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FROM THERE TO HERE AND OVER AGAIN:
DEVELOPING THROUGH CCT STUDIES MY ABILITY AS A PARENT TO TAKE
ACTION ON TEENAGE NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY

by

KERRI ARRUDA

©

SYNTHESIS*
MASTER OF ARTS
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

May 2016

Advisor: Professor Peter Taylor

Abstract: I entered CCT studies with the intention of obtaining a degree which would complement my previous studies in Psychology and allow me to later further my education. During the program I personally encountered a family member's participation in Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and set my goal on promoting awareness. During this process I found that my efforts were unsuccessful. My focus then turned to reviewing my previous insufficient attempts. During this process I discovered myself as my own block and had to start looking at my approach and myself in order to make forward progress. I ultimately made progress although the progress was only the beginning stages of a process that will continue into the future. The paper is written in a series of passes where I return to the principles of Action Research to discover what needs to be addressed further in order to make forward progress, all the while learning to become more reflective.

* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

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From There to Here and Over Again: Developing through CCT Studies my Ability as a Parent to take Action on Teenage Non-Suicidal Self-Injury

I am a mother of twin adolescent girls, one of whom has been cutting—technically known as Non-Suicidal Self-Injury or NSSI, a behavior presently trending among adolescents. In this paper I present my journey several times, a repetitive cycle of passes, in which each pass I learn something new about myself. I attempt to share what it means to be a student in the CCT Program and my attempts of a parent wanting to do something about the incidence of NSSI. By the end, readers should gain a sense of the evolution of my rudimentary project to a real life application, while noting how my coursework has encouraged and beckoned assessment of both my approach to my project, as well as assessment of myself and my personal interaction with my project.

Pass 1: The CCT journey, in general terms

The idea of *Journey* seemed to be a repeating theme as I read through previous Capstone submissions of Critical and Creative Thinking alumni. A written compilation by learners sharing their real life experiences; a documentary script, if you will. I thought, what better to share with the reader than a sincere reflection of a personal journey from *There* to *Here*? My journey through my studies in Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) has changed me. Not changed me in as far as who I am, but rather, enlightened my way of thinking. I believe this is an irreversible process, and one for the better.

CCT runs through my consciousness in most, if not all, of my thinking. Looking back upon my coursework, I realize that I have had simple *Ah Ha!* moments, but also deep and complex revelations. For example, early courses, such as Creative Thinking, taught me that I, too, could be creative. My initial

thoughts were that if I had not created a highly valued masterpiece such as Picasso, then I am NOT creative. Some of my classmates entering this course felt similarly to myself. My Creative Thinking course highlighted the means of which we can all be creative, while assuring that creativity can be learned.

My course in Critical Thinking demonstrated the need for balance between thinking critically and thinking creatively. While Creative Thinking allowed for unbridled thought, Critical Thinking aimed to offer a scaffolding. The courses together, acknowledging one another, expressed the need for a balance between the two thought processes. It is these initial courses in my Critical and Creative Thinking program that offered me many *Ah Ha!* moments, while paving the way for insight discovered in latter courses. This Synthesis paper will take the reader along my journey through my studies in CCT as I reflect upon my attempts to bring attention to a growing problem that has affected my daughter and my family.

As I compared what I have learned about Critical Thinking as opposed to Creative Thinking, I can see the differences and recognize the need for a balance. As I look at my entire coursework in CCT, I draw comparison from early coursework to the latter. My initial courses in CCT provided me with a foundation while the final courses required an application of skills in the format of a research project.

Understanding early concepts gave me many *Ah Ha!* moments while the latter courses required a deeper reflective process. For me, understanding the concepts and applying them were very different tasks; reflection being one of the most challenging yet revealing.

