CROSSING DISCIPLINE BORDERS-BRINGING SYSTEMIC RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY INTO SOCIAL CARE EDUCATION.

**Karen Leonard
Lecturer in Social Care and Systemic Psychotherapist
Athlone Institute of Technology, Ireland**

AiT
Connect & Discover

LOCATING THE CONTEXT
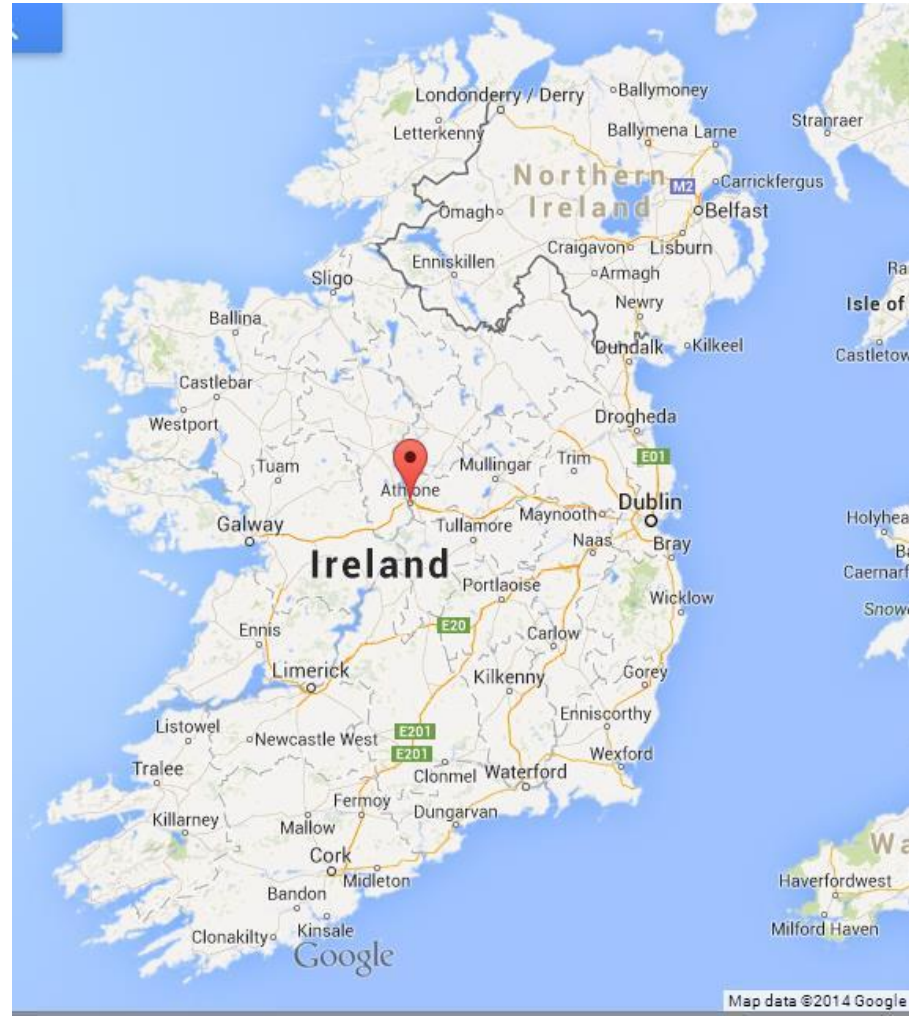
Images:
irishtimes.com;
worldeasyguides;
irelandsancienteast
erasmusu.com

LOCATING THE CONTEXT

The Professional Social Care Worker works:

-In a more *immediate way* than other professionals,

-often sharing their daily living environment,

-while *incorporating care, daily living and therapeutic work*,

-in residential or day services, family support or youth work settings

(Lalor and Share, 2013).

Image www.athloneit.ie

THE SOCIAL CARE WORKER'S "TOOLKIT"

Knowledge and skills are important but the main "tool" available to the social care worker when connecting with others is their own *"use of self"*.

"Reflective Practice is the cornerstone of effective social care. Practitioners must be willing to constantly scrutinise their practice ….. they must acknowledge their own vulnerabilities, counterproductive reactions, tendencies to blame clients, reluctance to seek support and guidance and, possibly, ineffective use of supervision"

(Fitzmaurice, 2013, p.187)

