

Teaching Online Panel (TOP)

# Critical Reflection in Online Forums

Techniques and tips for tutors

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This document is available online from the TOP website at:

<https://learn3.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=300154>

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## Key Messages

<b>Techniques and tips</b>
<p>Set up supportive environment using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ground rules</li><li>• Simple instructions</li><li>• Progressive complexity</li><li>• Review of goals</li></ul>
<p>Use problem-solving case studies or critical incidents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students to bring own</li><li>• Provide clear guidance on confidentiality</li><li>• Set up a rota</li></ul>
<p>Provide multiple opportunities and scaffold to develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Link online forum activity explicitly to other module activities incl. using other media and f2f</li><li>• Review goals</li></ul>
<p>Specific techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply reflective frameworks</li><li>• Question types</li><li>• Voting for solutions</li><li>• Concept mapping</li><li>• King/Queen of the mountain</li><li>• Why why</li><li>• TED</li></ul>
<p>Check how critically reflective students are being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use learning style self-evaluation &amp; later check if moving outside comfort zone</li></ul>

**Please see Section 5 for a detailed version of the above which you may find useful as a reference list or printable handout.**

# Background

## 1.1 Critical Reflection

According to Fook (2004) critical reflection as 'a process which is partially based on, and integrates elements of deconstructive thinking, can provide a means of reconstructing, and thus changing the ways in which individuals perceive and relate to their social worlds' (2004, p.16). Brookfield (1995) pointed out that when we uncover power dynamics in relationships and challenge our implicit socio-cultural assumptions and values we become critically reflective. Similarly Williams (2001) suggested that we need to assess and reassess our assumptions and question our underlying assumptions for critical reflection. Kim (1999) extended this conceptualisation of critical reflection suggesting that we should change our practice based on critical reflection. Critical reflection consists of systematic reflection on practice against the backdrop of theories. In other words the critical reflective process is all about digging and delving deeper by reflecting and questioning the questions and refusing to take things for granted. Also, critical reflections should lead students to become creative in their approach to social work.

The purpose of critical reflection is to apply theories to practice, challenge underlying assumption, use research findings with sound judgement to make social work practice better. Paul and Heaslip (1995) suggested that practitioners need to have in-depth knowledge to comprehend and address emergency, short term and long term issues skilfully so that effective, efficient and quality but safe services can be provided. Critical reflection equips practitioners to become like this. Based on research on critical reflection in the nursing discipline from 1995 to 2005 Crowe and O'Malley (2005) proposed a two stage model of critical reflection:

- i) To deconstruct knowledge in the light of the practice
- ii) To reconstruct to make changes in practice.

With the support of deconstruction and reconstruction practitioners should be able to integrate theories, research findings and social work values in practice. Crowe and O'Mally's (2005) approach is similar to Fook and Gardner's (2015) model of critical reflection.

On the other hand Al-Mubaid (2014) proposed a three stage process of critical thinking online: list, evaluate and restructure. This is individual learning but for team learning, discussion/evaluation and integrate/ re-structure are the main stages for critical thinking online.

## 1.2 Reasons for this study

There is a plethora of literature suggesting that being critically reflective is vital for social care professionals to provide a good quality service to service users. It is evident that face-to-face teaching allows students in social care to learn how to reflect critically. Also, various mechanisms and methods are available to enable students regarding how to apply these in a traditional class room setting. However, it is not evident how these techniques can be carried out in online forums as there is a paucity of research in this area (Hickson, 2012). That does not mean teachers are not using online forums to influence students to build their reflective and critical skills, far from it.

Wenger's (1998) 'community in practice' - i.e. a group of people sharing, learning, networking, questioning, debating, engaging and involving in various issues via online media – is becoming part of social care professionals' learning platform to improve their professional practice. This is because professionals are becoming very busy as they have to provide quality services with the principle of 'more for less' from monetary resources to time, but at the same time they need to improve their practice as a professional and deliver a good service to their service users. Hence online methods like online forums are becoming a way to fit learning and reflection into a busy working life. The OU is at the forefront of enabling students to learn and engage in debates and reflect critically online. However, we do not have sufficient evidence of how teachers support their students to become critically reflective in an online environment.

## 2 Research Questions

What tools and techniques do tutors use to facilitate and enable students to become critically reflective? How do they use those tools and techniques?

## 3 Methods

This study focused on the three 'practice modules' in the Social Work Programme: K113, K216 and K315. An online thread was developed in K113, K216 and K315 tutors' forums to capture diverse practices of critical reflection in social work. Tutors were asked the following questions:

1. What tools and techniques were used to influence students to become critically reflective and how (online).
2. How effective they feel those tools and techniques were (their perceptions).

Also, the researcher used his own reflective journal and interviewed four tutors on the social work programme to explore the tools and techniques they used in their online forums.

## 4 Results and discussion

The following findings are based on the contributions of a total of five tutors. These include: two tutors from K113 tutors, one from K216 and two from K315 tutors engaged in the tutors' forums, and 4 interviewed as well as my own contributions.

### 4.1 Ground rules

Findings revealed that ground rules set the tone for online forums. According to three of the five tutors, if they do not set the ground rules they felt they would struggle. This needs to be initiated by tutors but formulated jointly with students. It clarifies expectations for both parties. Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2010) found that clear expectations were needed in online forums to teach critical thinking. Furthermore, tutors need to explore and agree with students how to deal with conflict when it arises. Examples of ground rules are given in Appendix A.

### 4.2 The winner is problem and practice based case studies

This research revealed that four of the five tutors use problem and practice based case studies to spark reflection. Also, they felt module-related activities are not always conducive to sparking critical discussions in online forums or to increasing students' engagement and participation. However, they use module and external materials to link with the case studies (Box 1). By doing so students deconstruct the issues with theories and then reconstruct; this process enables students to become critically reflective. However, some tutors use critical incidents as well as discussion about contemporary policies to enable students to learn critical reflection. Case studies could be brought by students and if done on a rota basis (e.g. alphabetically based on student's name) it enables students to plan their workload.

struggled to look after them, hence, the local authority put them in a children residential home and Ben was placed in the care of Ms. Eta's stepbrother who is very supportive and understanding of Ms Eta's mental health issues. However, there is a rumour that he had a relationship with Ms. E and Ben is his child. However, this is not clear, as Ms. Eta is reluctant to say anything other than that Ben's father left. Currently her stepbrother is finding it difficult to manage Ben due to his anti- social behaviour. For example, recently he urinated and defecated on the neighbour's door, was racially abusive to black children, punched a Muslim girl in the school as she wears a hijab and he called her a terrorist. He also showed sexualised behaviour towards white girl.