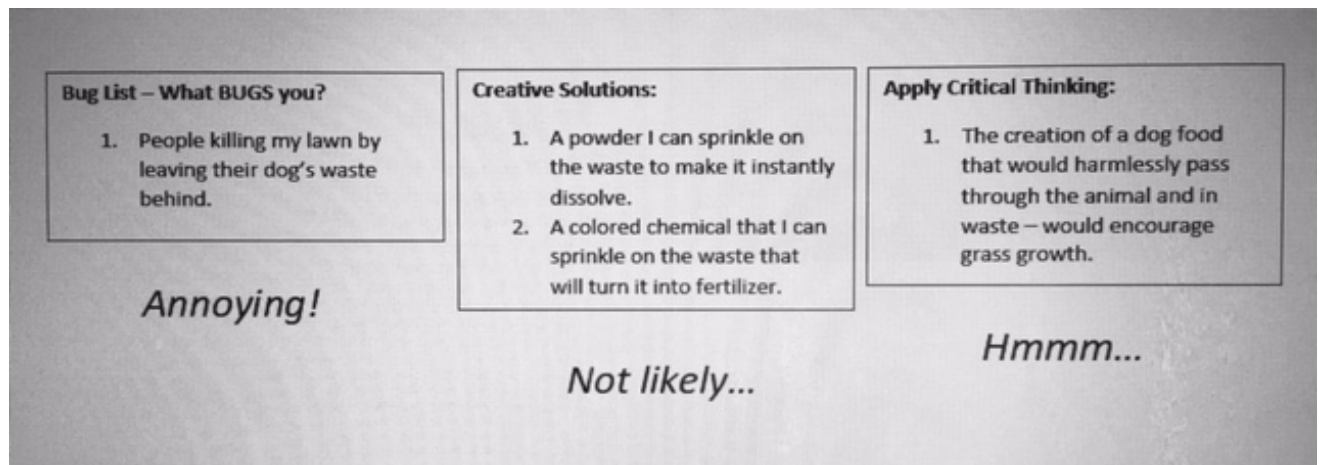
Understanding how to balance critical thinking with creative thinking was an important foundation for me. Looking back, my progression toward an end project wavered between the two extremes before it reached a balance. A fun activity from my early classes involved brainstorming and demonstrated the crucial role of balanced thinking. Play along if you like! (Following the professor's instructions). My

professor had us create our own personal, “Bug List”. No, not ants or butterflies or mosquitoes; rather, things that bug you – although, mosquitoes may also bug you! We each created a list of what bothers us, annoys us, aggravates us; what *bugs* us.

Here we created a list of ten items, from neighbors letting their pets use *your* grass for *their* bathroom deposits, to plow trucks who pile the roadside snow at the end of your driveway, to that toe nail on your left foot that grows awkwardly. This is our Bug List. Now, we apply pure Creative Thinking. Choose one, or several of your bugs. Now, think of a solution. Think creatively! The sky is the limit. Your solution need not be realistic or even earthbound. In fact, Creative Thinking will applaud your most bizarre responses.

Done? Now let’s bring in Critical Thinking. It kind of makes you feel like a student in school enjoying a carefree “free” period when your least favorite teacher walks in bustling with papers that are certainly an assignment for you. But Critical Thinking is not the party pooper here. Critical Thinking asks you to look at your wild list of solutions and find something that could potentially be feasible. So, take one or several of your creative solutions and apply some critical thinking skills. Could there potentially be a real word application of that playful solution? Critical Thinking merely reins in your far-fetched thoughts and may actually bring reality to what started off as mere play.

For example...



Though this activity is a very rudimentary example, when I started my coursework, this was a profound *Ah Ha!* moment for me. As I reached the end of my degree I realized that my early attempts at a synthesis project struggled to find this seemingly simple balance. My early attempts at my project were grandiose – Save the World!!! These were offset by dry and informative projects. That was *There*. Now, I am *Here*, with an end result that is more balanced and more effective than the previous, but also, with the potential to progress forward.

The early Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking courses and seminars were very much eye openers to me, because I was learning a way of thinking that was entirely different from which I had utilized for all of my prior life's learning. I use the reference to *Ah Ha!* moments with the upmost respect. If it were not for my early awakenings I would not have been confident enough to advance as I did. Though I did advance throughout the program, I must admit many failures along the way. In CCT, our failures are not seen with the negative connotation that the word routinely implies. Failures are seen as a part of our learning, a portion of the pathway to achievement; merely a signal to reassess and redirect. Failure is always part of a journey.

Pass 2: Achievements and Failures

“The best leaders in every setting reward people for taking worthwhile risks even if they are likely to fail. These leaders know that the death of an initiative – if it was tested for good reason – is always a source of new learning.”

Parker J. Palmer, “Let Your Life Speak”

Maybe the journey isn’t worthwhile telling if there weren’t failures to learn from. Learning to apply Critical and Creative Thinking skills came to me with some difficulty initially. I graduated as a Registered Dental Hygienist when I was 21, more than two decades ago. This degree was an Associates in Applied Science and little critical or creative thinking was demanded of its students. I was told what to study, what was important to remember and was tested on my ability to accurately recall information.

My next degree was a Bachelor’s in Psychology and this coursework allowed me some more fluidity in utilizing my ability to think. Some courses were a similar feeding of the information with grades being based on how well I could return the given information. Other courses welcomed some critical and creative thinking skills allowing for discussion and opinion, such as in case reviews, treatment approaches, and personality assessments. Curiously, these courses were some of my favorites! When it came to writing, however, we were back to a rigid informative piece in which every statement I made was supported by statistically significant research or not permissible at all. My opinion might occasionally be accepted if I could statistically substantiate my reasoning.

