colleagues, can be particularly beneficial. It is surprising what they can spot in our recordings, because they are looking at them from a more detached point of view.
REFLECTION POINT: What recording are you doing – for your agency, your clients and for your professional development?....which do you see as most valuable?

Process recording

Workers use many different methods of recording. Maybe you have already tried some of these yourself. Here I just want to focus on one - commonly known as process recording.

This form of recording involves three basic steps:

1. writing as factual a description of what occurred as is possible.
2. adding in any further thoughts and reflections.
3. noting any action that should be taken.

Commonly, workers divide such recordings into three sections on the page. [See Figure 3 The process recording.]
It is important that the description of the process is as factual as possible. By 'factual' here I mean that we focus on what we actually experienced and saw - not on what we imagined may have happened or what we thought others were thinking or feeling. Here is an example of a recording that includes some assumptions (i.e. statements not supported by evidence).

**Place:** the pool room

**Participants:** me & Winston (male aged 20 years)
**Winston:** Someone bottled me last night and broke my nose, look how swollen it is.

Surprised, having not noticed it before, I moved closer to take a look. On inspection, I thought it looked painful and whilst making sympathetic noises asked practical questions: how did it happen, have you been to casualty, does it hurt? My aim - to get information without being judgemental.

Winston was enthusiastic to talk about the whole situation, so we then moved on to discuss why it happened. He only vaguely knew the person who did it - 'Apparently they did it because they don't like me, what kind of reason is that? Well, I am really going to hurt him, because I don't like him either'.

Images of more blood being shed flashed through my mind - and I remembered the phrase 'an eye for an eye'. So I replied with a smile on my face - 'Ah an eye for an eye, do you think revenge works?'

**Winston** said laughing, 'No but it's sweet'.

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Analysis of the process recording

In the process recording above, the worker notes down her feelings, such as 'surprise'. These are facts, as she identifies them. She is reporting what she experienced - and this may have had an impact on the encounter - so it is important that feelings are included.

The worker also makes some assumptions as she is working - 'I thought it looked painful'. At the point of saying it to Winston she did not know it was painful - but by asking questions she confirms or contradicts her working assumption. This brings out an important point. To work we have to make assumptions - but it is important that we constantly test these out. Our recordings would then reflect this process.

We need, however, to guard against making statements about other people and events in our recordings where we have no evidence. For example, further on she writes 'Winston was enthusiastic... '. This assumption appears not to be tested - no evidence is given. She links moving on to discuss why the encounter had happened with this enthusiasm. Other things could have been important here - such as her interest and intervention.

This extract is what might be included on the left-hand side of the recording under 'process'. On the right-hand side various comments will be included, which come to mind as we write the recording - or as we go back to it later. For example, we may well recognize the assumption about Winston's enthusiasm - and comment on it. At the end we may note any action that we need to take.

The worker also talks about her aim for a particular intervention – getting information – and it appears she achieved it to some extent. What we don't know is why she wanted that information – perhaps she was just curious? We also have to think about whether it was an appropriate aim – or whether there was something else she could have been focusing on. We can also see from her last comment that the worker had moved on in what she was looking to do. She was asking Winston to explore his attitude.
REFLECTION POINT: Can you think of assumptions you’ve made recently and how you tested them out….or if you didn’t how you might have done so?
Confidentiality

Many of us get worried about questions of confidentiality around recordings. What if someone else reads our recordings and recognizes who we are talking about?

We need to bear in mind that logs are written for others to see - their purpose is usually to inform a range of people. We should not, therefore, include material that should not be shared with others.

Process recordings, on the other hand, are usually written for our own learning and use. Other people may see them, if we choose to show them - for example, colleagues or our mentor. In this sense our recordings are confidential to ourselves and to those to whom we show them.

As process recordings are likely to include material about our feelings and about the person we are working with that is not to be shared openly with others, they should be kept in a secure place (perhaps away from our place of work). It may also be useful to disguise the identity of those we are writing about. We will return to these questions later in the programme.

Confidentiality – not secrecy

People sometimes confuse confidentiality with secrecy. With secrets, we promise not to tell others. However, as workers, we cannot make such a promise. We may hear things that we have to tell others for reasons of safety - for example in relation to child protection. There are also professional reasons why we may talk about confidential matters. As workers we need to explore questions raised by people and how we are to respond.

We may have to keep records for the agency. For example, it may be necessary to keep case files. In these situations confidentiality is linked to those who are authorized to have access to those files. There should, thus, be a policy to cover these matters. In effect, when people make disclosures to us as workers they are making a disclosure to the agency.
REFLECTION POINT: Are you happy that your recordings are treated with an appropriate level of confidentiality?
### Some general points about recordings

- Recordings should be made **as soon as possible** after the event, so details are still fresh.

- They should be kept **regularly** - this way can you build up a picture of the way in which you work so that you can be aware of any patterns or tendencies. Regularity will also increase your skill in recording so that it becomes a tool, which you can use readily.

- Match your recording to your **purpose** in using it. For example, if you want a clearer picture of how you worked *generally* during a session, you might produce a recording to give you this overview. If you want to understand how you worked during a *particular interaction* with a client, you would need a recording with quite a bit of detail about what happened between you.

- Try to make them **as factual as possible** - by writing down what you actually did, saw, thought, and felt at the time.

- They should be **usable** - this means that they need to be written legibly and coherently enough to be understandable when you return to them.

- They should be **used** - it is pointless to make recordings then file them away, never to be looked at again!

- Keep your recordings **safe**, so that they are only seen by yourself, or by other people who you need to help you work on them. These should be people who understand and will respect the confidential nature of the material.

### In conclusion

There are many kinds of records which students and workers can keep. This piece has concentrated on only a few of them, but I hope it has helped you to think about the importance of writing things down.
If we neglect to write down our thoughts about our studies and our practice, we are missing out on an essential source of learning.
Activities

1. Note down briefly any points which have come into your mind while you have been studying this section, and which you would like the opportunity to discuss with your colleagues, or with your supervisor.

2. What is your approach to recording and journal-keeping going to be? What situations and experiences are you going to focus on? Have you thought about a regular time for writing-up?
References


Reflecting on our work

3. Supervision

About this section

I have written this section to run alongside ‘Exploring practice with your supervisor’, in the handbook. Please read those pages carefully before continuing with this section.

We will look at three different functions of supervision. To:

- facilitate learning (educative),
- develop your work in the agency (administrative), and
- Improve morale (supportive).

From there we will look at the experience of supervision that is designed to help us to develop our learning and practice.

Huw Blacker
What is supervision?

We tend to talk about two different types of supervision – ‘managerial’ and ‘non-managerial’. We will use these two related terms as our starting point to explore the concept and practice of supervision.

