What’s a Learning Narrative?

Portfolio education encourages us to make sense of what we are learning and to put our learning within the context of where we are now and where we want to be. One of the ways to achieve this is through a learning narrative.

This document helps you understand what a learning narrative is and provides example of learning narratives submitted by NSCC students.

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How to do Reflective Narratives

While you are developing your portfolio, you will hear your teachers and classmates talk about reflective narratives. The Student Guide refers to “reflective learning”. This may sound strange, even scary and many people have difficulty starting the process. However, just like any new skill you learn the more practice you get the easier it becomes. In this case, it may not be as strange or scary as you think.

What is reflection?

A reflective narrative is a thought, idea or opinion formed as a result of your thinking about yourself. Reflective learning often happens as a result of answering the question “Why?” For example, someone asks you “What do you want to be?” You reply “A welder!” The same person asks: “Why do you want to be a welder?” You reply...

Just think about looking in a mirror. You know that when you look in the mirror you see your reflection. This is a picture of your external self or your physical being. Through reflective narratives, your mirror is a little different – it is your internal self. You are using your mind or your thoughts to learn more about yourself as a person. For example, why you do the things you do, what makes you happy or sad, how do you learn new skills, what causes you problems in learning new skills, and so on.

Remember only a small part of your learning occurs in the classroom. You gain knowledge and new skills on the basketball team, working at a fast food outlet, baby-sitting, etc. These skills make up the picture of who you are, and are transferable to other settings.

How do I start?

The best way to start is to start small and to start with things that you are most comfortable with. For example, take a moment to think about the following:

1. Why did you choose to take a particular program at NSCC?
2. What knowledge, skills and abilities do you bring with you to NSCC?
3. What do you hope to do after you graduate from NSCC?
4. Where do you see yourself in five years time?

Now, once you have thought about these questions, you can
jot down your thoughts on a piece of paper;
tell someone else;
record your key points on a cassette tape; or
even draw a picture.

**Congratulations! You have just gone through the reflective process.**

If you get in the habit of thinking about all that you have learned and how that learning connects, it will become much easier to put your thoughts on paper.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. What did I learn today?
2. What mistakes did I make?
3. How did I correct my mistakes?
4. What topic did I find most difficult to understand and why?
5. What topic did I find easiest to understand and why?
6. How did I work with my other classmates?
7. How does this connect with your past experience?
8. Any other questions you may have.

Or you might draw a picture of something you worked on today. Use a few words to describe the experience.

These are all examples of how you can reflect and learn more about yourself. This is the beginning of an incredible journey. It is a part of what we call “portfolio learning”.

Catherine MacLean
Principal
Lunenburg Campus, NSCC
A Good Employee since 1997

As a child I was brought up to know the value of a dollar. My parents didn’t buy me anything that wasn’t necessary except the occasional “treat”. I obtained my first job the summer that I was going into grade nine. I was fourteen years old and eager to start working. That summer I was an ice cream vendor around Amherst for commission.

I was the only person that worked that whole summer. I would get up in the morning and bicycle about three kilometers to work to get my cart. There were a lot of people that I worked with that summer but I was the only one who stayed the whole summer. There were a lot of days that I was the only person working. I would go to the park near where I picked up the cart first thing, and then I pedaled across town into the industrial park for their break time, then back to the park until dinner break in the industrial park. After dinner I went back to the park and around the baseball field until the afternoon break in the industrial park. By that time I would take my ice cream cart back and bicycle back home to get ready for the next day.

As an ice-cream vendor I was responsible for handling money, which included figuring out correct change for every transaction and also counting my money at the end of the day and my float money. I was also responsible for my inventory, the ice cream.

This job taught me to be responsible, not only for myself and my actions but also for my employers’ investment. I learned that money is not the most important thing, I got up every morning being excited to go to work and actually got heat stroke a few times that summer. I liked having that responsibility and I knew that I could handle it.