Entering Critical and Creative Thinking, I felt I was struggling a sense of ambiguity. This “ambiguity” was likely my term of choice for identifying this new way of learning that was not the familiar rote method. It seems that in all of my earlier years of school, I was given directions with firm boundaries and rules

leaving no room for my own thinking, whether it be critical or creative. I can now see that my former way of learning was not promotive to developing my critical and creative thinking skills. Still, I had repeatedly heard the term 'ambiguity' used by other new CCT students who likely were struggling with this change in learning and thinking. In the Handbook of Creativity, Robert J. Sternberg states that a, "Tolerance for ambiguity", is a factor associated with creativity (419). Over time, I have learned to be more comfortable with this sense of ambiguity, though, I admit it is something with which I still struggle.

Midway through my CCT program, I reflect upon several other courses that had a great impact on my thinking. Notably, Metacognition and Dialogue Processes. Metacognition had me thinking about my thinking. I do considered myself a thinker because there is never quiet in my mind; rather, ongoing thoughts disrupting any possibility of quiet. Armed with metacognitive skills, I was introduced to the concept of being reflective of my own thinking. The Dialogue Processes course taught me that there is a potential for dialogue with another that could evolve to more than what I alone might conceive. This course also gave me the opportunity to co-author a chapter with my professor, which, with gratitude to my early course's encouragement, I accepted. Writing feverishly, the editors repeatedly sent the paper back in need of corrections creating a sense of repeated failures. After much time and effort, we were ultimately approved for publication in the text Dialogue Theories II.

Excited with the idea of publication, I learned that I had to recognize my achievements along with my failures; a necessity to be considerate of balance. As I reach the latter part of my journey through CCT, I found myself in more complex courses; namely, Processes of Research and Engagement, Action Research, and, of course, my synthesis. Here I was told I could create any project based upon any topic that I considered of importance. Again, a recurrence of my sense of ambiguity! What topic to choose? What topic to choose? Utilizing my Bug List framework and looking into my life's reality led me to an idea that became my project's birth. Topic chosen; but that was merely the beginning.

Pass 3: The Underlying Situation

A journey does not unfold in its own parallel realm to its surroundings. A journey unfolds at the time life unfolds; intertwining with the co-existing reality. During my studies in CCT, my reality included the struggles of a mom coping with her daughter's personal battles. My project was born as a result this major issue. My project was imagined and initiated, later inhibited, rerouted, restarted, annihilated, reinvented, reassessed, reviewed and refined. My journey evolved while intertwining with my own personal reality. My life had been tossed into upheaval upon the discovery of cuts on my 13 year old daughter's legs. Cuts that were not a result of accidents during play; rather, wounds that were carved into her thighs by no one other than herself.

I first became aware of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) when I had discovered these wounds. My daughter initially explained the injury away but I demanded that she pull her pant leg up, exposing more of her injured flesh; this revealed numerous remnants of cuts. She then admitted that the cuts were self-inflicted and explained that such cutting was not a, "Big Deal", because, "lots of kids do it". Shortly after, I had the opportunity to speak with one of my daughter's school teachers and I explained what my daughter had shared with me.

The teacher nonchalantly stated that she suspected several of her students were cutting themselves and, "What a shame", it was, but that this behavior was presently, "trending". I was not advised on obtaining help for my daughter; no school programs recommended, no resources suggested, no hotlines to call. The conversation ended. I was stunned with this teacher's obvious knowledge of student's self-injurious behavior. I was further enraged that I was in the dark about this destructive behavior while my daughter and her peers, as well as this teacher and likely other school staff, were more than acquainted.

This apparent nonchalant awareness presently by my daughter's teacher was a motivating force for me to feel the need to take some sort of action.

I became driven to inform myself about NSSI and to become a voice of awareness. I began researching Pub Med studies, online news articles, and statistics published by sources such as the Department of Health and the US Surgeon General. My research revealed that self-injury is on the rise and can yield potential detrimental outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). It was then that I began to identify a problem. A World Wide Web search revealed ample information about NSSI, readily found sites such as: www.lifesigns.org.uk, www.selfinjuryalternatives.org, www.selfinjury.com, www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu, and many more. After speaking with other parents; however, I discovered there seemed to be little awareness.

I felt there needed to be a way to spread awareness about NSSI and I considered this a means to be proactive and advocate for adolescent safety. Struggling with my daughter's issues with NSSI, research on the topic was both academic and therapeutic. I studied NSSI in order to help my daughter as well as to utilize my degree to make what I determined to be a needed change in the world; a real life application. My journey thrashed forward with utmost confidence in its mission to inform and prevent. My goal was that my journey would have real life applications; I mean, how could it not? The topic for my project was born, and my new journey started, but a tumultuous path lie ahead. In Leading from the Emerging Future (2013), Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer discuss such journeys, stating, "The journey...is open-ended and full of disruptions, confusion, and breakdowns, but also breakthroughs".