**Managerial supervision** is carried out with your manager or line manager, at your placement or place of work. **Non-managerial supervision**, on the other hand, is carried out with a supervisor, usually external to your agency.

What are the different priorities of each? To answer this, we will explore the model put forward by Alfred Kadushin in his book *Supervision in Social Work* (updated with Harness in 2002). Kadushin identifies supervision as holding within it three overlapping functions - **educational**, **administrative**, and **supportive**. We will briefly explore each of these functions, and relate them to managerial and non-managerial supervision.
**Educative**

Here the function is to develop the knowledge, attitude and skills that you require to do your work (Kadushin and Harness 2002). This is done through reflecting on your practice.

Supervision provides a space for you to reflect on your work and develop your understanding of, and new perspectives on, what was happening. From this, new skills will be developed that can be used in future practice.

Supervisors may help you to gain insight into yourself and the people with whom you work. They may want to explore:

- The way you reacted and responded to the other person, and to explore these interventions.
- The dynamics between you and the other person and to look at what the consequences may be from the way you acted.
- Other ways you may have worked (Hawkins and Shohet 2007).

**Administrative**

Here the focus is upon the correct, effective and appropriate use of the agency’s policies and procedures (Kadushin and Harness 2002). This involves exploring the responsibility you have towards the organisation for which you work.

Each organisation has certain ways of doing things (procedures), and certain sets of ‘rules’ (policies). When working for an organisation you need to be aware of these policies and procedures, and be able to work with
them. This includes, for example, the policies and procedures if someone needs first aid; or around opening up a building or running an activity.

An agency also needs to monitor the quality of the service it offers. Supervision provides an important place where this can happen.

**Supportive**

The focus in supportive supervision is upon improving your morale and job satisfaction (Kadushin and Harness 2002).

Here, the supervisor ensures that as a person and a worker, you are not left alone to carry, unnecessarily, difficulties and problems that arise in your work. It is a space to express some of the stresses related to your work, and then to explore ways of dealing with them (Hawkins & Shohet 2007).

The supportive strand of supervision is, therefore, about exploring ways of managing your feelings and stress, so they do not negatively affect your morale and job satisfaction. The assumption is that, if your morale is low, it affects the quality of your work.

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**For example…** *The three elements of supervision in action*

You bring to supervision an incident from practice. When driving the mini bus to the local ice bowl with a group of young people, you were taking on an activity, you told John to “sit down and shut up” as his incessant questioning was distracting you from driving.
In exploring this in supervision you realise that your attitude towards John may have been outside your frame of reference and upon reflection you regret speaking to him in such a manner, (EDUCATIVE).

The experience has left you somewhat uncomfortable as John refused to speak to you the rest of the evening and you are concerned this may affect your relationship with him when you meet again, (SUPPORTIVE).

In discussing it afterwards with a colleague she enquires “why was he standing up without a seat belt on”? This causes you to look at your organisation’s policy on driving regulations, (ADMINISTRATIVE).

REFLECTION POINT: Have you noticed an emphasis on any of the three elements in the supervision you have experienced so far?....how has this affected the impact of the process?

Managerial and non-managerial supervision

The three strands are present in both managerial and non-managerial supervision. Both focus upon the quality of service you provide to your clients, though the emphasis is different, as each has different priorities.
Managerial supervision gives priority to the interests of the organisation or agency in which you operate. The manager is concerned with the ways in which you are contributing to (or harming) the objectives of the organization. They are also likely to be looking at whether you are working within the policies and procedures of the organisation. In other words, the emphasis is on the administrative function. At the same time, some managers may also want to work with you on developing the way you work and function, and also offer support.

Non-managerial supervision centres more around your practice and working with your needs as a worker and leader. It involves reflecting on your work in such a way as to develop your knowledge, attitudes and skills. The priority of the supervisor here is more towards developing the contribution you make as a community educator and leader. This, then, moves towards the educational function of supervision.
Another model of supervision

The model outlined on these pages is not the only model. For example, Proctor, (in Hawkins and Shohet 2007) puts forward a similar framework, but brings out different aspects.

*formative or educative* is about your development as a practitioner. It is about exploring your work through reflection to help develop your understanding of your skills and abilities.

*normative or administrative* is about ensuring your work measures up to the quality of your organisation and that you are maintaining a standard that meets their aims and objectives.

*restorative or supportive* helps provide the opportunity to reflect on how you, as an individual, are affected by the stresses and responsibilities of practising community leadership.
The first steps – using supervision to develop our practice

In programmes such as the one you are on, supervision by someone who is not your manager (non-managerial supervision) plays a central role. Supervisors offer support, help you to explore your feelings, thinking and experiences, and provide a space for you to think about what to do next.

Much of what we do as community educators and leaders flows from the people we are, so talking about our work can get personal. For this reason, supervision can feel like a strange experience at first. To open up about your thoughts and feelings to somebody whom you do not know can be difficult. You may feel reluctant to talk about some of your work, thinking your supervisor may judge you in some way.

It is important to recognise, however, that you are a student, and as such have decided to embark on the adventure of developing your practice. To do this you need to be able to explore the shortcomings in your work, in order to learn from them and develop further.

Your supervisor is a professional who recognises the responsibility you have taken on as a learner. From their own experience they will know that there is much to learn, and that our work raises many difficult situations and choices, especially when starting out.
For example...

I remember the first few supervision sessions I had in which I was ‘playing safe’, avoiding certain areas in which I felt very unsure about exploring. As the sessions progressed I found I could talk about many of these things with greater ease, recognising that the sessions were not a threat, but directed towards my own development of practice. I also recognised that it was OK to do things in which I may feel foolish, or lack skills - if I didn’t then there would be little point in me attending such a course to improve those skills. Even now, as with many professionals, I continue with supervision, recognising that there will always be areas of my practice that I need to develop in, and continue to learn from.

One way to use the supervision session is within the three-stage process for reflection explored in the section on Reflecting on practice - returning to experience, attending to feelings and re-evaluating experience. You may find useful material to explore within supervision, whatever point you are at during this process: you may find it useful to recall an experience you had and then go on to explore the areas of interest that it raises; you may have already spent time recalling the experience before your session, to find you have strong feelings forming a barrier to your learning, and want to explore these further…or you may want to re-evaluate an experience within supervision, having already explored the first two stages.

As well as exploring your practice, it is also useful to explore related areas. This could include, for example, some of the ideas you read about in these study units and how they relate to your work, ideas you are being exposed to as a student, or simply the experience of becoming a student, with extra workload, challenges and responsibilities. If it relates to your development and learning as a worker, it can be a focus within supervision.
Taking responsibility for your own learning

Within supervision it is important to recognise the responsibility you have towards your own development. As Chandu Christian and Jane Kitto write (1987:2) ‘The supervisor’s job is not to advise or to instruct, but to enable the worker to think better about his or her work, and therefore to work better’.