Katie is depressed and is self harming herself at the residential home by cutting (.5 mm deep) her wrist and thighs. She does not mix with other children neither with staff.

Ms. Eta was detained under Mental Health Act 1983 just after Children Services took her two children away from her. She is now at a specialist OCD unit at the Maudsley Hospital, in London. She is now medically ready to discharge.

#### Ms. Eta's views

Ms. Eta says that she hates feeling that she is no longer in control of her own life.

One of Ms. Eta's biggest concerns is that she does not want to give up her 6 cats. She wants her children back. She wants to do some training so that she can attend university and do a social work course. Ms. Eta does not agree with the children social workers judgements. She is trying to find a man online who is willing to kill the children social worker in exchange of sex.

**Action:** For adults: you are the social worker for Mrs Eta, and for children you are the social worker for Ben.

Box 1 An example of a problem-focused case study in an online forum (pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of service users and family members).

### 4.3 Confidentiality

Students and tutors need to observe confidentiality when discussion is focused on case studies and critical incident analysis. Confidentiality must be the bedrock of any discussions about a case, service user etc. Students and tutors must anonymise or code names, places, organisations' names etc. so that people cannot recognise anyone or anything. It is good practice to ask consent from service users or carers (where possible) that their cases will be discussed but their identity and details including organisational details will be anonymised or coded. Also, students need to inform them that their case will be analysed to improve students' social work practice. Both students and tutors need to take great care to ensure that they do not discuss cases outside the forums. The only exception is when tutors or students will be legally obliged to disclose information if it is required by a court order or law. Also, some case information should be disclosed if it is in the public interest (GMC, 2009). Furthermore, students and tutors need to adhere to the HCPC's (Health and Care Professions Council) code of conduct at all times including in online environments.

### 4.4 Guidance

Four tutors stated that without clear initial guidance and instructions it would be difficult for a tutor to enable students to become critical. This view supports the previous research findings by Weinberger et al., (2007). They found deep collaborative learning could not be achieved without instructional guidance. Similarly, this research finding indicated that guidance and instructions were required to start the critically reflective online forums:

1. Criteria for selecting and writing a live case or critical incident from social work practice: an example is given in Appendix B. It should be a learning tool and should be written and facilitated to promote analytical problem-solving and critical thinking. However, a tutor needs to have learning objectives in mind before posting a case study or critical incident in online forums.
2. How to analyse a case: Box 2 illustrates a simple technique that was used by a tutor for his students. Also, a comprehensive framework for case analysis is included in Appendix C and D.

### How to analyse a case

- What are the issues?
- What outcomes we want to achieve and why? For example, organisational, individuals, carers, family members etc.
  - How we achieve our preferred outcomes?
    - What is missing?

Incorporate theories and models in each question to analyse the case.

Box 2: How to analyse a case<sup>i</sup>

Furthermore, a tutor could use a classic problem solving approach, such as IDEAL by John Bransford and Barry Stein (1993) to analyse a case:

- I – Identify problems and opportunities
- D – Define goals and represent the problem
- E – Explore possible strategies
- A – Anticipate outcomes and act
- L – Look back and learn

## 4.5 Reflective frameworks

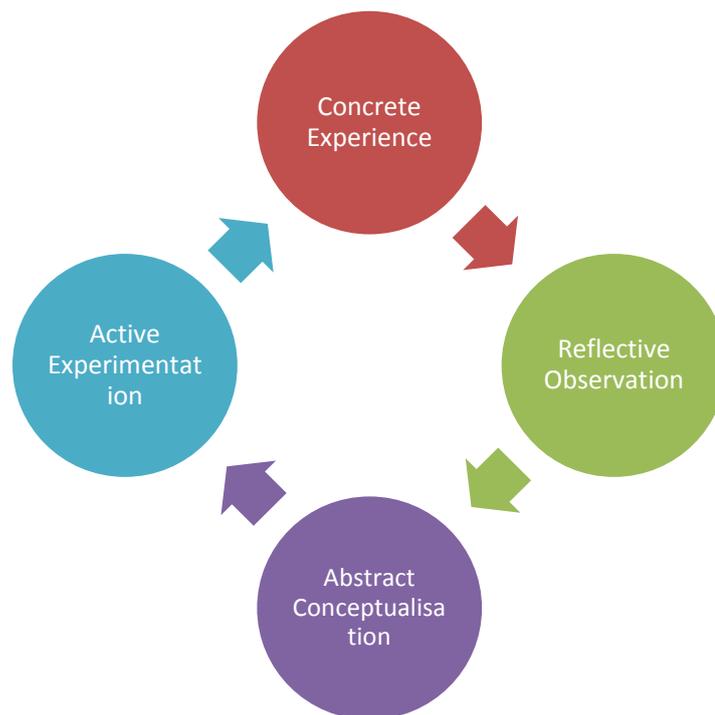


Figure 1: Experiential learning (Kolb, 1984)

Most tutors use Kolb's (1984) reflective framework. This research found the problem with this framework is that tutors need to demonstrate carefully how to implement this framework. Some tutors highlighted that students struggle to follow this cyclic process.



Figure 2: Gibb's (1988) reflective cycle.

Frameworks like Gibbs (1988) and Borton (1970) are self-explanatory and students found them easy to grasp. As both frameworks use a question-based format students find it easy to remember and apply. One needs to bear in mind that using these frameworks alone does not allow students' to reflect. After setting the ground rules reflective frameworks need to be posted in the forum with an example of how to apply them; this could be something from everyone's day to day life, it doesn't need to be a social work case.