Pass 4: Exercising the principles of Action Research

If a journey is a rock, and real life is a quiet pond of water – then can't a journey's impact on life be seen as a rock tossed into that quiet pond of water *always* causing ripples? Maybe that depends on how large the rock is and how quiet the pond is. Maybe my journey felt like it was a large boulder. Maybe what I assumed was a quiet pond was actually a bustling river. Maybe my rock made little impact on the water in which it fell. My journey, rather, my project's journey, had to find its place in the real world. My profound need to communicate was to be countered by the real world and all of its resistances. My envisioned boulder's impact on a quiet pond, in reality turned out to be a mere pebble in the midst of a tumultuous ocean.

With my outrage in hand, I was convinced that I merely needed to voice my concerns about NSSI. I wholeheartedly expected others to receive my message and to feel compelled to speak up against it. I mean, it was *my* daughter affected, but it *could* be their child! My plan was set into motion, I would create a Power Point full of shocking images and facts; the mere shock value alone I deemed certain to persuade.

Early Power Point with images expected to shock and motivate....



It's called **Show Me Your Story.**

My daughter and her friends add marks to these body outlines to show where they have cut themselves.

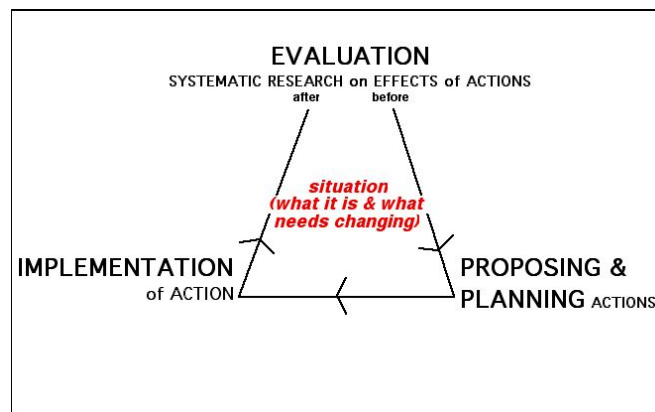


<http://the.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews>
Hannah Bond's mother stated that Hannah was, "A normal girl," who "Had loads of friends," and, "Everything to live for."
Hannah's mother said she did not know about the cuts because they were hidden under bracelets.
Hannah was found in her room, suspended an inch from the floor. The paramedics could not save her



(Expected result: Audience: "Gasp!! Let's Spread the Word!!")

Referencing the Basic Cycle of Action Research (see figure below), I felt I had followed the pathway faithfully. Clearly I had identified a problem, and the problem was the lack of awareness of NSSI. After substantial research, I discovered that NSSI is increasing among adolescents, that there are resources available that will help schools create an awareness program, but also that few schools have implemented such programs. My problem was now defined: adolescents were participating in self-injury and statistics revealed that NSSI is on the rise, my proposed solution was an awareness program and I had the resources to present in order to complete such an action.

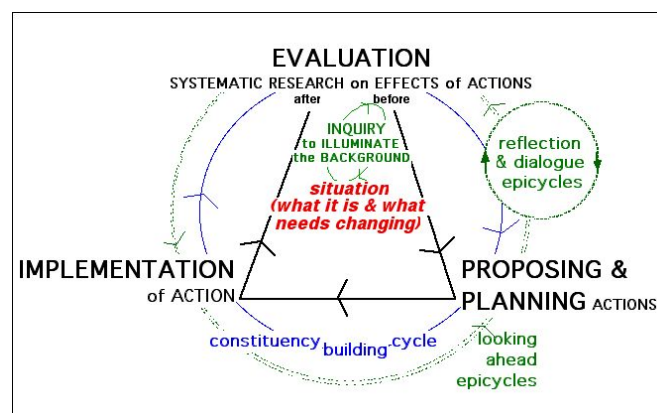


The basic cycle of Action Research (Taylor and Szteiter 2012, 36-37)

Case closed, problem solved. No need to look beyond the Basic Cycle of Action Research. No need to look into the Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research because my project was fail-proof. Now, with Power Point in hand, with all of its graphic images and shocking facts, I merely needed to present my project and the rest of the pieces would fall nicely in place. I sent a copy by email to the Superintendent of the Fall River School Department, an email to two principals of two local middle schools, and printed

out a physical copy which I covertly placed in the mailbox of the Mayor of Fall River. My contact information included, I simply sat back and waited for the ball to begin to roll. And I waited.