I also learned to be punctual. I always showed up on time for work and I carry that with me for everything that I do. Customer service skills were also a necessity at that job. I got along with my employer and coworkers. I get along with my classmates and co-workers now and enjoy working around other people.

This particular job gave me the foundation from which to build on. I believe that I am a good employee as I am responsible, punctual, honest, eager, and have integrity among many other traits, which I learned at a young age.

Jeff Brown
Heavy Duty Equipment Repair
Akerley Campus
Wearing ten pounds worth of dress, petticoats, stockings, and shawl is not always conducive to being in a pleasant mood, especially at the peak of summer. But at Sherbrooke Village, you perfect the art of being able to tuck any discomfort away and greet the visitor with a smile. It is for the visitor that you are there: to guide, to inform and to leave a lasting impression that the visitor will remember fondly.

I was employed at Sherbrooke Village as an interpreter for a season. Working in the village teaches you the fine art of adaptability. You have to be prepared for anything, because you never know what you will be doing for the day until you get there. Each morning, you are assigned a building to work in and you must be prepared to meet the need. That doesn’t mean you need to know everything – you have to be prepared to tell a visitor that you don’t know something, but can find out for them. I had to be a little more prepared that most, as I was one of the few bilingual interpreters at the Village. I would have visitors go all the way through the Village, and, upon arriving at my building, discover I could speak French and ask me questions about every building in the Village. If I did not know the answer, I always told the visitor I could find it out for them and let them know. In one such situation, when asked about the French population that may have been in the area during the 1800s, I admitted I had no idea, and took the visitors name and address and later mailed the information that I discovered. It led to a positive rapport between the village and that particular visitor, who sent not a few people to see the Village for themselves.

When you are working in a building, you are in the building by yourself. There is no one to whom you can go and say “I don’t know what to do, can you tell me?” You must be self-sufficient and be able to think critically to determine the best course of action for a given situation. When you come into contact with that many people a day, you are bound to cross paths with some who are difficult. As a general course of action, I tend to use humour to diffuse a potentially volatile situation. For example, when working in the Drug Store, part of the daily routine is to make the rosewater hand cream. Often, demonstrations are given so that visitors can watch it being made. While the visitors are told the ingredients used, they are not told the amounts. One gentleman who visited the Drug Store, on a day I was working there, became very irate when I would not tell him the precise amounts of ingredients used. He started talking loudly and gesticulating wildly and was making the other visitors uncomfortable. I found my moment when he waved his arms at the wild turkeys behind the Drug Store and said, “how do we know you don’t have crushed up turkey in the hand cream?” To which I replied, “I
can assure you Sir, that there are most definitely no fowl ingredients in our hand cream.” The gentleman, as well as the other visitors, laughed and moved on. When humour fails, I’ve found the best course of action is to continue to treat the individual courteously and with respect and they will either get over it or they won’t, but you’ll have done the best you could.

Working at the Village gives you a great respect for the diversity for not only the people who visit everyday, but for the people you work with as well. All of the interpreters at the Village must be able to work as a well-developed team. Breaks are given based on the availability of the interpreters, and so consideration of others is essential. If one interpreter has five minutes longer than they are supposed to, someone else gets five minutes less. It was a matter of knowing who liked to take their breaks when and trying to switch and cover seamlessly from the point of view of a visitor. Sherbrooke Village is not a village with employees in it. It is supposed to portray a working, functioning ecosystem, and without conscious cooperation on the part of all its employees, this would be an impossible goal.

The overall goal of the team is to meet the goals of the museum. The main goal of the Village is to impress the customers with our ability to portray an intact Village from the 1800s, to inform them of the way of life at the time, and to treat them with the utmost respect and courtesy that we can muster in order to get them to return or to encourage others to come. While I’ve since hung up my dress and moved on, the things I learned working at Sherbrooke Village will never be left in the past.