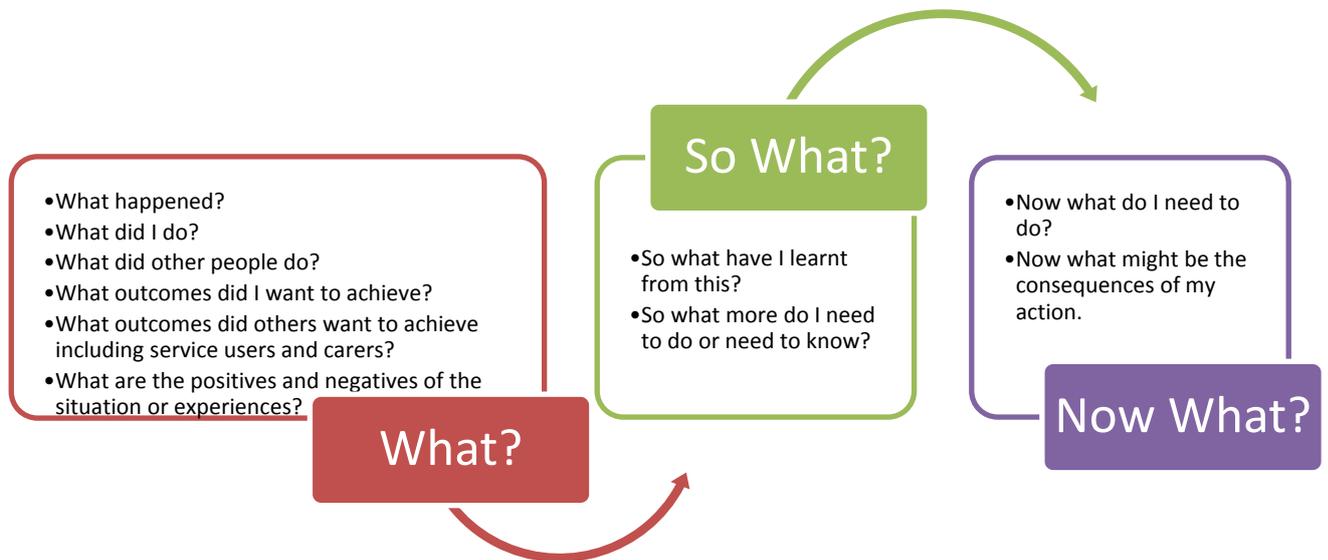


Figure 3: Borton's (1970) framework for reflection<sup>ii</sup>.

Tutors could focus on one framework, which is easy for students to understand. Some tutors may want to provide three frameworks and then enable students to pick and choose independently. Either way tutors need to demonstrate clearly how students can implement them.

This research showed that it is helpful and effective if tutors start the process of reflection first and invite students to do the same by using a framework. Some tutors indicated initially students will follow the framework literally and will copy headings from frameworks. In this stage tutors need to encourage students individually and feedback on their effort of applying the framework. This sets the tone for a case reflection.

{ a tutor started a thread in the forum 'why chicken tikka masala is becoming a national dish rather than fish and chips'? Students in this scenario did not have a choice other than reflecting on goodness of chicken tikka masala and badness of fish and chips. The tutor then moved the goal post by asking to reflect on the statement rather than specific content i.e. whether it was a valid statement, if so/not, the reason why? }

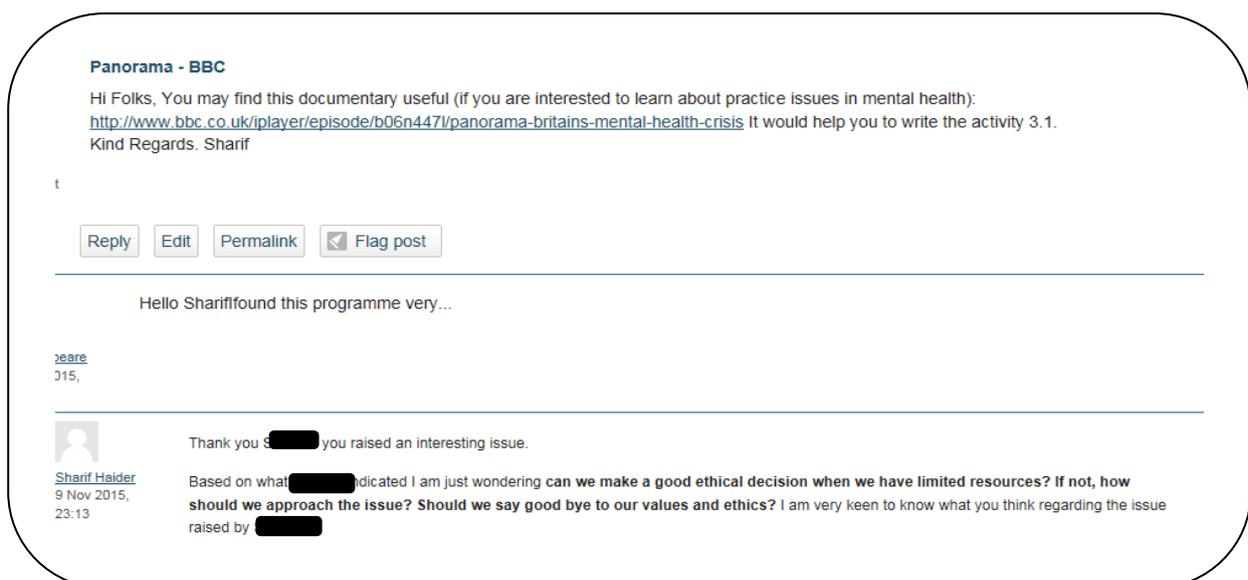
## 4.6 Three types of questions

In online forums three types of questions are needed to influence critical reflection:

**1 Engaging questions:** encouragement and motivation are the aims of this type of question.

**2 Testing questions:** to understand students' knowledge of the matter by asking question like 'why do you feel this method is supportive'? This will enable students to explore the gaps in their existing knowledge as well as to make an assessment as to whether they understood theories, ideas and concepts correctly.

**3 Challenging questions:** To enable students to think about their thinking by providing counter and competing arguments. Using challenging questions makes it possible to open up unconscious bias that students may have in their arguments (Box 3). Please see an example of how a tutor asked a challenging question to move the discussion further:



The screenshot shows a forum post from 'Panorama - BBC'. The post text reads: 'Hi Folks, You may find this documentary useful (if you are interested to learn about practice issues in mental health): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/player/episode/b06n447l/panorama-britains-mental-health-crisis> It would help you to write the activity 3.1. Kind Regards. Sharif'. Below the post are buttons for 'Reply', 'Edit', 'Permalink', and 'Flag post'. A reply from 'Hello Shariff' says 'found this programme very...'. Another reply from 'Sharif Haider' on 9 Nov 2015 at 23:13 asks: 'Based on what [redacted] indicated I am just wondering can we make a good ethical decision when we have limited resources? If not, how should we approach the issue? Should we say good bye to our values and ethics? I am very keen to know what you think regarding the issue raised by [redacted]'.