After unanticipated waiting, I received no emails, no phone contacts, no letter of declination, no notification at all! I reviewed my process: I identified a problem, I researched the topic area, I proposed a solution and offered resources to implement that solution. I contacted others who had the means to make such proposed changes. I applied creative thinking with my choice of visuals and my approach to the presentation. I used critical thinking in my assembling the facts and choosing those most pertinent. Where was I failing? In my Action Research class certain buzz words were frequenting our discussions. Words like, “reflection”, “constituents”, and, “epicycles”. I now felt I just might need to look beyond the Basic Cycles of Action Research. And so I did.



The Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research (Taylor and Szteiter 2012, 36-37)

After looking at the Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research, I began to try to determine what exactly these, “epicycles” were. Looking at the diagram, it seemed to me that these epicycles were little tornado’s moving around the basic cycle. Initially, I was a bit overwhelmed but I soon came to understand these epicycles as repeated reflections allowing for adjustments. Taylor and Szteiter (2012) state that, “The ‘cycles and epicycles’ model allows for extensive reflection and dialogue,” which is

necessary for, “Ongoing rethinking of the nature of the situation and the actions appropriate to improving it (254).” My project was not to proceed in a simple singular circular pathway. Instead, it was to proceed along the basic circular pathway but would also be living and breathing along the way.

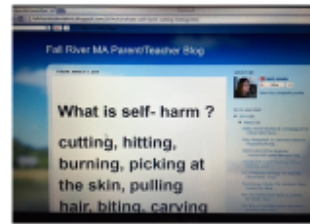
Guided by the basic cycle, I anticipated that my conceived problem, research on the topic, and proposed solution was going to turn out to be an open and shut case. Having no immediate success I was forced to look at the cycles and epicycles. ‘Dialogue’, ‘Reflection’ and ‘Constituency’ were terms that jumped out at me. What was my initial power point presentation lacking? How could I move the presentation a step further by applying these words that were beckoning? Upon reflection I determined merely that the original plan did not succeed as expected, and further, that I had not utilized dialogue nor had I built a constituency. My idea of an awareness program utilizing my PowerPoint presentation was set aside in lieu of a grander scheme: I would create a Blog!

I would use my present research and it would be presented in a blog format which would then spark readers to discuss their shared concerns about NSSI! Easy! I reflected on what did not work with my original plan and I made what I considered to be the necessary adjustments. The blog would offer me a means to both open dialogue around the topic of NSSI while also building a constituency. Taylor and Szteiter explain the concept of, “Taking initiative in *and through* relationships,” as a concept which requires that one does not, “Expect to learn or change on one’s own,” and that one will, “Build relationships with others; interact with them (244).” A fail-proof plan, I was certain! My blog attempts were many. All I felt I needed was the, ‘right’ platform and my plan would just burst into heated discussions which in turn would promote extensive awareness about NSSI.

My blog and forum attempts....



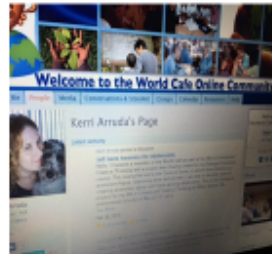
Facebook, being my routine source of social media, was an easy starting point. I opened a site named: Fall River, MA/Parent and Teacher Forum. I then proceeded to invite every teacher and parent that I could find on Facebook. I believe the member count may have gotten as high as three, yes, THREE! Myself included. My sister-in-law seems to be the only remaining member. The site had little activity. So, I moved on to another platform.



Blogspot.com was a site just for blogs. Perfect! Site established resulted in very little activity...yet, again.

<http://www.TheEmoProject.org>

During a previous project in my CCT studies, I discovered The World Café Online Community. Here the topics of discussion varied tremendously and across many countries and cultures. With such a broad audience base I was certain that my NSSI Awareness would effortlessly explode. Though my little blog still remains there, there was no explosion. Now understanding that my seemingly fail-proof attempts were not always so fail-proof, I began to try to get a blog going through several means. My activation of multiple blog platforms was likely to produce at least one method that would succeed.



I soon decided that these sites had limited means to be promoted as they were not advertised. I decided that I would create a web site and by paying a monthly fee, my site would inadvertently pop up upon other web searches. I had an official web address which was paid for and was promised to come up readily in related searches. Well, the World Wide Web would reach...well, everyone everywhere! Though, after my first three initial paid months the activity was present, but minimal. I merely counted, 'hits' but those, 'hits' were ineffectual to my cause. At this point I may have started to lose sight of my initial cause of awareness by a blindness to make each attempt offer any promising return.

