

Learning and teaching communication report:

Learning environment observation

Report prepared by: Sharon Maguire
June, 2008

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 Purpose	3
1.2 Overview	3
1.3 Structure	3
1.4 Scope	3
2.0 Methods	4
2.1 Process	4
2.2 Background	4
3.0 Discussion	5
3.1 Review of main supporting literature	5
3.2 Social activity and communities of practice	5
3.3 Questioning and guiding	6
3.4 Feedback and reinforcement	7
3.5 Non-verbal communication and congruence	7
3.6 Mediating with tools and artefacts	8
3.7 Interpersonal skills	8
3.8 Purposeful authentic tasks	9
4.0 Conclusion	9
5.0 Recommendations	10
6.0 References	12
7.0 Appendix A: Observations Notes	14

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to evaluate communication and learning strategies used in an observation of a learning environment, and to discern communication strategies for recommendation in effective teaching practice.

1.2 Overview

Learning environments that value social collaborative activity facilitate effective learning. Smith and Blake (2006) suggest “Learning is understood to be a social activity, where teams of learners work and learn in partnership with one another and their trainers” (p.7). The social discourse between peers and facilitators provides diversity of perspectives, challenges understanding and provides opportunities for questions and explanations that extend thinking. “Social integration and sense of community are linked to persistence” (Silverman & Casazza, 2000, p.133).

1.3 Structure

The section on methods informs the reader of the process and background of the observation process. The literature review gives a brief discussion of the main supporting literature referred to in this report. The discussion section gives an in depth analysis of the range of communication strategies and skills observed, followed by concluding commentary and recommendations for effective teachers on what communication strategies and skills could be used to engage learners and promote successful learning outcomes.

1.4 Scope

This report will interpret communication strategies and draw justified conclusions, backed by evidence from observation, supported by relevant literature. Effective

and not so effective strategies for facilitating learning will be identified, considering pros and cons, along with evaluation of alternative interpretations. This report will not cover the entire observation in linear format, but rather will limit discussion to aspects of it.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Process

Data was gathered through observation undertaken in a classroom learning environment. An observation protocol [Appendix A] was developed to aid the recording process. Consideration was given to layout and categories used in the protocol in an endeavour to ensure communication strategies were the central focus of the observation process. Approval for the observation was negotiated with a fellow teacher and permission was granted by both the teacher and her students. The following conditions formed part of the negotiation process:

- The observation was to be unobtrusive
- Confidentiality would be assured, real names would not be used in either the observation protocol or the report
- The observation would have no impact on the work or outcomes of those involved
- The purpose of the observation was clearly explained

2.2 Background

The observation was conducted in a class consisting of five mature aged female students, one teenage female student, one mature aged male student, the facilitator and a guest speaker from the mental health sector. The unit of study being undertaken was unit CHCMH1B Orientation to Mental Health Work. Students gave oral presentations as part of their assessment, followed by peer review and facilitator

feedback on the presentations, along with group discussions on overall outcomes of the unit.

3.0 Discussion

3.1 Review of main supporting literature

Silverman and Casazza (2000), Mercer (1999), and Drago-Severson et al. (2001) highlight the importance of community and the cohort in learning. Dialogue is acknowledged as a critical component of the learning process, along with supportive nurturing environments that provide feedback and reinforcement whilst being conducive to communicative activity. Engeström's (1994) earlier work champions the notion of learning as social activity, mediated by tools and artefacts conveying social knowledge, in addition supporting the use of a questioning and guidance to scaffold higher order thinking. Eunson (2005) conveys the importance of communication and interpersonal skills in developing understanding, ascertaining learner engagement, congruence in meaning, and managing relationships in the learning environment.

3.2 Social activity and communities of practice

The atmosphere was warm, friendly and supportive, as students, facilitator and guest chatted informally before presentations, older students were reassuring a younger student who appeared tired and nervous. Drago-Severson et al. (2001) observes that a cohort can serve as a context in which learners provide each other with a variety of emotional and psychological support. As students took turns presenting their research, they were teaching what they had learned to the rest of the group, when learners act as teachers they “experience content again and develop new perspectives” (Silverman & Casazza, 2000, p.119).

Student A spoke of her home in South Africa, the facilitator and another student asked her to expand on her statements, leading to a conversation about respecting cultural views in other communities [paragraph 5 on page 1 of Appendix A].

Interpersonal interactions can help learners become more aware of their own perspectives and provides a platform for exploring cultural differences (Drago-Severson et al., 2001). The facilitator told a story that gave weight to Student A's comments, telling of her own experience as a counsellor coming into an unfamiliar community. This sort of discourse between learners and facilitator establishes a zone of proximal development [ZPD] (Vygotsky cited in Engeström, 1994).

Students C and D used role play, dressing up and performing a skit for the audience as part of their presentation, to explain their research in a different way [paragraph 2 on page 2 of Appendix A]. Learners construct knowledge through interpretive activity, merging new material with previous constructed understandings in the course of their ongoing activity (Engeström, 1994).