Box 3: An example of challenging questions.

After initial modelling of how to reflect critically, tutors need to adapt Socratic questioning method to facilitate discussion. Tutors should not tell students the answers but rather promote dialogic inquiry. Tutors questions should expose the gaps in students' thinking, understanding, and knowledge as well as shortfalls in their perceptions and arguments. Evidence revealed that tutors need to act as a guide as well as a facilitator.

Tutors need to encourage students to ask appropriate questions of each other. This is not only important for dialogue to continue but also students start to phrase questions

appropriately. Students should act as a critical friend to each other i.e. asking appropriate questions, specifically challenging questions. However, tutors need to model this initially before students grasp the skills.

Tutors need to guide the discussion in such a way that students learn and explore concepts and ideas from various perspectives and angles. Online forums should not be used for transmitting information but to construct knowledge by analysing cases in the light of existing theories. For example, the following questions can be used to help students deconstruct and reconstruct their own professional and personal values, which influence how they perceive the social world and the decisions they make:

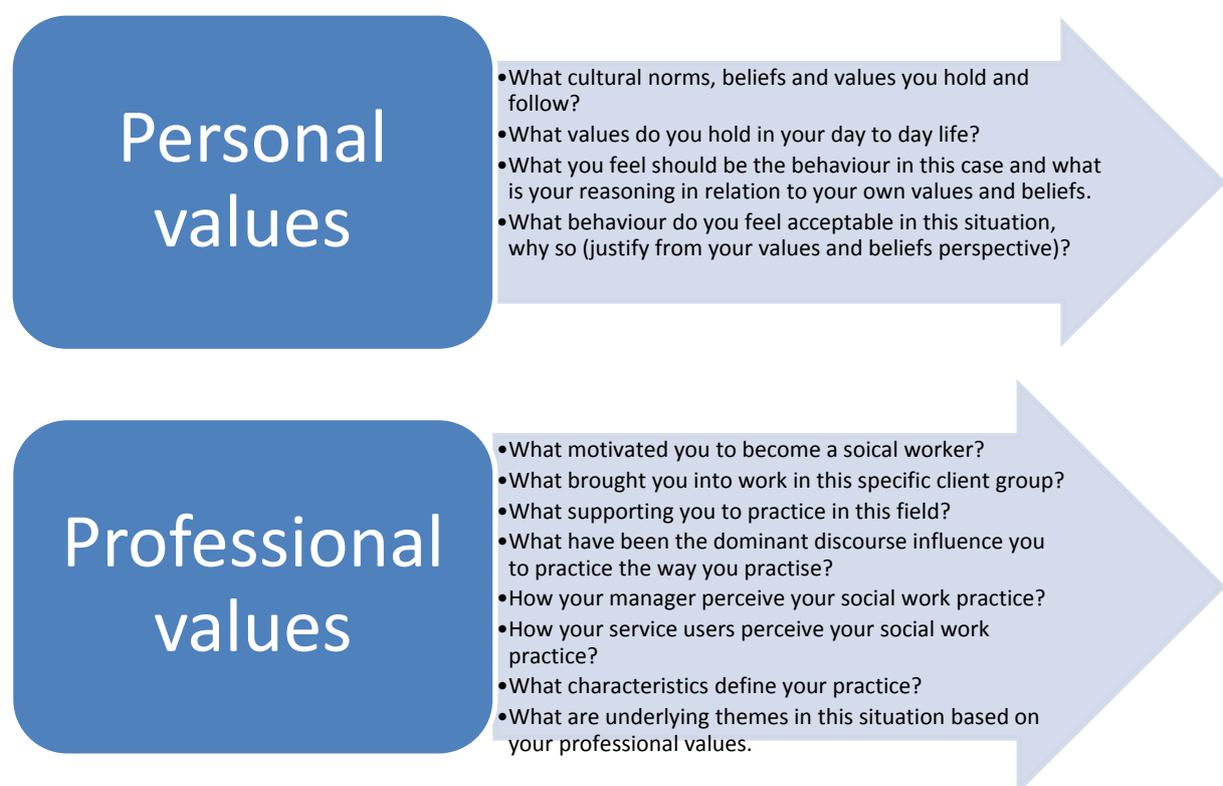


Figure 4: How to explore personal and professional values for anti-discriminatory practice in social work<sup>iii</sup>.

#### 4.7 TED

TED stands for 'tell', 'explain' and 'describe'. A tutor used TED to ask open ended questions which encouraged students to open up their arguments and thought processes. The tutor felt this approach was effective to clarify things. It also helps students to discover the structure of their own thoughts (box 4).

### **Application of TED**

“Tell us your reasoning for accepting this as truth?”

“Explain what difference does that make to service users?”

“Describe your options for this problem?”

Box 4: Questions based on TED.

## **4.8 Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning should be one of the aims of online forums. In order to achieve this, tutors need to encourage students to solve the case problems in the light of theories. By encouraging students to share and construct their understanding and knowledge, this enables students to work together with their peers. Also, ground rules, learning outcomes and shared understanding of the practical cases support collaboration. In collaborative relationships, students discuss issues critically and resolve a problem creatively.

## **4.9 Creating a cooperative environment**

Creating a cooperative environment is vital in online forums to enable students to become critically reflective. Ground rules and a learning contract with clear goals for each case study are bedrocks of creating a cooperative environment. Tutors' roles are also vital to create and sustain a cooperative environment.

For some students, at the beginning of critical reflection tutors need to encourage and enable them to become involved first, before becoming more reflective and critical. It has to be a stage by stage process (figure 5). Tutors need to be proactive in every stage of supporting students to become critically reflective.