When attending supervision to begin with, people often assume their supervisor will ‘give them the answer’, or ‘tell me how to do it’. This, however, is not their role.

A supervisor may show you ways in which you can think about your work. However, it is ultimately about you thinking about your work. By engaging in the supervision process in this way, the opportunity exists to further develop your reflective skills. It also develops your capacity to learn from experience and to conceptualise about your work. Supervision involves building new theories and thinking about various ways you can act in situations.

REFLECTION POINT: How have you used time within your supervision sessions? is there anything you might want to change about the way you work?

Preparing for a supervision session

Preparing for supervision is an ongoing process. There are activities you need to do regularly, in order to get maximum benefit from these sessions:

- **Study** the ideas underpinning informal and community education, in order to develop your knowledge base. Within your supervision sessions you can then develop your understanding of these ideas, and make links between them and your own work.
• **Record** your work. In the second section in this Unit, *Recording as reflection*, we explored ways you could record your work. Recordings can be used to prepare for supervision. If you keep a regular journal/record of practice, you will probably find you are also regularly identifying areas of concern, or areas you’d like to explore further. When I identify these areas I highlight them in my journal in some way - using a different coloured pen, or writing in large, bold letters. It has to STAND OUT when I return to my journal, and grab my attention. By doing this, I have a wealth of material ready to explore.

• **Give it time.** Give yourself time before supervision to make a decision about what you think you need to explore. Just grabbing your journal and picking the first thing that gets your attention is not sufficient - it may not be of the same concern to you as it was when you first highlighted it. Take time to read the bits you haven’t highlighted - you may find questions about previous work that you did not have at the time.

• **Manage the urgent concerns.** You may find you have questions or thoughts about a piece of work you have very recently been involved in, and haven’t written anything down about it - or you may be experiencing strong feelings at the moment that are affecting your work - and you may want to explore these. Here, you need to think about what is the best way to work in supervision - are you able to talk about these issues effectively ‘off the top of your head’, (remembering your supervisor will assist you with this), or do you need some time beforehand to focus on these thoughts, questions etc. and write them down in some form as an aid to your session. Sometimes I simply write down key words to trigger my memory about the various aspects of an issue I want to discuss. At times, when I have not done this, I have turned up to a session and my mind has gone blank. Just one word can trigger my memory, then I can begin to explore it within the session.
• REFLECTION POINT: Can you take advantage of any of these practical tips in preparing for your next supervision session?

In conclusion

Supervision within programmes such as the one you are on can play a special role in helping us to understand what we are doing in particular situations. After all it is not often that we have someone who is offering an hour of their time just to listen to us and to help us think about things. However, supervision sometimes takes a bit of getting used to – and we need to work to get the best from it.
Activity

Hawkins and Shohet (2007) have talked about there being a number of different things that can be explored in supervision. Here are some of the things that they suggest supervision can focus on.

Supervision can provide a space for:

- Reflection upon the content and process of our work
- Developing understanding and skills within the work
- Receiving information and another perspective
- Receiving feedback concerning our work and how we are experienced
- Support and validation both as a person and as a worker
- Exploring and expressing personal worries and distress that may be brought up by the work
- Planning and utilising our their personal and professional resources better

Spend some time thinking about each point and identify for yourself the most important benefits of supervision. Think, too, about what you are looking for from your sessions.
Bibliography


4. Reading to reflect

About this section

In this section four writers have pooled their thoughts on the significance of reading for workers and have made some practical suggestions about how to approach books.

Chandu Christian, William Mitchell, Linda Deer Richardson and Mark K. Smith
Seeing the bigger picture

There is a well-known story about a group of people who had never seen an elephant.…

They were blindfolded and asked to feel an elephant with their hands and then describe it. 'An elephant is like a rope', said the person who had got hold of his tail. 'I thought it was like a thick wall', was the comment from the person who had felt his main bulk. The one who had felt his trunk described him as like a ‘thick old creeping plant’ while the one who felt his leg described him as ‘like a pillar’. The story goes on with more descriptions of the elephant, based on feeling the tusks and ears.

A quarrel breaks out in which every person insists that their version is the correct one, until their blindfolds are removed. Then everyone sees that they only had a partial picture of reality.

The point of the story is that most things in life are like that elephant; most of the time we only manage a partial picture of what goes on around us. We get a clearer understanding of any situation if we try and widen our horizons by understanding how others view the same situation.

Informal and community education is no different. In order gain a deeper understanding as educators, we need to read around our subject – to find out about a range of different views on what it means.

So what do we gain from reading?

The fundamental reason for reading around our work is that we can then draw on a far wider range of ideas and strategies for our work.

Reading can be educative. We can learn about the sorts of processes involved in groups and conversations for example, and how these may alter from situation to situation. For example, when thinking about writing this section, I picked up a group work book - and opened it where someone had left a bookmark. I read:
An example from groupwork

It is not uncommon for members to contact groupworkers between sessions, but how are these contacts to be handled?.... This is a difficult issue. The groupworkers may wish to appear helpful but feel they must ask the member to raise their points in the group; the member may then feel rejected, fuelling anxiety and making engaging with him or her more difficult. However, to respond may negate previous work done in the group or place the leaders in the position of not working with the group as a whole. Workers need to decide for themselves and with the group their response to requests from members for contact outside the group. From the outset it should be clear whether or in what circumstances the workers will respond.

It is useful to consider the meaning behind the contact. The member may have found the group experience distressing or confusing. They may have felt threatened within the group or have formed a strong dislike of some members and be considering leaving the group. Generally, it is likely that the member feels the loser in the group. Consequently, a number of questions occur. Why has this contact occurred? How is this member losing out in the group or in other contexts?

Contact should not be refused. Rather, the member should be encouraged to take responsibility for raising their issues in the group. The member may be re-experiencing difficulties in group situations or finding their significant others unsupportive of what they are trying to do. In this example, they can be invited to share these difficulties in the group, using other members for support. If the member's difficulties have a circular causation, that is the problem is located by the group within the one member but is, in fact, a problem in terms of how the group functions as a system, it may be appropriate for the groupworkers to name how the group is functioning and to
challenge belief and action systems in the group without taking sides. This might be done, for instance, by asking who else might have the difficulties which this member experiences or how other members perceive that this one member experiences them or the group. Retaining neutrality is important, that is not being sucked into alliances where members can say that the workers are on their side alone. (Edited from Preston-Shoot 1987: 43-44)

The last reader of the text may well have had an issue about ‘contact between groups’ and turned to this section. Reading these words, we think through our own position on contact and how we may respond to situations that arise around the groups with whom we work. When we are approached, we can return to the thoughts we had when reading the passage, draw on those and then try to act in a way that we think will help to develop understanding and fruitful action.

