Instructions for using The Park, The Presentation and other reflective learning exercises

An Exercise on Reflection

The aim of this exercise is to enable participants to see what reflective writing looks like, to recognise that reflection can vary in depth and that there is more potential for learning from deeper rather than superficial reflection. The exercise is developed in response to the observation that students, who are asked to reflect, firstly often have difficulty in writing reflectively and then, when they manage to write reflectively, tend to reflect rather superficially. In the exercise there are three or four accounts of an incident or experience. The accounts are written at different depths of reflection.

Instructions for use of the exercise
The procedure for the exercise is described as a group process, though it can be used individually. The process works best when it has a facilitator, who is not engaged in the exercise. It takes around an hour. It is important that the pages are not leafed through in advance, other than as instructed - and the exercise works better when people follow the instructions. In particular, they should not begin the discussions until everyone has read the relevant account. The facilitator needs to control this. The groups can be told that there are four accounts of an incident, and that they will be reading them one after the other, with time after each session of reading for discussion about the reflective content of the account.

♦ The exercise is introduced as means to demonstrate that there are different depths in reflection and that deeper reflection probably equates with better learning.
♦ Small groups are formed (no more than six in each).
♦ The groups are told to turn to the first account and read it quietly to themselves considering what features that they think are reflective.
♦ When it is evident that most people have read the first account, the groups are invited to discuss the account and identify where and how it is reflective. They are given about seven minutes for each discussion session. They may need less time for the earlier accounts.
♦ After the discussion session, the participants are asked to read the next account in the sequence (and they are reminded not to turn pages beyond the account in hand).
♦ After the last account has been read and discussed, groups are asked to go back through all of the accounts and to identify features of the reflection that progressively change through the accounts. For example, the accounts change from being ‘story’ to focusing on issues in the incident. In the later accounts there is more recognition that there are multiple perspectives etc. The groups are asked to list (eg on flip chart paper) the ways in which the accounts ‘deepen’.
♦ In a plenary, the groups share their lists (as above) and discuss the whole exercise. It is at this stage that the participants can be referred to the Framework for Reflective Writing (Resource 9) which provides a general guide to features in deepening reflection. The accounts are not intended to accord directly with the stages described.

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