What happened with my initial projects and why I needed to follow the Cycles and Epicycles, is that things do not necessarily flow so smoothly. There are bumps in the road, things that are overlooked, things that could be improved upon, and unforeseen blocks. During the creation of my early projects I held a closed minded belief that each attempt would self-propel. Following the basic cycle of Action Research and neglecting to apply the cycles and epicycles left crucial aspects of the Action Research process unaddressed. I realized that I needed to earnestly reflect on my past attempts in order to correctly utilize the Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research if my project were to progress any further.

Pass 5: Reflection versus Review

External reality does not impinge upon us as an ultimate constraint: if we who are privileged find ourselves confined, it is only because we have conspired in our own imprisonment.

Parker J. Palmer

My Synthesis course started in Spring of 2015, but due to life and all of its happenings, I did not complete the course, although I did participate in all of the classes. In all actuality, the progress I had made during that semester was not very reflective at all. The next available Synthesis would be in Spring of 2016, a year later! Albeit not part of my original game plan, the year off gave me room to breathe and rethink and again approach my goal. My professor, Peter Taylor, would have to contend with me for yet another semester!

During my first Synthesis course, Peter had discussed the possibility of utilizing my paper to share my reflections about the attempts that I had made. Since my attempted projects never evolved into anything tangible, I took this suggestion as one of writing about my failures. I was not excited about that concept at all! After speaking with Peter again during my second Synthesis, I came to recognize the reflection Peter spoke to me about was one of addressing process, not failure.

I came to consider that my paper could be a reflection while sharing my process; my journey. I decided that what worked, what did not, and what I had learned were actually worthy of writing about. Still, I felt that I wanted to have a project that I could actually apply in my present day world. I did not merely want to submit a review of how I could have done things differently. I wanted to *do* something differently. Whether it be a success or merely a stepping stone, I wanted to be able to have something tangible which I *could* and *would* use. I would not reach this goal; however, until I did the work of reflecting.

I felt that I was starting to understand how to be reflective. I began looking at my goals and my resulting projects from my earliest attempts and forward. I came to realize that reflection is more than just a review of previous work. I believe that initially, I merely reviewed my attempts instead of actually reflecting. As a result, I made undirected changes. Reflection, I believe, must be unbiased, honest, and as objective as possible. True reflection is a much deeper assessment than a more casual review. My early reviews of my work were just realizations that the project at the time was not working and the adjustment was merely to try a new idea.

My new understanding of reflecting led me to consider my project from various points of consideration, thus revealing multiple adjustments that needed to be addressed. This was opposed to former attempted reflection where I set aside the current idea in lieu of something merely different, thus, never addressing the weaknesses in my approach. My earliest goal had remained consistent – awareness. Since day one I have wanted to scream out loud: “Hey! Kids are cutting themselves! The teachers know this occurs! And I didn’t? My child cut herself! Is yours? Where is all the outrage? Where is all of the attention for self-harm that bullying receives?”

Awareness remaining my goal, my task became to create a Synthesis paper that was Reflective while allowing me to keep my sights set on my original goal. I also understood that I would have to move beyond the mere basic cycle of Action Research. All those swirling tornados in the Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research would have to be tackled. Reflection and Dialogue Epicycles were swirling around in this process, and I was feeling that I finally had a handle on reflection. Oh, but those Dialogue Epicycles. Did that imply having a dialogue with someone other than myself? Someone other than my short list of friends? Would my mother count as a person I had dialogue with?

Dialogue Epicycles set aside for the moment, I looked at the Cycles and Epicycles again. There I realized another key term: Constituency Building. TYS states, “Constituency building happens in a number of

ways: when you draw people into reflection, dialogue, and other participatory processes in order to elicit ideas about the current situation, clarify objectives, and generate ideas and plans”(p.38). Several of my earlier projects included attempts at gaining constituents, to no avail. Attempts, via email, that is. Oh, and that power point print out that was covertly snuck into the mayor’s mailbox. It now seemed to me that I was lacking in addressing Dialogue Epicycles and obtaining Constituents. Hmmm, could there be some relationship between the two?

I was starting to realize that reflection was more than reviewing and that there must be a significant importance of Action Research’s epicycles, but still, I seemed to be stuck. I noticed that there were certain areas in which I took the easy way out, worked around, and shied away from. This created a “block” which was impeding my processes of dialogue and constituency building. This block was no less than myself. My attempted projects all shared this one variable: me. I was my biggest block. I began to recognize myself as an entity that interacted with my project; and I knew I needed to get out of my own way.

In reality, I already knew that I was anxious; I had been previously diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). In social settings I was routinely anxious. In fact, socially terrified! I noticed whenever my project required me to interact with someone unfamiliar, I just couldn’t. Even during a phone conversation with the Mental Health staff at my daughter’s school; I just couldn’t get the words out. I would run into other parents, and I would tell myself that the present moment would be a great opportunity to speak about self-harm. I just panicked, and bailed, and avoided, and placed my good intentions aside for some other time, some other day, just not now. This introversion was inhibiting my progress and I would have to address it. Tackle it head-on! Overcome! Conquer! Abolish! Or, uh, well, maybe find a way to work with it.