Reading can be **supportive**. Faced with a situation, such as a problem with a group on a residential, we may recall something we read - perhaps about group behaviour or about when something similar happened to another worker - and what they did and felt about it. Below, a youth worker talks about the sort of situation that is familiar to many of us.

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**The quarrel**

Two bigger girls who were sitting happily at work… suddenly quarrelled about a thimble, in a passion one girl threw the table over, the others with excitement, began to act in the wildest, utterly fashion... The horrified workers found the lower in still worse confusion. Boys were banging at the and door, the girls inside shouting and singing, even fighting, slates, books and sewing being used as missiles... One of the ladies
went to speak to the lads, and one threw his cap in, and getting his foot in doorway prevented the door being closed. Remonstrations were of no use.

The worker quoted above is Maude Stanley – she was writing about a club in 1890 (pages 195-6). When I first read these words I laughed and felt a direct connection with her. Many of the situations we face have also been encountered by the generations of workers before us. Knowing this can be a comfort – it is not necessarily me that has done something wrong or that I am suffering alone.
Reading can also help with *administrative* matters. We can learn the correct procedures to follow. For example, if we are taking a group out in a minibus we would be well advised to check what the legal and agency position is before we even mention the possibility to a group.

You probably noticed that I used these same three categories in relation to supervision: *educative, supportive, administrative*. Supervision and reading are both aids to better practice.

**REFLECTION POINT:** What reading have you found useful to your practice?....was it educative, supportive or administrative….or a mixture?

**Assessing books and written materials**

In this section we look at how to decide whether a particular book is what you are looking for, and if you need to read it all or just a section of it.

The key is first of all to be clear why you want to read the book, and then to follow the signposts. Your reasons are likely to be *educative, administrative or supportive* – and your purpose(s) will help direct your search for appropriate books and materials. Once you have identified books you may find useful, you can look at their ‘signposts’ to see which ones are likely to be most helpful to you.

*The signposts in a book*

- Look first at the author of the book. Is it someone whose work you have read before, or that you know specialises in a particular subject? Are her/his qualifications and experience given?
• The title. What does the title tell you about the subject of the book? Also look at the sub-title - this may tell you more about the subject, or about the level of the book or for whom it was written.

• The book cover. Does this provide a summary of the book and say for whom it was written? Does it give further information about the author, her/his experience and qualifications?

• Publishing date. This is usually on the back of the title page. What is the date? Is it important to you to know when the book was written? Are you looking for current information? Are you looking for the latest edition? (Unlike the word 'edition', 'reprint' and 'impression' do not mean that the text has been revised.)

• Preface. This may also be known as Introduction, Foreword, Author's remarks. Does this explain why the book was written and for whom? Does it give any further information, maybe about the content and structure of the book?

• Table of Contents. What does this tell you about the main topics of the book? Can you also get an idea of its structure and the relationship between the topics?

• Index. You will find this at the back of the book. It is an alphabetical list of subject headings with page references to the main text of the book. Could you use this if you are looking for a particular subject? How detailed is it? Does it have 'see also....' references?

• Bibliographies. As you probably know, a bibliography is a list of books and / or journal articles. A bibliography may be included in a book as a guide for further reading. The author may also list the books and journal articles that her or his used when writing the book. These are called References. Bibliographies and References may be found at the end of the book or at the end of each chapter. Does this book have any? Would you want to do further reading? Does the author list references so that you can find and read them?
Reading to reflect

- **Summaries.** These can be either at the end of each chapter, or at the end of the book. Does this book have them? They may help you to decide whether this book is what you want.

By now, you will have a clear picture of what is contained in the book. On the basis of your survey of the 'signposts', you can ask, ‘Will this book help me answer the questions I had in mind when I started?’ If not, what is your new purpose in reading it, or should you start again with a different book?

**Assessing material we find on the internet**

We get a lot of the information we need for work and for other areas of our lives from the internet. Anybody can put material on-line – and the quality of information can range be very variable. Sometimes it is complete rubbish and perhaps very misleading; sometimes you may well be reading something written by the world's experts in their field. We need to learn to tell the difference.

Many of the things we have said above apply – but here are three things to look out for as starters:

- Is the name of the person who wrote the piece clearly identified – and is there a way to contact the writer? This gives a clue as to whether someone is prepared to stand by what they write.

- Is there an indication of the writer’s qualifications, experience and position? This helps us to make judgements as to their expertise and to carry out further research on them.

- Is the page part of a well-respected site or body with clear editorial policies, and with contact details? It helps if we know that other people with expertise have looked at a piece and judged that it is of an appropriate standard. This is especially useful with anonymous pieces – as the body can be taking on some responsibility for the contents by publishing it.
REFLECTION POINT: Do you use some of these reading tips already? …and are there new ideas you can bring into your own reading and research practice?

**Reading with discipline**

There are a lot of books to read! Make the most of your time by reading in a disciplined way. Pick a particular section or chapter that you would like to read, and follow this procedure:

1. **Survey:** Having decided what section or chapter is of interest to you, first survey it. This means reading it quickly to get an overall picture of what is contained in the text. Note sub-headings and words in heavy type, and any pictures or diagrams. This may only take a few minutes.

2. **Read and make notes:** Now you have some idea of what the chapter is about, and some more questions will have come into your mind about the purpose of this reading. Now you know what information you want to get from it, you can now go back and read the section or chapter and make notes.

3. **Survey again:** When you have made your notes, survey the chapter or section again. Have you got in all the important points that you wanted? Do you need to amend your notes?
Recording your reading

Before finishing this section, let us look at the link between recording and reading and their importance to reflecting on practice by introducing you to an activity that may be interesting and fun for some of you.

In this Unit we have stressed the importance of writing down, in the form of recordings, journals, diaries etc., what you have observed and experienced so you are able to ‘return’ to the incident to help raise awareness or gain more understanding of your practice within the process of reflection. You are being asked to extract information and make associations to a particular experience in order to learn something new. We are asking you to do likewise in this section, by using reading to reflect.

Just now, you have been asked to record something by being encouraged to study a book and make notes. It is probably fair to say that the majority of you who did so would have produced something that looks like Exhibit 1.
Exhibit 1

BBBBBBbbbbbB

1. bbbbbbb b b b b bbbbbbbbbbb bbbbb bbbbb bbbbbbbbbbbbb b b b b b bbb
   bbbbbbb

2. nnnnn n n nnnnnnnnnnn n n n n n n n n nnnnnnnnnnn n n n n n

3. bnbnbnc nnbnvnnvnnvnnvnnv
This is the Standard Linear style of note-taking used by 95% of note takers in schools and professions around the world. Buzan and Buzan, (1993), highlight a number of disadvantages to this form of recordings notes.