Kristine Wilson
Paralegal Services
Akerley Campus
How I Will Use My Portfolio

As a mature student returning to school after twenty-three years, I have found the portfolio to be a key part of the experience. I think we are particularly fortunate at Burridge Campus to have teachers and staff who have embraced the idea, and who have willingly shared their portfolios with us.

In our program, Practical Nursing, we have already worked on several assignments that form part of our portfolios: a goals paper, a chronological record, a life history, and a learning narrative. We have also collected surprising number of things from home for our portfolios.

In our goals paper, we identified some short and long-term goals. The simple act of identifying and writing down some goals has already helped me to meet some short-term goals and make some progress towards the longer term ones. Based on this, I hope to continue to write down, evaluate, and even revise goals, both large and small, and work towards them. Hard as it is to believe, I spent the past twenty-five years (my whole adult life!) without a plan! It feels wonderful to have a plan. The chronological record and life history were difficult exercises, because they forced me to look at things in my past that I would once considered failures. Looking at the big picture, I was better able to put it all into perspective, have fewer regrets, spot weaknesses, and identify new paths. In other words, portfolio building was helping me to identify, reflect upon, value, and build on prior experiences - even seemingly insignificant ones.

For example, for the past three years, I have been a bike tour leader. Who would think that bike tour leading has anything to do with the field of nursing? Reflecting on my life history helped me see a surprising number of transferable skills: The skills I achieved in bike mechanics helped me to know and believe that I will learn and master the psychomotor skills of nursing. As in nursing, bike tour leading involves prioritizing at a glance the day’s routines and activities based on client’s needs and abilities. As in nursing, bike tour leading involves communication, teaching and teamwork.

Although we tend to think of our portfolio as a body of work to show to prospective employers, I feel strongly that the ongoing process of building my portfolio will be at least equally valuable to me in terms of personal growth. Although I hope to be highly employable at the end of my course of study, I hope even more to have grown personally. I believe that mastery of a subject is a small thing compared to learning who I am, and
where I want to go. I hope to continue to work on my portfolio long after I have landed my first job in nursing.

Very early in the school year, we began and ended the Terry Fox Run at the front of the school on Pleasant Street. I almost always enter school from the back parking lot, so on this day, I saw for the first time, the banner "Canada's Portfolio College" at the school's main entrance. That moment affirmed for me that my decision to enroll in community college instead of university was the right decision for me. All too soon, the wonderful days of attending classes will be over, but our portfolios will travel with us.
Reflective Learning Narrative - I Will Always Remember

I will always remember.
That horrible day in September.
The day the World Trade Towers fell to the ground.
Because terrorists flew two planes in and not around.

It was a devastating day.
Everything was dark, dismal and grey.
I remember my feelings of horror and sadness
It was really quite confusing and such madness.

How could such a horrible event have taken place?
Oh! What the American people have to face.
My heart goes out to those who have passed away
and to their loved ones who will never forget that day.

The effects will still be there many years from now.
Along with many questions including how?
How could this have taken place?
And how will it affect the human race?

Margo Thomas
Early Childhood Studies
NSCC, Kingstec Campus
It’s now Feb.2/2004 and we are that much closer to our next clinical experience. Since the last time I have successfully passed my Christmas exams, somehow managing to come up with honors in my marks. I think the instructors are just good to me. As wonderful as they are, I feel I have worked my tail off to achieve the marks given. It was not a goal of mine to achieve honors but it sure feels nice to know I was capable of doing so.

Recently, my nutrition instructor Debbie Turner asked if I would co-chair a fund raiser with another student. The fund raiser was to have a coffee host to raise funds for the Alzheimer’s Society. With the collaboration of instructors, students, and librarian and of course the campus, we successfully raised $187.18 for the society. It was a wonderful experience to once again work within a team, especially for such a worthwhile cause.

It has certainly been a growth experience thus far. It is not just a program where one memorizes and demonstrates the hands-on skills, but literally grows and develops within oneself which benefits all. I am constantly amazed at the collaboration and instruction given. When Nova Scotia Community College advertises an atmosphere of growth and learning they deliver what they promise.