A text my (other) daughter copied and sent to me.....(she felt this explained me- her mother)

*Please be patient with those who have anxiety
They say sorry a lot because they are genuinely afraid they've insulted you somehow
They say things are 'awkward' because they can be uncomfortable in any situation, no matter who with, they don't mean to personally hurt you
They cry because sometimes people and situations are too much, not because they're looking for attention
They don't text you a lot because they're clingy, it's because if you don't reply, they think they've done something wrong
They can be set off by little things, so don't say they're overreacting when they panic
Please be patient with those who have anxiety
They only mean the best
(Author unknown)*

The text, *Essential Skills for Management Research* (Partington, 2002), “Explores the individual in the role of researcher,” and identifies personal characteristics as one of three major contributors. The text states, “In the eventual design of research studies researchers may go against their grain, or may go with their flow, but acknowledging these choices can help them see the extent to which their research has been shaped by decisions that are intentional and appropriate.” The text specifically addresses introversion and advises such personal assessment tools as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). During my attempts with practicing reflection, I came to see how my progress was inhibited by my introversion. Now I feel that I can attend to my introversion as another variable to be addressed as I employ the process of Action Research.

Pass 6 – Working with my introversion

I realize there is something about my own ontology which leads me down the path of enquiry and influences the type of research I undertake.

Patricia Weight, "The Essential Skills for Management Research"

Employing sincere reflection and attempts of being honest with myself, I decided that I would address my introversion in a manner with which I was comfortable. I decided my project would utilize printouts and handouts as a crutch to minimize my time in an expected uncomfortable situation. My grand idea at the beginning of my latest synthesis semester was to create a brochure. I created a brochure and my goal was to hand them out and place them where they could be retrieved. My intention for the brochure was to place them where they could be retrieved, no interaction for me! However, though I did not fully pursue this plan, I had placed some of the brochures at a local restaurant. Later returning to that restaurant, I noted the pile sat untouched. I had many good resources on that brochure, but clearly none that would be discovered. No crowd was lining up to retrieve my brochure. There I was again, blocked by my introversion and creating something and expecting self-propulsion. I quickly recognized this weakness and I corrected for it.

I realized that, once again, I created something that would require no actual human interaction with the grand expectation that it would inform and motivate others all on its own. Once again expecting self-propulsion. Becoming more comfortable with the process of reflection, I made the necessary adjustments. The brochure had taken a fair amount of time to create, as well as a nice amount of ink and fancy glossy paper, so I did not set the brochure aside, rather I included it into a part of something that would require me to take a step out of my comfort zone. Albeit a small step, it would still be a step, and one that could be manageable.

My project kept the original goal of awareness and rather than toss my newly created brochures away to start anew, as I had in all of my former attempts, I retained it. I printed out two pieces of established information on self-harm from Cornell University. Out of all of my research, Cornell, had the most extensive and user-friendly material. I printed out basic information about self-harm and information on how to establish a school protocol. The pieces were bound in clear binders and the brochure included. The intended audience was for adults, mainly school administration but also parents.

Could I alter my brochure into something else? Part of my early goals was to include an audience of adolescents. I was certain that teenagers would not be fighting one another for my brochure. Looking through my power point templates where my brochure inceptioned, I noticed bookmark templates. Well, bookmarks are things that people kind of grab, because they are free, because they serve a purpose, or because they have the Patriot's Logo, pink skulls, or cute bunnies on them!! I decided to print out book marks with hotline information and other resources on the reverse side of various decorative themes. Informational printouts, with brochures and bookmarks would be my crutch that I needed to aid in dealing with my introversion.

Now I needed to take my small step. I set a personal goal for myself, likely a seemingly insignificant step to most, it was a challenge for me. I was to go into two Fall River middle schools, ask to speak with someone and hand over my assembled package. This was a big deal for me but one I felt I could accomplish. This attempt was facilitated by the only dialogue I ever routinely took part of: Writer's Workshop. Instead of feeling ever more inadequate about my irrational fears, my well-spoken and seemingly confident classmates actually applauded me. Their words were understanding, a pat on the back for challenging myself, and one crucial tip: "an elevator pitch".

“Hi, my name is Kerri. My daughter attended this school last year; during that time our family dealt with an issue that was quite difficult and I would like to share some information that might help others”.