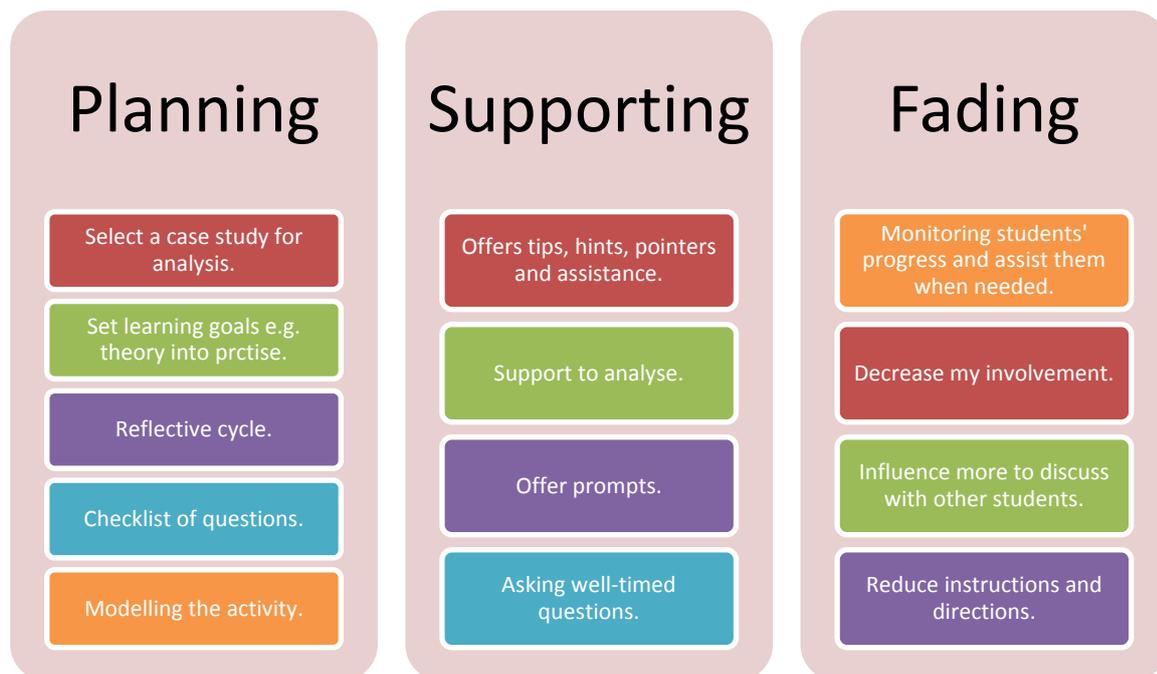


Figure 5: Tutors' role in online forums to enable students to become critically reflective<sup>iv</sup>.

#### 4.10 Managing fear and anxiety

Some students do not have full understanding of social work theories and models. This made it difficult for them to apply theories and models to a case study or a critical incident in online forums. Furthermore, some of them were frightened to put their comments in case other students perceived them as inadequate or inappropriate. They then became anxious. Tutors need to support these students by finding out learning gaps earlier and enable them to learn. Also, tutors need to try to build their confidence. A practical way to support this matter is to enable students to reflect on their fears and anxiety via emails or phone calls or face-to-face.

#### Case Study

One student who used to visit the online forums never participated but when the tutor spoke with her over the phone it was clear that she was anxious and her understanding of critical reflection was not correct. Therefore, she was not confident to participate in the forums let alone become critically reflective. The tutor then agreed to see her response via emails and provided constructive feedback directly to her. After a couple of emails she understood what was expected and how to do it. The tutor then encouraged her to put her comments on the forums.

Box 5: A case study of managing anxiety.

Techniques like gentle persuasion to some students who are quiet in the forums sometimes help. Sometimes emails or telephone contact give students the confidence required to participate in the forums (box 5).

Tutors should not allow students to lose sight of theories and models. To support students to learn theories, tutors could develop a thread in online forums to explore some specific social work theories and models. For example, a tutor commented:

“I carried out a few online sessions for students to discover, and then create factsheets about fundamental social work theories. I divided the cohort in 5 small groups, maximum of 3 students in a group. I then allocated them time to discover a specific theory online. After doing so, they created a fact sheet and reference list. They then shared this with the large group and discussed them. By doing this exercise all students have learnt about 5 specific theories”.

#### 4.11 Assignment oriented discussion

It was evident that when tutors make case studies link with the learning outcomes and focused on assignments students become engaged. Also, when case studies provide ethical dilemmas or complex issues some students become more engaged compared to a simple and an ordinary case study. In situations like this the tutor's role is to enable students to solve problems in a creative manner.

#### 4.12 Voting for Solutions

After analysing the problems or deconstructing the issues from the case, students may want to explore how they would approach things differently in future if they have similar issues. In this stage students provide solutions. Sometimes they are probably not the best ones. In situations like this, tutors may want to provide some solutions but they should refrain from doing so, rather they should allow students to discover and solve problems cooperatively.

It is possible to have voting systems if there is more than one solution which is usually the case in social work. When students vote they need to justify the reason why they are accepting a certain solution. The tutor's role in a situation like this is to steer students back to the module materials, wider social work theories and research evidence, otherwise, students will not become critical in their approach.

### 4.13 Concept mapping

Techniques like concept mapping about social work issues are deemed effective by some tutors to support students to link their cases with concepts and allow them to become critical. This involves the tutors and students using a mind map approach to break down and apply the different perspectives (see Appendix E).

### 4.14 King /Queen of the mountain

Most of the respondents in this study agreed that real case studies and critical incidents analysis support and enable social work students to reflect critically. A tutor found that students struggle to reflect critically unless they define the case problems or issues appropriately. Well defined problems made it easier to explore the root causes of the problems and better supported students in developing an effective strategy for identifying resolutions. A tutor used a technique for better defining the case issues and the way to deal with the issues or develop arguments to explain the situation. The tutor adapted a children's game called 'king/queen of the mountain' for online forums which proved very effective for instigating critical reflection.

After a case study has been posted in the forum the tutor asks any two students to define the problems or issues. This can be done as the first two posts, then the tutor asks the rest of the students to challenge or come up with a different angle or an alternative to the ones posted. After two posts the tutor then asks other students to challenge them. It carries on until everyone runs out of ideas. Those who become the first to add their posts become kings or queens until other students add their posts. This method can be used for defining problems as well as exploring alternative strategies to deal with cases or solutions to the problems.

### 4.15 Why Why

Asking why why (Higgins, 2006) enables students to unpack issues from the case studies and critical incidents in their work. By doing so they start to explore which theories could have been explored or will be explored. It enables them to explore how they need to approach the case. This is a very effective technique for critical reflection.