- They obscure the key words
- They make it difficult to remember
- They waste time
- They fail to stimulate the brain creatively

This said they can be useful in that they record what is in the book or piece.

According to the authors these disadvantages are overcome by what they refer to as Radiant Thinking – the ability of the brain to make association thought processes that proceed from or connect to a central point. The exercise we are about to ask you to do is using radiant thinking to word storm ten associations to a general concept, like in Exhibit 2.
Exhibit 2: Adapted from Buzan and Buzan 1993

- brother
- relaxing
- swimming
- running
- laughter
- smiling
- sunshine
- warmth
- chocolate
- exercise

happiness
The method can be developed further, by adding more ‘levels’, generating ideas that are associated to one original idea.

‘Radiant thinking’ notes may also be useful in helping you to link recording to reflection: you could apply this approach to recordings you have made from practice. This would involve extracting some key words and making associations that help you “make sense” of a particular incident that occurred in a group you were working with. This approach may help you think wider about your experiences.

‘Radiant thinking’ is helpful to reflection - having read a book or article, for example, what does it get me thinking about? How do I relate it to my work? As result, it may be helpful to think about using a two-stage process –

- Recording our reading (perhaps with good old-fashioned linear notes!); and
- Recording our reflections on our reading (perhaps using a diagram as above)

This could be a good way of reflecting on our reading ‘around’ a subject. For example, having read (say) three books on group work, what are the key ideas I want to take into my work or talk through with others (like my supervisor)? Or what are the key themes as I see them?

**In conclusion**

Reading is an essential tool for broadening our understanding and improving our practice as workers with people. With so much to choose from – and so much to learn! – it is essential to bring some discipline to our research and reading.
Recording our reading – in an appropriate way – can enhance our learning and enable us to revisit the materials ourselves, with colleagues, fellow students and/or supervisors.
Activity

Assess what – for you – are the potential benefits and problems of the two approaches. Try both forms of note-taking (‘standard linear’ and ‘radiant’).

To practice ‘radiant thinking: take the word HAPPINESS (as in Exhibit 2 above) as a central theme and make ten associations of your own. Then pick one association (such as sunshine or running) and make five additional ones. Develop your radiant thinking with a few similar exercises of your own then apply it to your note-taking from our activity. You could also (or alternatively) select some key words from a page in a book of your choice and develop some associations.

Can you adapt either/both method(s) to improve their value to you? Is either approach more valuable for particular tasks?
References


5. Interests, values and reflection

About this section

The values and ideas that we hold about life affect our behaviour and the way we think about things. Each of us has a different set of values and ideas, which can develop and change throughout our lives. This helps to explain why people involved in the ‘same’ event experience it differently and have differing views about it. In this section we will explore:

- the nature of interests and values, and how these affect the way we perceive an experience.
- the interests and values you hold, and your biographies.
- how reflecting on practice enable us both to question and clarify our values and interests.

Huw Blacker
What are interests and values?

We all hold an individual view of the world. Our unique experiences mean that no two people will hold precisely the same thoughts about life; we each have our own set of interests and values.

**Interests**

If you were to list your main interests in life, I wonder what you would come up with? You may list your hobbies. I know that when I had to write something similar I put music, playing guitar, painting and drawing. You may well have included your work, your development, politics, friends, family and so on. We tend to use the word in two basic ways:

1. Something we have a general sense of curiosity or are concerned about, including hobbies – ‘I have an interest in how things work’; ‘Playing piano is a real interest of mine’; and

2. Something we have a share in, benefit from or is to our advantage – ‘As a worker, I have an interest in the success of the summer play project’.
As a worker, the theme of ‘interest’ is a crucial one in a number of practical ways:

- In general, as workers, we are looking to bring together people’s interests in both senses of the word – to involve them in activities they are curious about and that will be to their advantage.

- People will take different things from an experience, depending on their interests. Each individual is ‘tuned in’ to some aspects of the experience, and not to others. Part of your work as an informal educator is to encourage and enable people to see things about an experience that they may not have recognised – widening their awareness of their own interests.

- We can use our own interests in our work, but we must be conscious of not allowing our interests to divert our professional focus – we may be keen on football and encourage the development of a local team, but that should not prevent us from being aware of the needs of those who are not interested in football. Similarly, in a group we may be particularly interested in the needs of one group member, but this should not be at the expense of the rest of the group.

- Possibly even more problematically, it may be in our interest to work with a particular ‘target group’ in a particular way (as there is funding available) … but is it in their interest?

- **REFLECTION POINT:** Have you been involved in work that has connected with young people’s interests – in both senses? Are there times when your personal interests have been valuable?
Interests, values and reflection

Values

Within professional groups there is often a lot of talk about the about the ‘values’ of the work. As with almost any of the key words that we look at here, the term has been used in various ways. Sarah Banks (2006) has pointed out that, in everyday usage, ‘values’ is often used to refer to a set of principles, beliefs or attitudes that could be religious, moral, political or ideological. In our work it is more often used to describe a set of fundamental moral or ethical principles to which we should be committed.

[Note that I have used ‘ethics’ and morals as synonymous here, in common with everyday use. Strictly speaking, however, as Sarah Banks (op. cit.) points out, ‘morals’ are the norms of behaviour that people follow concerning what is right or wrong, good or bad - and ‘ethics’ is the study of morals and morality.]

As community leaders and community educators it is important that we are able to recognise the values we hold. From this we can begin to understand how these affect our work, and the people with whom we work.

‘Holding a value’ doesn’t just mean having an interest in an abstract idea (like ‘justice’). It means thinking through the meaning of the word and using it to guide our behaviour.

Criteria for a ‘full’ value

Writers on the theme of value clarification suggest that there are three sets of criteria which need to be met for a value to be fully held – choosing, prizing and acting:

Choosing: freely from alternatives after thoughtful consideration of the consequences of each alternative
**Prizing**: cherishing, being happy with the choice willing to affirm the choice publicly.

**Acting**: doing something with the choice doing something repeatedly, in a consistent manner.


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**The values of informal education, community development and community learning**

There will always be debate about what should be included in any list of community development/learning values - and the meaning we should place on each. Jeffs and Smith (2005) put forward the following as the values of informal education. To work for:

**The well-being of all.** While we look to the happiness of individuals we have to place these within what may benefit all.

**The unique value and dignity of each human being.** Each person is unique and special - and is deserving of respect. Here we may draw a line between an individual’s actions and
her or his worth as a person. We may have little time for a person’s actions e.g. in the way she or he treated another individual, but still respect their ‘personhood’.

**Dialogue.** Here the commitment is to exploring matters with others, to listening to what they have to say and to search for new and common understanding.

**Equality and justice.** Here there are going to be all sorts of debates about what we mean by these terms. However, most statements of principle around area of work will make some commitment to working for equality of opportunity - trying to remove privilege - and for justice or fairness for all.