At the end of the presentations students filled out a questionnaire they also completed at the beginning of the unit. The facilitator and learners discussed how their views, beliefs and attitudes had changed over the past few weeks [paragraph 4 on pages 3-4 of Appendix A]. This critical reflection leads to perspective transformation, an awareness of why particular meanings are connected to reality (Mezirow, cited in Silverman & Casazza, 2000). Each student discussed how their views had changed and how they relate their learning to their life circumstances, "effective learning is said to be situated in activity, context and culture as a collaboration in a community of practice" (Marsh & Ketterer, 2005, p.1). Group work strategies have been found to increase group motivation towards learning goals and improve satisfaction and self esteem in some cases (Pithers, 1998).

3.3 Questioning and guiding

Questioning can be used in a way that creates cognitive conflict, providing intellectual confrontations and challenges. Therefore bringing into view the source of inner contradictions and assisting learners to see that their former ways of knowing may be insufficient, thus providing interest and motivation for learning. The facilitator locates the point in the ZPD between what is known and what is not known and offers appropriate support to encourage the learner to reach potential (Engeström, 1994). The facilitator used effective questioning with Student C when

discussing her sister's schizophrenia [paragraph 3 on the last page in Appendix A], gently bringing student C to realise that her own needs had clouded her earlier judgement about her sister's treatment. Questioning allows the facilitator to evaluate understanding and correct misunderstandings as they become apparent (Pithers, 1998).

3.4 Feedback and reinforcement

The facilitator gave feedback throughout the presentations, "positive reinforcement has a powerful effect on learning... it strengthens learning during practice when the learning is being acquired and this reduces later forgetting" (Pithers, 1998, p.38). The facilitator also explained how emotions in tackling units of this nature can be hard to deal with [paragraph 3 on page 3 of Appendix A]. Feedback in the form of explanations promotes meaningful learning by helping learners to establish meaningful connections (Pithers, 1998). Students followed the facilitators lead, in acknowledging how difficult the subject matter was, particularly for younger learners [G], by offering support and debriefing should student G need it, "supportive environments are those in which individuals are involved, help each other, and feel comfortable expressing themselves openly and freely" (Moos, 1979 cited in Silverman & Casazza, 2000, p.119).

3.5 Non-verbal communication and congruence

As the guest speaker spoke about unjust treatment of the mentally ill throughout history, students were observed displaying rather defensive posture, with rather angry expressions and folded arms [paragraph 1 on page 2 of Appendix A]. The students were united in anger with the speaker, but this may easily have been misconstrued as being indifferent or hostile towards the speaker "checking the meaning of messages is critical for accurate exchange" (Sultmann & Burton, 2004, p.38). The nods of agreement, eye contact and comments conveyed their united stance. Effective communication happens when verbal and non verbal communications are in harmony, when they are congruent. This can be observed

through paralinguistic expression, mirroring, posture, gestures, expressions, body orientation and proxemics (Eunson, 2005).

3.6 Mediating with tools and artefacts

Students C and D used graphic pictures in a PowerPoint presentation to add further impact to their discussion on torture of the mentally ill throughout history. Learning is mediated by the environment in which it is situated, it is socially and culturally constructed (Engeström, 1994). Students G and F played a YouTube music video clip to bring realism to their words. This had a powerful effect, with many students observed choking back tears [paragraph 2 on page 3 of Appendix A]. Adults learn in a transformative way, “using critical reflection and interpretation through the lens of experience, and interacting with the environment in ways determined by the sociocultural context in which learning occurs” (Silverman & Casazza, 2000, p.128).

In an activity system where students are working together to derive meaning, there are tools that mediate the activity. Tools can be both physical and conceptual. Students also act within other activity systems such as family, thus it is important to consider the cultural historical nature of the contextualised learning system and to connect meaning making to ways of knowing in other activity systems (Stevenson, 2003). The facilitator did this well as she encouraged student B to talk about her experience with panic attacks in her family while relating the conversation back to the context of the unit [paragraph 5 on page 4 of Appendix A]. “Context is the basis of continuity in learning, good teachers contextualise new experiences” (Mercer, 1990, p.32).

3.7 Interpersonal skills

The facilitator used empathy and warmth in conveying to student E that she was brave in doing the presentation on her own and acknowledging the “wonderful story telling” [paragraph 1 on page 3 of Appendix A], “empathy and listening are core skills of reciprocity... listening is the main medium through which empathy is generated and communicated (Sultmann & Burton, 2004, p.39). The guest speaker

had ‘presence’; he modelled self regulation, self confidence, motivation, optimism, adaptability, resilience, persistence and initiative throughout his speech. His interpersonal skills made the atmosphere ‘buzz’ [paragraph 1 on page 2 of Appendix A].