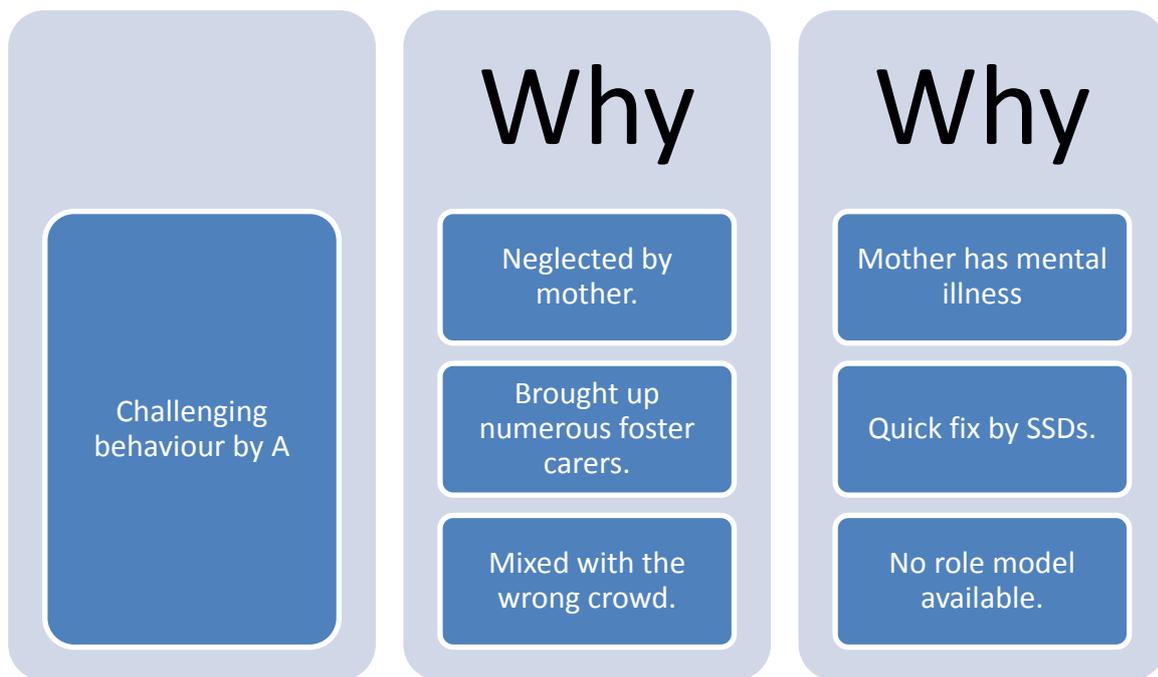


Figure 6: A brief illustration of how why-why could enable critical thinking in a structured way<sup>v</sup>.

#### 4.16 Knowing your students is vital

It is vital for a tutor to know and understand their students in terms of the way they learn. Two tutors use the learning styles inventories and questionnaires to know their students. This would give them a snapshot of the way each student learns.

For example, after posting learning styles questionnaires a tutor asked whether students wanted to share their learning styles. Some students were willing to share, so then the tutor started a dialogue with the students to explore whether their scores for various learning styles reflect the way they learn. Some agreed with their learning styles' scores and some disagreed but one thing for sure was that students started to link this with their own life, which made it easy for the tutors to engage them and understand students better. If students feel uneasy and uncomfortable to share their scores, tutors could share their own learning styles and start the discussion.

To influence the discussion further a tutor could pose a challenging question like whether it is useful to know one's own learning styles, what difference it can make and what difficulties it could bring. Students then start to analyse the importance of learning styles; some may challenge the conceptualisation of learning styles. A tutor needs to support and enable

students to move to a stage where they start to challenge learning styles but synthesise their learning in the light of these online discussions.

Knowing students' learning styles at the beginning of the online forums enabled a tutor to see when they needed to gently manoeuvre specific students to move out from their comfortable and secure learning styles to the one which is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. This way students start to see a different point of view. A tutor stated:

“The issue of preferred learning style was both surprising and interesting. When I read the online discussion, I could see some students stayed with their preferred learning styles when they were discussing theories with a case. For example, those students that had a theorist learning style raised issues to understand the theory more and spent considerable time on going through some intricate details of cases, which was not needed. On the other hand, those students that were pragmatist in terms of their learning style were quickly moving to discussing a plan of action but were not thinking about the intricate complex nature of the case and theories. It seemed to me that students were not ready to engage in the unknown and preferred to stick to their learning style that gave them some level of comfort (Honey and Mumford, 1992). However, my feedback allowed them to realise these issues and they became self-aware that this was inhibiting their ability to become critical about theories and practice”.

## 5 Summary of critical reflection techniques and tips – categorised

Techniques and tips	Key Messages	Section
Set up supportive environment using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground rules</li> <li>• Simple instructions</li> <li>• Progressive complexity</li> <li>• Review of goals</li> </ul>	The initial aim for tutors should be to engage students first, then move to the stage of reflection and then critical reflection. The ultimate goal is to turn students into action researchers for their own practice.	4.9
	Simple instructions are required at the beginning of the module for reflection and critical reflection in online forums. This will set the tone for students. They will know what to expect and what they need to do.	4.4
	Tutors need to be proactive in every stage of supporting students to become critically reflective. They need to be persistent, firstly, to encourage students, secondly to support them to reflect and thirdly to enable them to be critical about their reflection. There are some good practice examples of engaging students in how to become critically reflective in online forums (in K113, K216 and K315). However, these examples are sporadic and sparse.	4.9 6.0
Use problem-solving case studies or critical incidents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students to bring own</li> <li>• Provide clear guidance on confidentiality</li> <li>• Set up a rota</li> </ul>	Allowing students to bring a problem oriented case study from their own social work practice encourages discussion and critical reflection. Maintaining confidentiality of case studies and critical incidents is paramount for online critical reflection.	4.2 4.3
	Initially ground rules need to be agreed that each student should bring a case study or a critical incident from their social work practice. If it is done on a rota basis (e.g. alphabetically based on students' name) it enables students to plan their workload.	4.1 4.2
Provide multiple	Module-related activities are not always conducive	4.2