**Democracy and the active involvement of people in the issues that affect their lives.** Participation in the decision-making that affects our lives, and a commitment to open and shared processes has been a central concern of informal educators.

This set of values will be examined throughout this programme.

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**REFLECTION POINT:** Do you recognise these values in your own work – or in the work of colleagues? Can you demonstrate how they are acted upon?
Interests and values

Our values and our interests are closely linked. If, for example, I value justice and democracy, then this will affect my interests in my work. In my interactions with people I would have an interest in how I work to develop these qualities. It is important, therefore, to be able to understand and be clear about our own interests and values, and to explore the effects of these on the judgements we make and, hence, the way we work.

Sometimes our ‘interests’ can conflict with our ‘values’: if a value I hold is towards ‘justice’, and I see something happening that I perceive to be an injustice, I am likely to act in a way whereby I may challenge that injustice. If I choose not to act in such a way, I may need to reflect on whether my value of ‘justice’ is as fully realised as I thought.

This final point indicates the importance of reflection on our actions. By taking time out to review our behaviour, we can re-examine our behaviour and see if it is ‘in tune’ with our values and interests.

REFLECTION POINT: Can you think of situations where people’s behaviour (yours or other people’s) has not been ‘in tune’ with their values? …what do you learn from this?

There are questions we can ask ourselves that begin to reveal some of these areas. How did we get to be studying? What motivated our interest in the particular hobbies that we have? Where did our values come from?
Biographies

Our past experiences help to shape the values and interests that we hold. By looking at our own personal biographies we can begin to see how the course of our life has been influenced by many things. Our experiences have helped to shape our values and interests. For example, our educational experiences, our nationality, religion, class and gender etc. - all have played a part in shaping where our interests now lie, and what values we hold.

For example....

The school we may have gone to, or church, the friends we have had, our family - all have affected who we are and how we think. Similarly, we may be influenced each day by the media - newspapers, television, advertising.

In turn we may talk to people who are also influenced by the ideas these promote. It may be interesting here to explore some of the messages that are inherent in the media, and that people daily come into contact with.

Throughout our lives we have had experiences that ‘stand out’ as powerful memories. These may be an interesting starting point for you to explore some of the things that have helped shape your thinking.
REFLECTION POINT: Are there key aspects of your biography that affect your interests and values?

Interpreting experience

Reflection can enable us to see what helped shape our values and how our perspectives change over time. We don’t see the world now in the same way that we once did. In a few years time, you may find your current study to be a contributing factor to your changing values and interests. Every day we have new experiences, which have the potential to alter our perspective in some way.

There are many influences on our views on life. Our ‘frame of mind’ or our emotions can also affect the way we see things. For example, if we are feeling tired, fed-up, overworked, or have negative feelings, we will probably see the things we focus on in a very different way to when we are feeling positive about things.

For this reason we need to stay in touch with our emotions. We need to take time to entertain our feeling (become aware of them) and to make sense of them. There is great value in the learning we can achieve from this. We may reveal much about ourselves and our situation. Through this process of self assessment we can respond to situations more effectively. It may also reveal to us more about the nature of human experience.

In practice, reflecting on our work will mean ‘replaying’ our interventions, seeking to unearth and clarify the interests and values that motivated our actions – and then asking ourselves if those actions (and the interests and values on which they were based) are appropriate for community development/learning workers.
The clearer and more confident we are about our values, the more appropriately we are likely to act and the greater impact we are likely to have as workers in communities. Clarification of values, therefore, is an intrinsic part of the process of reflection on practice.

Once we are clear about our own motivations, it frees us up to think more clearly about how others see the world and what influences their behaviour.
In conclusion

We have looked at how our values and interests are formed by our life stories. Our values and interests will affect how we think and act – and how we interpret an experience after the event.

As you become more skilled at reflecting on your experience – and clearer about your own values and interests – you will become more effective as a worker. You will also become more able to reflect on what is going on – for you and others – during the experience itself, as it is happening.
Do one, or both of the following activities:

**Activity 1**

Look through a tabloid newspaper and watch an episode of a TV soap opera

Whilst you are doing this look at the different ways that male and female roles are portrayed. What does this tell you about how male and female roles are seen in our society?

What other messages can you find that tell us something about the values, attitudes and beliefs of our time?

Do you think the media has had much of an influence upon your own values and interests?
Activity 2

Recall a recent piece of work you were involved in. Observe the event in your mind as if it were happening in as much detail as possible. Now turn to the index of evidence you need to produce for your interim assessment (you will find it at the back of your Programme Handbook – or you can download it from ymoodle. Read through the various sections, focusing upon each of the criteria. As you do so, relate it back to the experience you have been reflecting on.

How many of the criteria can you find evidence for?

You will most probably of found more than one, possibly several of the criteria were applicable to the experience. Try it again with another experience - it's also a useful way of getting to know the criteria.

What we are essentially doing is ‘unpacking’ an experience. Many things happen in a very short space of time, it is only by reflecting upon them afterwards do we have the time to begin to understand all that was involved. Using the separate criteria to focus your interest upon the event can help you to understand the different skills you may of been using at the time. It also shows us once again how our interest during reflection can affect the way we perceive an experience.
References


Reflecting on our work

6. Reflecting forwards – planning

About this section

The previous sections in this Unit have focused on learning from our experiences after the event. This section focuses on the next stage of the learning cycle – using our experience to plan for the future. Effective planning helps us to make the best use of our time and increases our chances of achieving our goals.

Planning is all the more important, when there are constant pressures on our time – including the pressure to reflect and learn!

Exploring your practice in various ways is your responsibility. Identifying the areas where you need to develop is also your responsibility, albeit within a framework of tutors, supervisors and other practitioners to work with you in your explorations. In this section we explore the place of getting organized and time management in developing your work.

Huw Blacker
Getting things done

In one of the most popular books on planning and organising, David Allen introduces a number of basic methods by which we can organize our work and activities – and do so with the minimum of stress and worry. His approach is based on two key objectives:

- Capturing all the things that need to be done – big or small – into a system or list that is outside of our heads.

- Disciplining ourselves to make what he calls ‘front end’ decisions about all the things we let into our lives, so that we always have plans for next actions that we can implement or talk to others about. (2001: 3-4)

To begin we are going to look at his approach
Collecting things

David Allen is great fan of making sure that we list and collect in some way all things that we think we have to do. This allows us to:

- Get them out of our heads.
- See what we actually have.
- Know where things are.

Processing

The first thing to check is whether something needs to be actually done or not.

- If no action is required we can either ‘bin’ it or file it for further reference.
- If we do have to take some action, it is important to work out what tasks are involved – and list them.