3.8 Purposeful authentic tasks

When discussing presentations, student C stated “presenting our findings has helped me learn, not only did I have to present what I researched, but I had to understand what I researched in order to present it” [paragraph 3 on page 3 of Appendix A]. An assessment itself can facilitate learning, when learners participate in the design of their assessment, deciding what areas to cover and how to present it, doing so requires that they have a sound understanding of their research topic. “Learners are well served by a process of connecting learning to relevant life experience and vocational outcomes” (Smith & Blake, 2006, p.5). Meaningful learning occurs through activity, when new knowledge and skills merge with prior knowledge, learning is less meaningful and more easily forgotten if the connections between new and prior knowledge are weak (Engeström, 1994). Learners “learn more when they are actively involved in learning than they do when they passively listen” (Eggan & Kauchak, 2001, p.2).

4.0 Conclusion

Creating a learning community, where learners work together in partnerships, provides an opportunity for creative and transformative learning where new ways of understanding and creating knowledge occur through social interaction, “part of the ‘making sense’ process is providing opportunities to talk about issues and problems with others, to think about them, and to repeat the learning cycle as the level of expertise increases” (Smith and Blake, 2006, p.10). Interaction and exposure to peer feedback and diversity of opinion encourages a reflective process, where learners are able to take on other perspectives that challenge their own assumptions (Drago-Severson et al., 2001). Questioning and reinforcing can be used to stimulate learners to reflect on their understanding and recognise relationships between ideas and beliefs (Eggan & Kauchak,

2001). Macrorie, cited in Silverman and Casazza (2000) suggests “outstanding teachers are those who construct climates in which students are free to take chances and to make use of mistakes” (p.123).

5.0 Recommendations

This report identifies a number of strategies recommend for use by effective teachers;

- Use social interaction and collaborative activity to engage learners - Communities of practice form the basis of a good learning environment, but teachers must be aware of the developmental stages of learners in order to provide adequate support and a secure environment. Learners make meaning with different ways of knowing, and as such require different forms of support and challenge. For example, those that have not developed the capacity to be self-authoring may feel threatened by the tensions and conflicts caused through diversity of opinions (Drago-Severson et al., 2001). A cohesive environment creates a strong sense of shared purpose (Mercer, 1990).
- Use questioning to strategically guide learners – this can assist learners in seeing the connections between what is being studied and how the ideas relate to real world examples (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). Facilitators need to make wise choices in the use of pause, probing, redirection, paraphrasing, timing and active listening for questioning to be effective (Pithers, 1998). Questioning can also be used to reframe, creating new and neutral perspectives by removing offending language and bias and drawing out implications (Eunson, 2005).
- Give feedback immediately and often – use it to inform and fill in gaps, correct variations from goals, stimulate and encourage, and develop performance. It is important not to wallow in negative or counterproductive feedback, but rather highlight an error and move on to problem solving and what can be done (Eunson, 2005). Appropriate and timely feedback “places high value on the needs and feelings of the learner” (Pithers, 1998, p.54).
- Observe non-verbal behaviour - Facilitators need to be aware of non verbal behaviour in determining congruence in communication. Observing non verbal cues assists in

checking for accuracy and uncovering discrepancies or problems, “a key element of the communicative process of education must be the development of an understanding which is shared” (Mercer, 1990, p.30).

- It is important to realise that the way in which tools are used mediates response and how learners think about and understand tasks, “cultural artefacts mediate human activity and they are always situated within a human activity system (Petrina, 2004 cited in Marsh & Ketterer, 2005, p.7).
- Develop interpersonal skills - A good teacher can “make the right judgements about when to tell, when to ask, when to instruct and when to stand well clear and only facilitate” (Mercer, 1990, p.33). Effective listening allows others to solve their own problems as the cause often becomes apparent and well defined when one is able to speak freely without judgment or interruption. Good interpersonal skills allow facilitators to induce desirable responses in others (Eunson, 2005)
- Make tasks purposeful and authentic - Facilitators should set realistic tasks that show connections between what is being studied and learner’s lives, to do so facilitators need to find out and become aware of learners backgrounds and their prior experiences and knowledge (Eggan & Kauchak, 2001).

6.0 References

- Borich, G. (2003). *Observation skills for effective teaching*. Upper Saddle River: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Drago-Severson, E., Heising, D., Kegan, R., Broderik, M., Portnow, K., & Popp, N. (2001). The Power of a Cohort and of Collaborative Groups. NCSALL. Retrieved June 6, 2008 from <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=254>
- Eggan, P. & Kauchak, D. (2001). Strategies for teachers. *Teaching content and thinking skills*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Engeström, Y. (1994). Training for change: *New approach to instruction and learning in working life*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation.
- Eunson, B. (2005). *Communicating in the 21st century*. Milton, QLD: John Wiley & Sons.
- Marsh, G. & Ketterer, J. (2005). Situating the Zone of Proximal Development. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume VIII*, Number II Summer 2005. University of West Georgia, Distance Education Centre. Retrieved June 7, 2008 from <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer82/marsh82.htm>
- Mercer, N. (1990) Context, continuity and communication in learning. In Potter, F. (Ed.) *Reading, Learning, and Media Education* (pp.27-38). Oxford: Blackwell Education
- Pithers, R (1998) *Improving Learning Through Effective Training*. Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Silverman, S. & Casazza, M. (2000) *Learning and Development. Making connections to enhance teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Smith, P. & Blake, D. (2006). *Facilitating learning through effective teaching: At a glance*. Adelaide: NCVET. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/search.html>

Stevenson, J. Ed. (2003). *Developing vocational expertise*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Sultmann, B., & Burton, T. (2004). *People skills: Guiding you to effective interpersonal behaviour*. Bowen Hills, QLD: Australian Academic Press.