Well, that was my elevator pitch. What came out of my mouth was not quite as polished but expressed the same point. In my mind I kept thanking Kaylea, my classmate, for the elevator pitch idea. It did take some of my fear away as I was preoccupied with repeating it over and over in my mind. I went to two schools that day and though I only left information at the second school, I was invigorated by the response at the first school. The principal came out to speak to me and expressed that this topic was of growing concern and she would like it on the school’s “Radar.” She asked if I might come and speak to staff and students, either this year or the upcoming. I was thrilled and agreed to all of her suggestions.

My first constituent! Hmmm. What made her accept me so willingly? She did come to this school about three years ago as the new principal. The school was getting low ratings and her ambitions were to improve the school. The second school I went to has a new principal as of this school year. Maybe a follow up phone call might facilitate things there. Maybe I could mention my, “in-progress” program with the initial school.

I recorded my two attempts as I had intended. Listening to the recordings revealed a comical audio of nervous mutters, repeated deep sighs, rehearsals of my, “elevator pitch”, and finally my stuttered presentation. All this dread and anxiety that I encountered ultimately turned out pretty well. I left ecstatic. I was proud. Maybe a lesson can be learned here, that my oppressive fear was irrational. Although, a phobia is defined as an irrational fear. Maybe repeated attempts with small steps such as these might just make me....Social! An extrovert! Gregarious! An exhibitionist! Or, well, maybe just not so terrified.



(Left) Bookmarks intended for adolescents with hotline information and resources on one side and other intended designs on the other.

(Middle) Initial brochure that was not case aside but rather included in the packet meant for teachers and administrators, but yet suitable for parents/guardians as well.

(Right) Packet with two separate pieces of information about NSSI created by the Cornell University. One article defining NSSI and the other informing how to establish a school based NSSI program.

Pass 7 – Progress Made, Work In Process

I now feel that I understand how to successfully follow the Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research. I feel I have gone through one complete cycle in which I have had a plan, made changes, created constituents – well, at least one- and attained a real life application. This process did not come easily to me. Though I attended my courses, read the material and discussed the concepts, my attempts were ones with which I was comfortable. I initially made changes where changes were easiest. I solely made note of problems that I felt were comfortable to address. I did not pay honest attention to what my project needed. It was not until I discovered that I had a very intimate relationship with my project that I then recognized

myself as one of the biggest blocks to my forward progression. I had to learn that reflecting consisted of addressing all aspects of the projects including those that were awkward and intimidating.

This being my second Synthesis course, the goal for my Synthesis paper has changed several times. My first intention was to have a Synthesis paper based solely on the facts about NSSI. That goal later changed to a paper that would share the original goal with the addition of sharing my reflective processes. Initially, I was not excited to write about my reflective process and saw little value in it. Once I started my writing, I decided that I would begin with reflection in order to get that portion over and done with so that I then could conclude the paper with the fact- based NSSI material with which I was most excited. As my writing carried on, I decided that I did have a bit to share about my process. In fact, I was learning more and more about reflecting as I wrote about it! Initially, I thought I had little to say about my reflective process, but by the end of my paper, I embraced it. Because of reflection being the focus of this Synthesis, I have discovered both a purpose for reflection as well as resulting personal growth.

I have come to recognize that this one little term, Reflection, is quite multifaceted and comprehensive. If I were new to CCT and Action Research and someone told me to Reflect, I would want to read this paper to understand how reflection is much more than mere review. I would not have had a real-life application if it were not for being able to FINALLY grasp the concept of reflection and doing so in an honest, albeit not always so comfortable, manner. I had known I was an anxious person but it wasn't until I took the steps reflecting where I noticed that my anxiety was presenting itself as introversion which was then impeding my progress. Ultimately understanding my introversion as a block led me to choose an approach to my goal that I felt manageable. I took smaller steps and employed crutches such as my, "elevator pitch" and having materials to hand out to further convey my message.

As a result of CCT, I can say that I have succeeded in making progress toward my goal, a real-life application promoting awareness about NSSI. Additionally, I can say that I have experienced personal growth and a new understanding of myself. Though my introversion remains a potential obstacle, now identified as such, I can employ facilitative tactics. Introversion is not something I have defeated, but it is something that I can identify as a block and I believe blocks can be addressed and managed. Though my journey has merely been early steps in my progression, I understand the reflective process is incomplete. My journey has been one of understanding, and now that I have a basic understanding, I will continue a process of application and continued learning.

I feel I have made it from *Here* to *There*, though I realize that my *There* is now my new *Here* as I embark on another cycle of Action Research. With my invitation from Morton Middle School to speak about NSSI, my new goal is to create a presentation that I can use to discuss my concerns with staff and parents as well as an adolescent appropriate version. Such a presentation will again ignite my introversion but now identified, I begin the process anew. Getting to *There* will be an easier journey with my new growth and understanding that CCT has provided.

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