Then we have to do it, delegate it or defer it:

- if the action will take less than two minutes Allen argues that it best to do it straightaway;
- if it will take more than two minutes we need to ask ourselves whether we are the right people to do it - if we are not, we delegate it or give it to the right person;
- if it will take more than two minutes – and we are the right person for the task – then we need to defer it until the right time (see below). (Allen 2001: 35)

Organizing

We need to create a system that allows us to manage actionable things. This involves:

- A list of projects or tasks.
- Storage or files for project/task plans and materials.
- A calendar.
- A list of reminders for next actions
- A list of reminders for things we are waiting for. *(op. cit.)*

Some of this can now be done easily on computers (for example using Outlook or one of the many programmes or add-ins that are available). Some of it may be simply a matter of keeping a workbook or list.

**Review**

We need to regularly review what we have to do – what we can act on, what we are still waiting for things to arrive so we can act, where we have got to. This, according to Allen, is best done weekly. We gather our stuff, update our lists and then decide what to do.

**Do**

At any one moment there will be all sorts of things that we could do – but what we need is a sound basis for making quick decisions about what we should do. One of the factors is the priority of the task (see a matter of abc – below); another is the time we have available (is the job small or large). We also need to consider our own energy levels – and whether the job is one that we have the ability to do at that moment.

**REFLECTION POINT:** What, for you, are the potential benefits of using this approach to get your work done? …and what puts you off the idea?
Managing our time

Bookshops are full of books with titles like Managing Your Time, Making the Most of Your Job/Life/Leisure, Live a Fuller Life, etc., etc. We talk about managing time or our life almost as though it was the same thing as managing our dog or our bank account, something outside ourselves and separate.

Although we might say 'I have less time than X has' the fact is that everyone everywhere has the same number of minutes in our hours. **No one has any more time than you.** (Engstrom and Mackenzie 1967: 23)

The truth is we cannot manage time, we can only manage ourselves. All the books about 'managing' or 'making the most of' are about one thing; the sort of **decisions** we make and how we make them. Nothing else.

This section is about the decisions you make. It is based on one of these books, *How To Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* by Alan Lakein. Lakein makes really only two points. One is about **goals** and the other is about **priorities**. Managing time is based on knowing what are goals are, and then prioritizing them.

A matter of ABC

Lakein suggests a simple listing system (of your goals, tasks, whatever) and then taking a simple step of putting an A, B, or C against them. For example, you could sit down now and write down a list of things you want to do tomorrow.

Having established your **goals**, the next task is to identify **priorities**. Lakein suggests that you:

Mark with a letter ‘A’ all those items that have a high value for you.

Mark with a letter ‘B’ all those items that have a medium value for you.
Mark with a letter ‘C’ all those items that have a low value for you.

When you have done that you can break it down further. Take the As. Mark the A that has the highest value 1. It is now A1. Mark the one with the next highest value 2 and so on. You have now ranked your As in order, A1, A2, A3 etc. Do the same with the Bs and the Cs.

We have done this listing with your goals for tomorrow but you will, of course, realise that this is something you can do each day, week, month or year – you can even be ambitious and list your (current) ‘life goals’. This gives you a method of checking from time to time whether you are making the right decisions about what to do.

One way to help you decide on the worth you place on things that need done is to use a priority organiser. Try using what we have set out in Figure A if you have difficulties in setting priorities. We have completed one just as an example. As you can see in Figure A we have given “complete a funding application” as the top priority followed by “meet the residents association” and so forth. You can use this one or adopt your own from our discussion on “A matter of ABC”

Although this is an activity for you to practice for managing your time better and prioritising what needs done, you can see it is a mixture of the personal and professional. The example we give is hypothetical but some things may be linked and if they applied to you personally, might have a different rating. For example, you might consider that fixing your brake light should have an A1 rating as, not to do so, may result in an intervention from the Police.
Reflecting forward - planning

REFLECTION POINT: What are your A1 priorities for action right now??
### Exhibit 1: Priority organiser

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>list of things to do</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arrange supervision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complete funding application</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find out cost of activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visit library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet residents association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear spare room at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fix brake light</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quite a lot of thoughts arise from this approach. First, the notion of **worth** (or ‘value’?).

We put worth on different things for different reasons. Writing a report for work may have a high value because if you don't get it done the organisation may not get refunded. On the other hand, talking to a colleague about her/his son may also have high worth, because otherwise her or his will feel unhappy and not work well. Going to a football match or to a theatre may have high worth, because you have spent a lot of time working and you need to relax.

The important thing is to know what worth you place on things and why. Lakein points out that at any moment of our life we can stop and ask ourselves 'Am I doing the thing I should be doing at this moment?' If you ask yourself that and find yourself doing a C you should then ask yourself whether you are doing the best thing. You might be, you might have dealt with all your As and Bs and have only Cs left. On the other hand you might be leaving important things and filling your time with unimportant things.

Your work on clarifying values [see Section 5 in this Unit] is also relevant when planning and reviewing your use of time. The key values you bring to your work will need to be reflected in your actions.

**Cs are easier than As**

As are sometimes difficult, may take a lot of energy or may be unpleasant. Visiting an important contact for the first time may be a bit frightening. Sorting out a mass of information for a report or for drawing up a budget may take a lot of effort. Confronting your son about the way he is behaving may be unpleasant.

Lakein suggests that we often find ourselves doing a C because it is easier than tackling the A we really need to do. We find excuses for doing the Cs like, 'It will only take a few minutes', 'I won't have any peace of mind until that thing is out of the way', 'I'll feel much more like it when I've had another cup of coffee' and so on. Actually, we are kidding ourselves.
What I am talking about is making priorities and sticking to them. Informal educators often say 'I can't do that. Informal education is so unpredictable. You never know what is going to happen next.' I do not believe this. Certainly there are jobs that are more predictable. The more you work with machines the more you can predict. But I think this argument is really an excuse for not sitting down and thinking about what really needs to be done.

Alan Lakein talks about the business executive who claims he cannot work properly because he is interrupted all the time. He asks a very pertinent question of such people, 'Is it possible that you like to be interrupted?' After all, being interrupted can saves us from doing the important but difficult thing. So, maybe informal and community educators should ask themselves: 'Are all these unpredictable things really so unpredictable?'

**Saying 'No'**

Books about managing time often have a section on saying 'no', and it usually strikes me as rather negative. Lakein makes some good points about this.

The most striking point he makes is that the people who always say 'Yes' to any request are not actually saying 'Yes'. Some of the things that they say 'Yes' to will not be done because there isn't time to do them. Thus, he points out that some of the 'Yesses' are actually 'Maybes'. Now this is a different thing altogether. Nobody wants to have the answer 'Maybe'. It is better to be told 'No' because then you know where you are.