Prompts for Observing		7.0 Appendix A: Observations Notes	p.1
Social Environment	Level of comfort – physical environment	<p>Certificate III Population Health – CHCMH1B Orientation to mental health work</p> <p>This observation was conducted in a classroom environment, as students complete their assessment on the last day of the above unit. Students are to give a 20 minute oral presentation in pairs to launch display boards they have created on mental health. The class consists of six female students and one male student, a facilitator, and an industry representative from the mental health sector is also present. The students are mature age, I would guess maybe in the range of 30 to 45, one female is much younger, maybe late teens, very early twenties. The presentations are then to be followed by a group discussion and feedback session with the facilitator.</p> <p>The room itself is comfortable, modern, light, airy and pleasant, though the temperature is a little on the cold side. Students are settling into class, and along with the industry guest, are seated around a table in the centre of the room. Students, the guest and the facilitator are chatting informally, the atmosphere is warm and friendly. I notice that one student, considerably younger than the rest of the group, doesn't participate in conversation as much as the other students. I overhear her saying she is tired and nervous, she is sitting, shoulders slumped slightly forward and down. The older students seem protective of her and tell her she will be ok, that once it is over it will not seem so bad.</p> <p>Students will be standing towards the front of the room to give their presentations. There is a portable whiteboard, a large portable noticeboard and a projector screen connected to a laptop at the front of the room. The facilitator commences by welcoming the guest and myself and then introduces each student by name and we all say hello.</p> <p>The first pair of students moves to the front of the room to begin their presentation (student A and student B). They have previously set up their display on the notice board. Student A introduces their topic 'policy, legislation and legal requirements' and says "as the topic is heavy, I will begin with a joke", the joke is of an adult nature, though delivered with tact so as not to be offensive, and is basically about 'being in bed with the policy makers'. Students erupt with laughter and the industry representative and the facilitator laugh and clap quite loudly. The class quietens and students are all sitting back in their seats, looking relaxed, all but the male student has their legs crossed – all appear to be mirroring each other. Students sit in close proximity to one another.</p> <p>Student A then uses a ruler to point to a timeline of political history events on large sheets of cardboard pinned to the noticeboard. She begins by saying "early in history, little difference was made between mental illness and criminality", students look concerned and empathetic as she discusses the cruelty inflicted on the mentally ill. The room is very quiet and I am surprised at how attentive everyone in the room is. Student A speaks with ease and has a lot of passion in her voice, her palms are open and face outward as she speaks, moving her gaze around the room. Students nod in agreement "mmm" – paralinguistic expression used by several students appears to demonstrate connection and agreement with Student A. Student B hands out a printed overview of their presentation to the audience while student A continues to speak, I feel this is slightly distracting as students rustle the paper as they quickly glance through the notes and are no longer engaged and focused on the students doing the presentation. Students settle and sit their papers down, once again focussed on the two out the front. Student B now does some of the talking, "statistics show that 73% of women incarcerated have mental illness, subsequently their treatment is poor and inappropriate", student B also speaks with genuine concern in her voice, her face is expressive and her brows raised, "studies confirm that there are strong links between physical and mental health", students nod in agreement, there is very good eye contact between those presenting and those in the audience. Student A talks about her home in South Africa, she is dark, of Indian heritage "I feel strongly that it is important to learn about local politics, about local communities, we can't come in from outside and make suggestions on sensitive issues like mental health, we need to get in and know the communities". The facilitator and another student ask that she expand on her comment and tell us more about what she means. Student A "we must respect cultures and their views and work within their existing systems, we can't take go rushing in with solutions to problems and impose our own views". Paralinguistic expression again used to convey agreement and understanding. Facilitator interjects "you have highlighted a really important aspect of working in this industry, when I worked on the west coast many years ago in the sexual assault area, I was referred to as a 'seagull', communities don't like outsiders coming in with their outside knowledge, it is important to understand and respect the community you work in". The pair concludes their presentation and the facilitator comments on the depth and accuracy of the research, saying they have indeed highlighted the important milestones in relation to the political events that have shaped the mental health sector. The facilitator thanks the students for being the first to present, and asks students in the audience if they have any questions. There are none, students clap and tell the two students who just presented how good their presentation was. This group appears very supportive of one another. Personally I'm finding it really hard to stay focussed on observing, as the topic, the presentation and the atmosphere are thoroughly absorbing.</p>	
	Spontaneity and risk taking		
	Cohesiveness, togetherness		
	Diversity – backgrounds, interests, activities		
	Accommodations – disabilities etc		
	Formality – guidance, flexibility		
	Pace – smoothness of transitions		
	Frictions, tensions, competition, conflict		
	Acceptance of goals by students		
	Communication of expected roles by students		
	Apathy v motivation – see relevance in tasks		
	Ownership over learning		
	Voice in activities - participate, create, change		
	Cooperation, independence, interdependence		
	Structure of activities (relates to learning guide)		
	Tools used and activities undertaken		
How tools are used			
Rules and routines established, informal, flexible			
Atmosphere, climate, warmth, trust			
Feelings displayed			
Speaking expressively, dramatically			
Variety – Clarity	Praise, reinforcement, support		
	Variations - oral, visual, tactile		
	Eye contact, voice		
	Learning by seeing, listening, doing		
	Sustained interest, rewards, reinforcers		
	Humour, vocal variation, gestures, enthusiasm		
	Receptiveness, understanding		
	Repeating, reviewing		
	Questions asked, responses, immediacy		
	Expanding on answers, probing, encouraging		
Explicit, clear instructions			
Using concrete examples, demonstrations			
Content in perspective of past and future learning			