<p>opportunities and scaffold to develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link online forum activity explicitly to other module activities incl. using other media and f2f</li> <li>• Review goals</li> </ul>	<p>to sparking critical discussions in online forums or to increasing students' engagement and participation.</p>	
	<p>Focusing on one medium does not necessarily enable students to become a critical practitioner. Alongside the online forums other avenues for students' engagement are needed. For example, online case focused problem solving forum discussions could easily be linked with face-to-face tutorials. Face-to-face tutorials can be used to clarify and unpack difficult concepts and theories, which then allow students to engage in online forums to explore the applicability and integration of those concepts and theories into practice.</p>	4.10
	<p>Tutors need to enable students to set their group goals and review them regularly.</p>	4.9
<p>Specific techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying reflective frameworks</li> <li>• Question types</li> <li>• Voting for solutions</li> <li>• Concept mapping</li> <li>• King/Queen of the mountain</li> <li>• Why why</li> <li>• TED</li> </ul>	<p>The role of the tutor is to intervene actively by asking engaging, testing and challenging questions.</p>	4.6 4.7
	<p>Tutors' initial modelling of how to reflect critically is vital; so that, students should act as a critical friend of each other later on. They need to act as a guide as well as facilitator.</p>	4.5 4.6
	<p>Tutors' should not tell students the answer but rather promote dialogic inquiry. They should allow students to discover and solve problems cooperatively.</p>	4.12
	<p>Defining the case problems or issues is paramount to become a critical reflector. Techniques like concept mapping, king/queen of the mountain game, why why and voting for solutions are useful.</p>	4.5 4.7 4.12 4.13 4.14 4.15
<p>Check how critically reflective students are being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use learning style self-evaluation &amp; later check if</li> </ul>	<p>Knowing students' preferred learning style initially is important as tutors can challenge them when they are not moving out of their preferred learning styles in the case discussion.</p>	4.16

moving outside comfort zone		
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## 6 Conclusion

Critical reflection is now becoming an essential part of social work teaching in the UK. It is probably because employers are looking for social workers who are competent and capable as well as flexible, adaptable, open minded and accountable for their professional judgements and decision making. This will then have significant impact on the delivery of social care i.e. service users, carers and family members to receive good services. Evidence of critical reflection on service delivery is sporadic, inconsistent and the body of knowledge in social work is in its infancy. However, social work literature is very positive and suggested the benefits critical reflection could bring to an individual worker, service user and employer. It is a win-win situation for all parties.

The Open University needs to be at the forefront to include critical reflection in their social work learning online. This study explained the techniques and tools tutors applied in online forums to enable students to become critically reflective. As tutors are very active in face-to-face workshops only a handful of practice is evidenced in online forums. This report is based on qualitative data gathered from five tutors including the author. Due to the small number of tutor participants in this research it is not possible to generalise from these research findings. Nevertheless, there is some effective and creative practice evidenced in online forums, which is included in this report with practical steps for tutors to try in their teaching online. One point that is paramount from this study is that the critical role of tutors is to be directive, supportive, a resource depending on individual students' needs and group needs. In a nutshell, tutors have to become leaders to shape, influence and support as well as encourage, enable and empower students to become critically reflective.

## Appendix A

### Ground Rules<sup>vi</sup>

- Commitment to respecting and valuing others.
- Rights to keep confidentiality.
- Listen to each other.
- Appreciate different opinions.
- Be willing to share and accept.
- Get involved – Workshops and Forums.
- No such thing as a 'daft' question.
- Respect boundaries and confidentiality with sensitivity.
- Learning environment – challenge the ideas but not the people.
- Respect the group – turn up on time, mobiles off/silent.

## Appendix B

### Criteria for selecting a case study<sup>vii</sup>

- The whole purpose of a case study is to spark an interactive, participatory and discovery-learning process.
- If a tutor wants a single correct solution from all students a case study might not be the best tool to facilitate discussion.
- A case study should read like a problem focused story for student social workers to reveal the issues, concerns and problems – one that does not have obvious solutions.
- It should not provide answers, outcomes, alternatives and solutions.
- It should be based on real life issues that students are encountering in their social work placements.
- The contents should be anonymised or coded to maintain the confidentiality of individuals and organisations concerned but must have narrative details or quotes, or attachments to facilitate an analytic discussion where students learn from each other.
- In a case study, enough information needs to be included to form assumptions, make judgements and decisions. It should have enough to understand the nature and scope of a problem.
- It should be written in past tense; jargon should be defined in footnotes.

## Appendix C

### How to deconstruct the problems<sup>viii</sup>

- What are the issues?
- What are the major problems?
- What social, political, legal, economic, cultural and historical factors underpin this practice/ situation?
- What are the power relations in these groups?
- What rationale is provided for this practice/situation?
- What are the benefits of this practice / situation?
- Who is advantaged (and disadvantaged) in this practice / situation?
- How has this practice impacted on service users, carers, public, other professionals and organisations?
- What are the alternatives? The reason why?
- What needs to happen to change this practice?

## Appendix D

### Framework for Case Analysis<sup>ix</sup>

This is developed based on Critical Incident Analysis Framework by Lister and Crisp (2014).

- What was the purpose and focus of contact/intervention?
- What are the outcomes of this case study for the various participants?
- What are your thoughts and feelings?
- What were the responses of other key individuals? If not known, what do you think these might have been?
- What practice dilemmas (if any) you can identifies?
- What are the values and ethical issues you can identify?
- Are there implications for inter-disciplinary and or interagency collaborations?
- What theory (or theories) has helped develop your understanding?
- What research has helped develop your understanding about some aspects of this case?
- How might an understanding of the legislative, organisational and policy contexts explain some aspects associated with this case?
- What future learning needs have you identified as a result of this case study?  
How might this be achieved?