Whether I graduate or not from this program I feel a sense of accomplishment in the knowledge and awareness, acquired which will benefit me, my family and others in my life. I certainly would recommend Marconi Campus in the future for their expertise - delivering a quality service that does not just stop at the academic side, but extends to the whole person, inspiring student growth and development, leading beyond our comfort zones to bring us into enlightenment within ourselves, our surroundings, our environment, to those we care for and work with. Professionalism is not just a word to this special group who provide this program, but a way of life.

I sincerely thank the instructors, the administrator, department heads and all involved in the design and delivery of this program.
Beverly Dilny  
Continuing Care  
Marconi Campus

**Provision of Child Care Services for Stranded Passengers**

**Supporting Details**

For this particular learning narrative I decided I would write about my experience while helping out at Camp Aldershot. This experience took place at the Aldershot Camp from Thursday September 14th, until Friday September 15th 2001. My role for this experience was one as a volunteer. I offered my services and help to those families who were stranded here at the camp.

**Learning**

I feel that there was not just one positive thing that I gained from this, but several. Some of the positive things that I experienced were the incredible feeling I felt inside seeing the relief on each families face knowing that their children were in good hands and having fun. All the wonderful friends I was able to meet and get to know. Hearing the children tell their parents that they did not want to leave, that they were having too much fun, made me feel good inside. What I did to contribute to this experience was I gave everything I had to make sure that the children were comfortable and relaxed and were enjoying them-selves. I would have to say that the least positive thing about the experience was having to say goodbye to everyone and all the tears shed.

What could be done differently for a similar circumstance would be to have things prepared ahead of time, have a action plan and if something like this were to, God forbid, happen again to be able to say "Okay here's what we have planned, let's go to it".
Important Details

I learned and gained so much from this incredible experience. It made me realize just how important family is and how even though we were all strangers we put aside all of our differences and worked together as a terrific team. Even though we were all from different places all over the world nothing stood between us from communicating with each other. I was lucky to be given the chance to test out my little knowledge of French from high school with a little girl who could not speak very much English and we had a great time together laughing and caring on. I feel that this opportunity brought our class closer together on so many levels. I learned how people truly come together in times of need and was able to experience this. I learned the importance of putting aside and differences others might have in order to come together as a team and produce a job that everyone can be proud of.

Jacki Bailey
The Lady at the End of the Hall

During my clinical experience at a local long-term care facility, I was asked to feed a resident. I was not familiar with this resident and only knew her as "the lady at the end of the hall". After finally getting a response from her, I fed her the little that she would eat. She seemed very confused and sad and appeared to have little interest in myself or the things around her. But for some reason I took a liking to her.

The following morning I jumped at the chance to feed her her breakfast. I was told she would probably not eat very much but to do the best I could. She ate her entire breakfast, to the amazement of the staff. Before leaving I told her I would return later to see her.

That afternoon I returned. She looked up at me and with a big smile said, "You said you would come back to see me and you really meant it." Until then I was not even sure if she was aware of who I was. We talked about her and her husband and about when they got engaged and married. The smiles that this brought to her face brought great satisfaction to me. I realized that all she wanted and needed was for someone to care and to take time for her.

From this experience, I learned many things. I learned that it only takes a minute to make someone smile. I learned that simply saying "hello" could make someone's day go from miserable to great. I learned that everyone needs to be given a chance, no matter what previous judgments you have made or gossip you have heard. I learned that everybody needs to be treated with equal respect. I learned that people need to be approached with patience. I learned never to give up on someone because they might just surprise you.

This experience also taught me about myself. It taught me that I can be patient. It taught me that I can make a difference. It taught me that I truly care about others. It taught me that I am not as hard-core as I would like to think I am; that I am a softy at heart. It taught me to be confident in my abilities to help others. It taught me that personal satisfaction truly is the greatest reward. But most of all, it taught me that "the lady at the end of the hall" has a name. This name I will never forget.