Observations Notes (continued)

Task Orientation - Engagement	Practical application, practice	<p>The guest speaker is now invited to address the group. He begins by saying "knowing about government policy, funding, economics and politics as it relates to mental health is of vital importance to those considering a career in this sector". His voice is very clear, with a confident slowness, he speaks very well in a naturally loud voice, his tone is almost like that of a news reader, and I feel this makes him appear very credible. Everyone in the room is still, focused and engaged as he speaks, he asks "who has the least power in our communities, who are the most vulnerable?" he pauses "children, aboriginals and the mentally ill". "the history of mental health is one of exclusion, of deviant behaviour, if one is not doing what they are expected to be doing then they are removed from society, until as presenter A and B pointed out, the system was deinstitutionalised in 1991". He goes on to reaffirm most of what the first two students presenting have said and goes on to say "become informed, learn how policy is made, learn how the system is governed, learn how it is funded, this is what gives you your voice, we need to give as much input as possible". "Your health is determined by your postcode, if you are aboriginal, if you are poor, if you happen to live in the Northern Territory, your access to mental health support decreases significantly", "1% of the health budget is directed to the mental health sector, yet one in five people have mental health problems". I am so absorbed by the speakers confidence and knowledge, I look around and notice heads shaking, nearly all students have their arms folded, they almost seem united in anger, almost like they are threatened and are protecting themselves. A student from the audience speaks "I read, as you said, that one in five people suffer from mental health problems, so if you are in a room with four friends and they are all fine, maybe you should look at yourself". Everyone nods, and laughs, like they are on the same wavelength, "yes, yes, says the guest speaker, that is it exactly, people that suffer mental illness, they are you and I, they are us, they are anyone of us at any time, we must remember that, they are you and I". The room is charged, buzzing literally, it is a bit of a culture shock for me, coming from my computer class into such a hot topic, students obviously have a lot of passion for what they are learning. The facilitator and students thank the guest, there is a short coffee break while the next two students prepare for their presentation.</p> <p>Student C and D begin, they have set up their display on the notice board, and introduce their topic "society, stigma and values throughout history". They begin with a story of how, early in history, the mentally ill were tortured. Student C is speaking, while student E shows PowerPoint slides, the slides have pictures only – no words, which seems to make what the speaker is saying more vivid without being distracting. As student C speaks I notice that two other students are taking notes, appearing very engaged. The images are powerful. Student D says "early beliefs were that mental illness was something inflicted or put in the individual, put in by the devil, and at times the most horrid things were done to let the evil spirit out" a slide is shown depicting an image of a conscious person being held as a hole is drilled into the top of their skull. The shock factor is quite chilling, the younger student looks particularly emotional, the facilitator nods and makes notes. The presentation moves fast and I'm unable to capture many words, but the student presenting becomes emotional and stops, lost for words. A student from the audience assists, continuing the topic from her own knowledge until the student at the front collects herself and takes over again. Student C "Hippocrates believed the mentally ill needed massage, music, bathing and dream therapy", a student from the audience asks "what is dream therapy", Student C explains what it is. Student D "Plato believed dialectic questioning and talking helped the mentally ill, and care should be the responsibility of the family", a student from the audience asks "what is dialectic questioning", the facilitator responds "posing a series of purposeful, structured well thought out questions that serve to tell you the story, challenge illogical perceptions and encourage deeper thought and reflection". Student C and D continue on – focussing on a PowerPoint slide featuring an ancient Greek theme, student D exits the room, student C continues speaking then pauses and looks towards the door, student D re-enters the room dressed in ancient attire, wearing a long robe and a large bishop like hat - he gives a great rendition, speaking in an ancient tongue as he recites the ancient script at the bottom of the PowerPoint slide. Students gasp, and roar with laughter, the facilitator slides her chair back from the table and slaps her thighs, the student does such a very, very good job. The facilitator says "you have missed your calling, you should be in theatre, that was so very, very good, it is so wonderful to have a historian among us", I give a confused look to the student next to me, she says "student D has recently completed a social history degree", the penny drops. Student D whips of his costume and pauses as the room settles and laughter subsides, the two continue the presentation. Student D speaks "there is very little written on women's health and women's mental health throughout history, it is hidden, this maybe because history has been primarily documented and recorded by men", he continues "think of the word history, it is 'his' 'story', where is herstory?". Students are so attentive, nodding in agreement, "hmmf" I hear one say. "hysteria and the walking womb were only attributed to women, but this diagnosis was proposed by men". The students wrap up their presentation. The facilitator tells them how wonderful the presentation was, and comments on the research saying "isn't it funny, we seem to have come full circle, going back to Plato and Hippocrates holistic approach and spa treatment"</p> <p>The next student moves to the front of the room (I wonder why she doesn't have a partner). The facilitator thanks the student for going ahead on her own, saying "it is difficult to work as a team, when one part of the team is not committed". I gather that her partner has pulled out. Student E begins by introducing her topic "learning from our mistakes, what the past can teach us". Her approach is different to the</p>
	Opportunities for self directed projects	
	Interruptions	
	Peer tutoring	
	Group activities, team work, sharing	
	Critical dialogue, reflection processes	
	Student – teacher interactions	
	Milestones – tests, reviews, assignments	
	Momentum - rapidity	
	Problem solving, Self directed activity	
	Attentiveness, on task	
	active social construction, higher thinking	
	Choice of words, tone, voice	
	Feedback systems, corrections, immediacy	
Congruence	Silence, active listening	
	Questions asked, responses	
	Reciprocal distancing, exclusions	
	Reflection question for next class/activity	
	paralinguistic expression	
	linguistic expression	
	Gestures	
	posture, mirroring	
	body movement, orientation,	
	touching	
	Personal space, proxemics	
time, observing chronicity patterns		
active listening		
synchronisation		
Head movements		
facial expression		
Eye Contact, gaze		
Silence		