People in the helping professions often feel that it is not caring to say 'no'. But it is not at all caring to say 'Yes', when you really mean 'Maybe' or even 'No'.

When you say 'Yes' or 'No' to a request you are making a decision about priorities. You need to ask yourself whether the request has high priority – for you – or not. If you do not do this, you hand over control of your time to others. If you find you keep doing this, you need to ask yourself the question – 'Do I prefer it this way?'
You may be protesting, 'But if I say 'no' people will be upset'. I quote Alan Lakein: The assistant who vows to fulfill a request 'Right away' (whether he intends to or not), the colleague who offers sympathy when action is needed, and the mailroom clerk who claims never to have received your request in the first place, are all wasting your time and theirs because they have not learned to say 'no'. To do this is simply poor ethics, poor business, poor personal relations, and it can make life harder for everyone in the future. (1973: 85)

**Balancing your needs**

A common concern is balancing the need to have ‘Quiet Time’, where people know that you are not to be interrupted, with ‘Available Time’, where you are accessible. It’s great to have time to concentrate on tasks, but it is vital that we also have time to be sociable. Lakein tell the story of Mr Bean, (ibid.: 94). Alternating Quiet Time with Availability Hours helped Mr Bean to say ‘no’, as well as maintaining his contact with colleagues and getting his key tasks done – and it could work well for you too.

**How to handle the big 'A's**

The problem here is those apparently insurmountable jobs, for example the project report that has got to be about 2,000 words or - horrors! - 10,000 words. These things can seem so big that we do not know how to get started.

The great temptation is to put it off until we have a 'really good stretch of time', which usually means several hours. Unfortunately, this does not happen often – and we tend to bite into the stretches of time that we do have with those easier C jobs!

Lakein's solution is: START NOW. Say you have ten minutes. Identify a small job, which has to be done in order to get the 'big A' done. It might be finding a book, or reading a short passage, or getting some notes in order, or even sharpening a pencil and leaving your reading and writing materials out on the table where you will certainly meet them again when you come back. You have made a start. Having taken one bite you can take the
next. And the next. If you don't start at all you will always have the big A looming in front of you, totally in control. Do something and then you are in control.

One strategy you can try is to end your working day (if you are writing) with a job to do the next day that is quite easy, like making a fair copy of the last few paragraphs. This is a good way of making sure you get into the work again tomorrow.

The other piece of advice is about reading. There will come a point if you are writing an essay or project or report when you say to yourself, 'I can't start writing until I have read such and such. This is the 'just one more book' syndrome, and it becomes like the washing up, a C activity which serves to put off the awful problem of doing the real work. The trouble is there is always another book you can read. You have to recognise the point at which to stop.
Some points to consider:

If you spend 10 minutes a day planning your time and thinking about your priorities you may find it makes a great difference to your work, your personal life and your state of mind. It is useful to do this first thing in the morning, or at the end of a day, when you can plan for the next one.

Remember to make time for yourself to relax and unwind.

When do you work best? There are many different times of the day when you find you can focus better on certain activities. For example, some people like to study in the mornings, others later in the day. Finding the best pattern for yourself will again help you make more effective use of your time.

Make space to respond to unplanned situations. This is especially important as leaders and educators in informal and community education. You may find things happen in your practice that are unpredictable and cannot be planned for. Many of these things you will have to respond to on the spot. Remember this will have a knock-on effect on the work you have planned.

Keep your list of ‘things to do’ easily accessible. You will need to refer to it regularly to remind yourself of what you have planned. It is also a good feeling to ‘tick’ the items on the list as you complete them.
Do not plan an unrealistic amount of work for one day.

Attempt to do a list for each day.

If you don't complete your list, add the unfinished items to tomorrow's list.

REFLECTION POINT: What do you see as your own strengths in terms of managing your time?....and which ideas do you think you could helpfully take on board?

Working under pressure

Different people produce under different circumstances: Shakespeare, we are told, wrote much of his plays standing in the wings of the Globe Theatre; Marcel Proust, on the other hand, had a cork-lined room constructed so that he could work without any interruption from the outside world. The point is to know how you produce.

Some people say 'I work best when I am under pressure, so I always leave things to the last minute.' I think it is a natural human condition not to do things unless we have to.

You may be right that you only work under pressure. If so, you need to be aware of what the dangers are. Suppose the book you are relying on is not in the library? What if the roof leaks or your youngest has measles? More seriously, what if one part of the work turns out to be more difficult than you thought and needs more
time? Be sure you are not just kidding yourself about your last minute-ism. Is it just an excuse for not getting down to it? It is sensible management to make a careful estimate of how long the job is going to take and make sure you have the time.

**REFLECTION POINT:** What conditions bring out the best in you?

**Diaries: mapping out your time**

Do you have a diary? If you don’t then you need to get one. A diary is a way of mapping out the way you are going to spend your time. Usually we put in our diaries only the time that we intend to spend with other people, but we can also map in the time we intend to spend with ourselves, say writing a project.

If a diary is a kind of map of time, give a thought before you buy your next diary about what sort of map you need. Some diaries are thick and give you a whole day to a page. Others give a whole week to a page. In between are those that give a week to a double spread (both pages) or sometimes half a week to a double spread. What do you need?

What you need will relate to the way your life is organised. Someone who has a lot of regular appointments in one day like a dentist, may need a day-a-page diary. Most of us probably need more. I find I cannot manage safely except with one which gives me the whole week in a double spread so that I can see it all. You need to make up your mind about your needs.

The final word about diaries; when you have the right one and you are putting things in it, remember to look at it!
REFLECTION POINT: What sort of diary would be most helpful to you?

**Reflection as a priority**

Within this Unit we have looked at several ways of exploring your work: journals, recordings, reflection, supervision. We have explored various ways of approaching these areas, with examples and suggestions for you to try out.

From these ideas it is important that you find ways of working that work for you. Experiment with the ideas, suggestions and examples. Over time, you will develop your own approach from a more informed viewpoint. What is important is that you *actively* take part in these different areas, so that you can learn how best to use them.

Give yourself *time* to engage in these activities, and to develop how you learn with them. This will greatly enhance your practice. *What priority do you give recording, reflection and supervision within your time management?* If you squeeze these activities in between the other activities of your life they may not be as effective as giving them some quality time.

Keeping recordings, taking time to reflect on your work, and supervision should become *part of the way you work*, rather than activities that are ‘bolted on’ to your practice.

REFLECTION POINT: Do you make good use of your time for reflection? …do you need more? …or less??
In conclusion

Planning the use of time, far from being a pernickety and restricting approach to life, is actually something that takes in our fundamental values and philosophy and determines the way in which we relate to others.

Clarifying goals and priorities is essential for good planning and time management – thus linking the process with the theme of ‘values and interests’ examined in the previous section.

Bibliography