## Appendix E Concept Mapping<sup>x</sup>

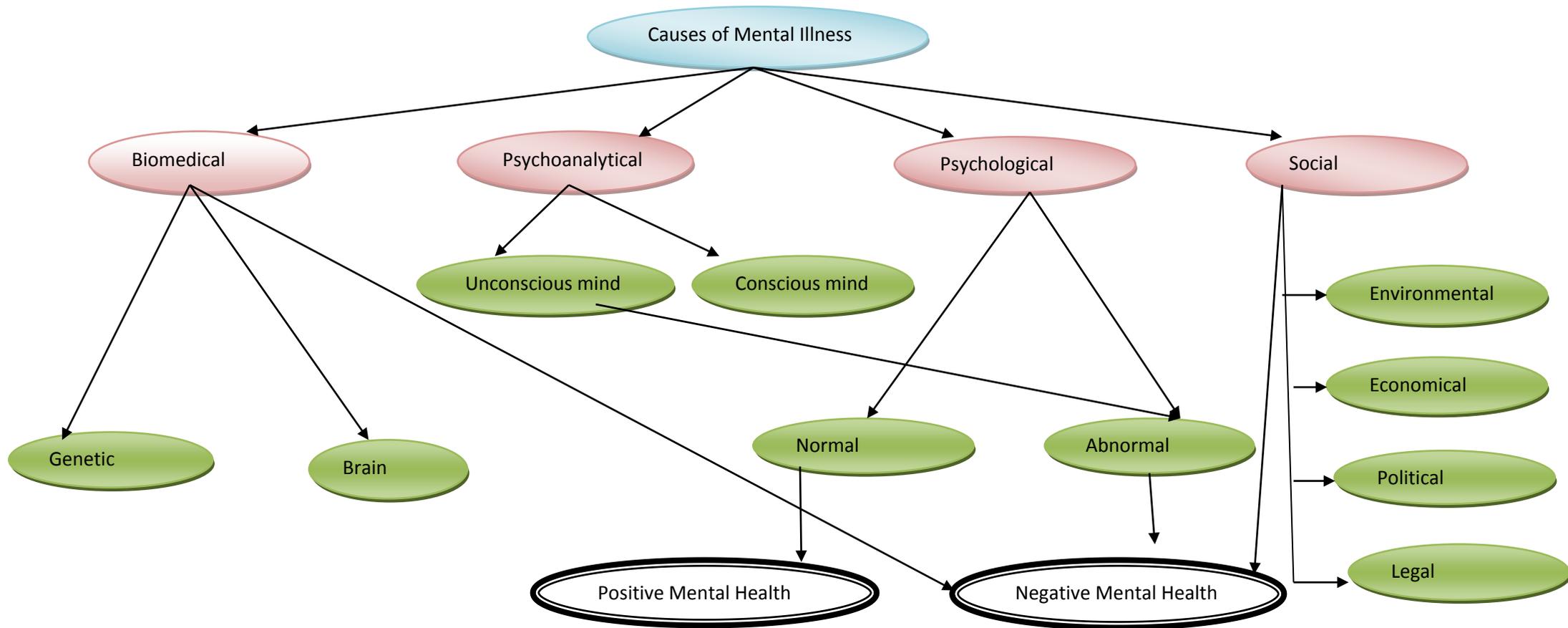
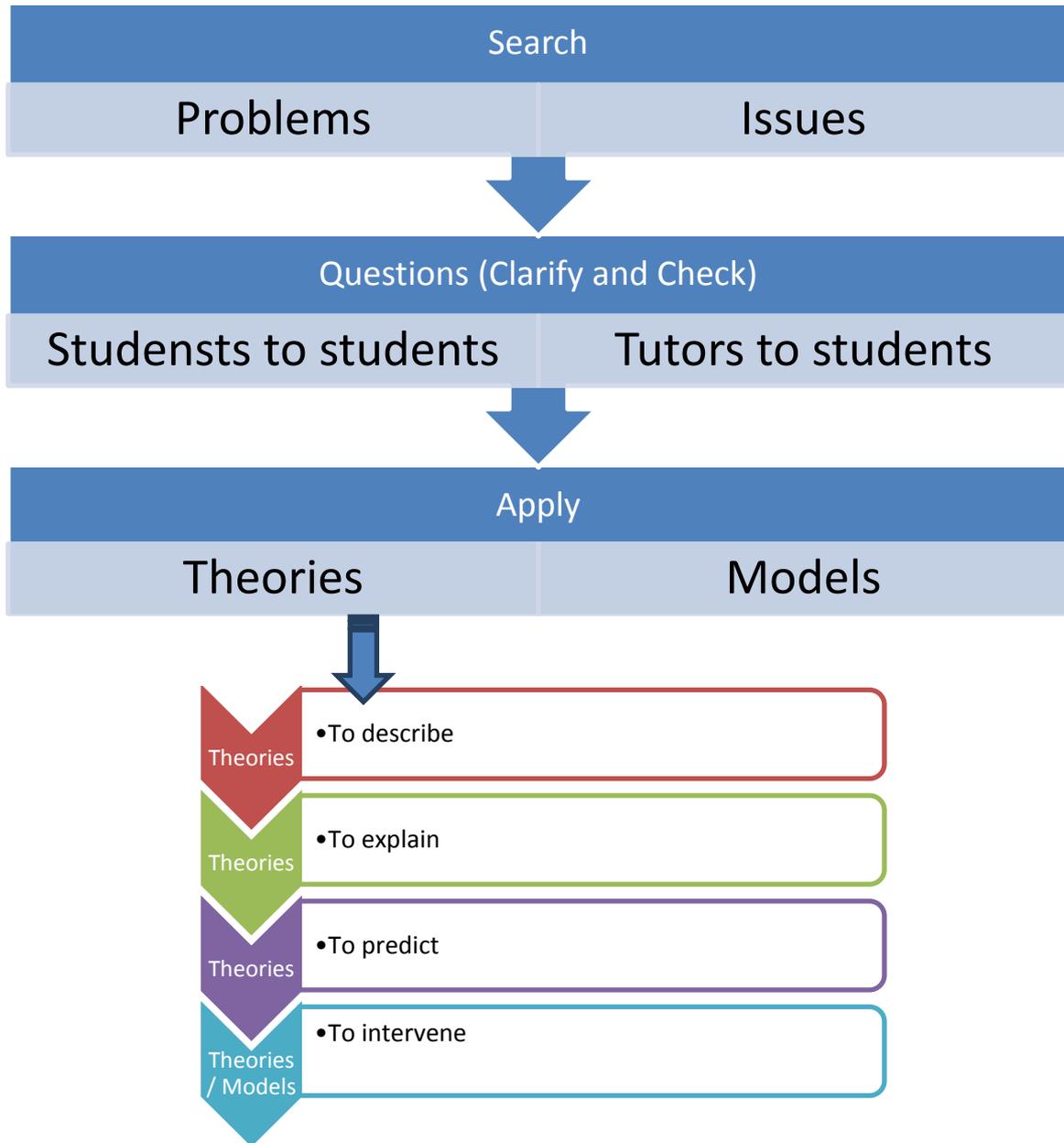


Figure: Concept map for the causes of mental illness

## Appendix F

### Process of Critical Thinking in online forums<sup>xi</sup>



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<sup>i</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.

<sup>ii</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.

<sup>iii</sup> It is based on the author's own diary.

<sup>iv</sup> It is based on the author's own diary.

<sup>v</sup> It is based on the author's own diary.

<sup>vi</sup> It is based on the author's own diary.

<sup>vii</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.

<sup>viii</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.

<sup>ix</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.

<sup>x</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.

<sup>xi</sup> Based on the author's own reflective journal.