students before her, she has written her presentation as a story and tells it like one. Student E reads from papers in front of her, but stops and adds her own words and feelings, her hands, her face are so incredibly expressive. She reads with glasses on, she reads a small section, stops, removes her glasses and addresses every student in the room as she gives an interpretation of what she has read and puts her own spin on it. This is the pattern throughout her presentation. Her display board is full of pamphlets that outline the rights and help available, she says "this help doesn't appear to be available to everyone". Student E speaks from the heart, she shakes her head and waves her arms and glasses as the words she reads makes her and everyone else in the room angry at the injustice she highlights. She speaks of negligence, especially in relation to mental health issues in aboriginal communities. She says "when will we stop repeating our past mistakes, there is no forward planning, no funding, we are unprepared, yet again", a student claps, the rest join in. I realise I have captured very little; I was so drawn in by her presentation that I don't appear to have captured much at all. Mental note to self, try to 'observe' in the next presentation. Without realising her presentation is over, I was so focussed on her beautiful expressive manner that I didn't capture a single sentence. Immediately the student seems nervous and says to the facilitator anxiously "did I cover enough bits". The facilitator tells her "that was beautiful, as I looked around the room you had us all in the palm of your hand, your narrative style was fabulous, you told us a story, wonderful story telling". The facilitator looks around the room and says "I think we can all learn something from student E, speak from your heart, use the power of narrative, tell the story, the manner of speech can make all the difference". The other students congratulate student E and tell her how brave she is for doing the presentation on her own, one says "I really admire you, I wouldn't have done it". I am reflecting back on the words of the first two students presenting, when they said the topic is heavy, I thought they just meant their topic, I can see now that it is the whole subject, the whole unit. It is indeed a very heavy topic.

Students relax and have a quick informal discussion as the next two students prepare for their presentation. The younger student gets up and immediately other students start to reassure her, the facilitator asks if she is ok, her partner says "she is nervous and even dreamt about her presentation today and has had no sleep", the facilitator tells her to take her time, tells her she is in a safe place and to use her partner where needed. The support here is quite tremendous. Student F and Student G introduce their topic "what constitutes mental illness", they use a PowerPoint presentation with dot points listed as they move through it and explain how mental illness is defined. They have the laptop and projector ready, and I notice that they have a couple of You Tube video clips ready to go. Student F "One in twenty people suffer from anxiety" students nod in agreement, "no one is immune to mental illness", they talk about the media and the negative impact it has on the perception of mental illness in the community. They get ready to play a you tube clip from the movie 'A beautiful mind', the story of mathematician John Nash, the clip won't play, as it reloads the students chat and use the disruption to readjust their seating and have a bit of a stretch. The clip begins, one scene depicts the actor cutting at his wrists, I notice that one student turns away, I glance around, the room has become really emotionally charged, the music, the video, the presentation has really got everyone going, eyes are teary, I hear gasps and noises. They continue on "males under 17 are most affected by anxiety, followed by women 35-44", "women are more likely to report psychological distress", a student from the audience brings up anorexia and a discussion between the presenters and students begins about eating disorders and their relationship to mental illness. Everyone is participating, the younger student (G) seems more relaxed. Student G says "there are misconceptions surrounding those that suffer from mental illness", they say the next clip says it all, they play a video clip from You Tube called myjourneywithdepression (all one word). This clip is set to music like the one before and is so, so emotional, it takes us on a journey, an inside look at mental illness. I being a sensitive emotional soul, and not at all prepared for the nature of this class, find it really hard to hold back my tears, my eyes well till they are almost bursting. I can't watch any more, I look around, tears are everywhere, tears and laughter, and tonnes of blinking and trying not to cry. The video really connects and hits home big time. The presentations have been emotionally draining and hard. These students wrap up their presentation. Everyone seems overwhelmed, and relieved. The facilitator tells them how powerful that was and says "you have given me another tool for my other classes, You Tube, that was fantastic". Students reflect on the video, one suggest that they could show it to family and friends in an effort to raise awareness of mental illness, facilitator says "fabulous idea".

The students discuss self harm, the mood is sombre, one student E says "I am shocked about what I've researched", the facilitator responds "I'm interested in hearing more", student E says "it's been sad and hard to allow myself to really acknowledge mental illness in the way that I have". Facilitator says "all of the presentations were excellent, above standard, and way above the qualification level of this group", "I am gobsmacked at the professionalism of you as Certificate III students at the beginning of your journey". The facilitator comments to a couple of students about their good eye contact and their confidence, she then turns to the younger student, student G, and uses a comforting tone, leaning forward and acknowledges how difficult it is to cope with the emotions of this subject at such a young age, saying "the emotions experienced in confronting mental illness can be overwhelming". Other students acknowledge the difficulty faced by student G and offer support, a shoulder and debriefing at any time should she need it. I begin to understand now why this student appeared so tired and withdrawn. The facilitator thanks the students once again, restating that the group has done exceptionally well, stating that competency has been highly achieved by all "congratulations, and very well done, your presentations demonstrated beyond doubt that you have picked up, and exceeded the underpinning knowledge". Students clap and congratulate each other. Student C says "presenting our findings has helped me learn, not only did I have to present what I researched, but I had to understand what I researched in order to present it", Student A says "we didn't just regurgitate information; we went and found out together", facilitator says "I would like to acknowledge student E, who ended up doing a solo presentation, as the two students working with her pulled out, or have not been showing up". Facilitator asks "do you, as a group, feel that you have learned off each other", there is an overwhelming "yes", followed by laughter. Student E says "everything we have all learned links in together", facilitator says "this group has been particularly good at sharing information, if we hold on to our knowledge it doesn't do anyone any good, we need to share our knowledge". Facilitator also says "I was really pleased that we didn't experience death by PowerPoint, slides weren't packed with words, those who used it used it effectively". The facilitator says we will break for lunch and acknowledges how heavy the subject matter is and acknowledges the passion shown, "after lunch I will present written feedback on your presentation, and on your display". We break for lunch.

Class resumes after lunch in a different room, this room is an older classroom, but it is homely and less formal looking tables are set up in the middle of the room and we all sit around it, there are lounge chairs and a couple of coffee tables in this room and lots of colourful posters and noticeboards painted bright red, it's quite lively looking. Students are given a questionnaire to fill out, the facilitator says "this is the same questionnaire that you were given at the beginning of the unit, the purpose of repeating it is to see if you have changed your views, your beliefs and your attitudes towards mental illness", student F says "my views have definitely changed, I answered critically of myself before, I have a different perspective now", facilitator responds "that's what we're here to

discuss". Student E says "I am shocked by my research on aboriginal health, I'm just left feeling frustrated", she shakes her head and throws her hands in the air, a student responds "evil persists when good men do nothing", facilitator agrees, "frustration is good, it prompts action". Student G (the young one) is sitting with her head in her hands, looking very worn out and drained, the facilitator asks if she is ok, student G responds "I'm just very tired, I dreamt about today, and it's been pretty emotional, I wasn't really expecting it to be like this". The facilitator tells her that it's important that she shares her feelings and talks with her and the other students, she says her feelings are a natural progression through units of this nature.

The facilitator asks students if they have answered differently now on the issue of whether mentally ill patients should be institutionalised, student F responds "yes, if that is what they want, I think now that it is ok, if that is what the individual wants", facilitator responds "so you have gone from general statements to contextualising your answers", she then acknowledges the nods of agreement. Student D says "the word 'asylum' means place of safety", student A says "I remember the impact of a video we watched a couple of weeks ago, the man in it said he had a place to stay, he was warm, he was cared for, I feel differently about institutionalisation now". All students appear to be in agreement here, in that institutions have a place and can help those that need it. Student G says "I can now look at it from the viewpoint of the mentally ill". Student B says "I have learned more, I have a more informed opinion, but I also realise now how little I know, that I don't know enough and I want to know more, I want to make a difference", the facilitator responds with immediacy "that statement right there, that is what puts the fire in my belly, we have to want to make a difference", student B agrees "when I answered these questions previously, it was based on my own assumptions, I also realise how little I know, and that my assumptions were ill informed", the facilitator says it was good to see her tackle the political area, saying "it's a bit like eating your yucky vegies first", students laugh.

Students begin to discuss the lack of government policy and politics taught in schools and discuss how important it is to know how the country is governed, the facilitator responds "our vote is our power to decide how we live", "we must have a voice in this industry". The facilitator turns her attention to student C "how do you feel about this now", student C responds "when I first started this I was bitter, as you know my sister has schizophrenia, she is in a supervised facility, but I am glad she is there now, she is safe, she has a life, she goes on bus trips, she's looked after, my parents aren't so stressed", the facilitator responds "there are some that view those kind of facilities as institutions", student C says "it's not, my sister is happy, she comes and goes as she pleases, she has stuff to do", the facilitator says "what makes her happy being there", student C says "when she was at home there was nothing to do, just her and her thoughts, the medication wasn't helping", the facilitator responds "medication alone is never enough, staff create communities, there is 24/7 care and supervision, patients are listened to". Another student asks "has it strengthened your relationship with her, student C responds "yes", facilitator says "that good, she has qualified people who can challenge the voices she hears", student C says "I hoped she'd be home by now", facilitator says "so that's what you want". The students and facilitator then discuss how their own needs and wants can sometimes cloud judgement. Facilitator says "do you think it's fair to say that we focus on peoples negatives rather than the positives in people", students respond in agreement "that's a fair call", student B says "a teacher from my sons primary school told me he would never drive a car or function like normal", facilitator says "you're kidding", another student says "it's one thing to read and learn about this stuff, but it can take a long time to apply it, you have to change yourself", facilitator says "it takes less energy to think negatively, if I give you a piece of paper with a line down the middle, one side says negative, the other side positive, which side would you fill up first?", students all respond, negative.

Facilitator says "from your research, have we learnt anything from history or do we keep repeating mistakes", student D responds "we seem to keep repeating mistakes", facilitator says "there is still a mindset, that if the mentally ill are not seen or heard then we don't have to deal with it". Student E says angrily "on one particular topic I researched I found over 360,000 reports, of all of those reports only 3 were written by women, but the topic was about women", the male student (D) that has studied social history says "historical research about women was written by men", student G says "one thing that has changed for me is that I now know that people can recover from mental illness", the facilitator quickly responds here "I noticed when you started that your views were black and white, I have seen a huge growth in you, you really need to value your contributions".

The facilitator says "the purpose of this exercise was to ascertain if your values are congruent with the sector", "what is our role?", student C responds "care giver". They all agree. Students all appear happy, they are laughing, joking, making quips. The facilitator says she's noticed how the language they use has changed, it is more respectful and considerate "there is power in language". Student B says "I understand what is meant by the 'locus of control'", she talks about her sons panic attacks, and talks about how her son can take control and develop a notion of self and realise the power to change is within himself. The facilitator responds "as your research showed, it was believed throughout history that the locus of control came in to the body from an external source, it is now recognised that it is internal, to recover or manage is internal, the hardest thing is to tell a client that it is up to them, only they can change, they want to be rescued, they want someone to fix it, but we must give the power back to them, we must help them see that it lies within". Student A says "it is not what we want to hear, people don't want to acknowledge that, it is hard", student F says "this is where care takers can stuff up the healing, we shouldn't say 'I know how you feel', we don't, it can inhibit recovery". The facilitator says "yes, it is more than empathy, we need to get clients to tell their story, they know themselves better than anyone". Student C says "I thought before learning, that we had to change them", student F says "that reminds me of a saying – normal is only a setting on the dryer" they all laugh, facilitator says "I like that", and writes it down, student E says "who are we to put people in a box", student A says she is sick of people looking at her and assuming poverty and illiteracy in her country and how mental illness there is tackled, she says "people try to make decisions there when they know nothing about the community", the facilitator responds and says "New Zealand coined this term – *nothing about us without us*", another student says "here, here", they nod in agreement.

The teacher concludes the session, presents students with feedback and instructs them to step back and distil what they need to, she tells them to re-read the unit outline and reflect in a couple of days and if they feel they have any gaps in their knowledge to call or email her, she says "use me as a resource". The students ask her how she got started in the industry, she says "I got a job as a counsellor of a sexual assault service, even though I had no formal qualifications because I knew the difference between a victim and a survivor", "I later went on to study, for five years in fact, obtaining my diploma and other qualifications", "working in this industry is about being an agent of social change, you need to learn about models, but take pieces and make your own model of how you work, develop your own eclectic style". The session now ends, students thank the facilitator and vice versa, everyone is tired but in high spirits, the facilitator reminds the students to email any thoughts in the next couple of days.