Theory

Skills
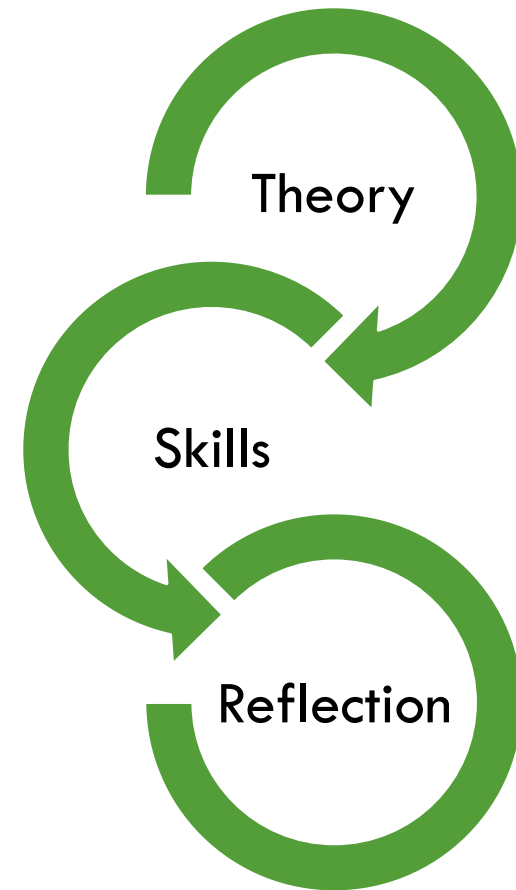
Reflection

BUT HOW DO WE "TEACH" REFLECTION?

To large numbers of students?

In large lectures?

Ethics and Disclosures - *"you can't take back what you have said".*

Some students tell us that their own family experiences have contributed to their interest in this area of work,

BUT

we provide little or no opportunities to assist students to reflect on these processes.

Image www.athloneit.ie

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE........
MODELS OF REFLECTION IN EDUCATION

John Dewey (1933,) Jürgen Habermas (1984), Donald Schön (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner,* Gibbs (1988).
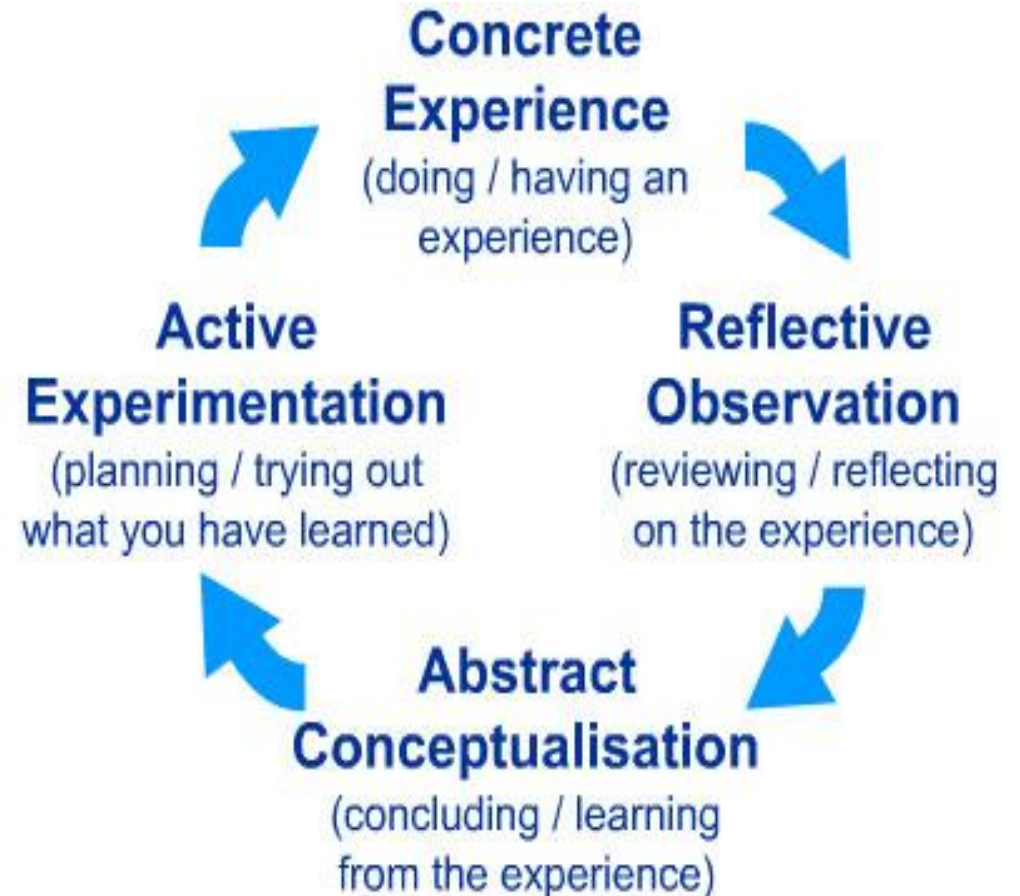
And in social care training:

Kolb's Model of Reflection

Learning as a Cycle:

Practitioner engages in an activity with a client.

Identifies their key learning.

This feeds back into their practice.

Concrete Experience (doing / having an experience)

Reflective Observation (reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualisation (concluding / learning from the experience)

Active Experimentation (planning / trying out what you have learned)

Image: simplypsychology.org

THESE ARE USEFUL BUT…………..

Kolb's Model

can be constraining-it **focuses on a particular learning style** rather than on a student's ability to be reflexive (Race, 2001 cited in Neden and Burnham, 2007).

All models focus on reflecting **after the event;**

Tend to be **too idealistic;**

Social context is absent;

And too **Individualistic** (Frost, 2010).

Therefore we are encouraged as educators to:

*"develop new ways of thinking about reflection that recognise the complexities and the **relational** qualities of practice".* (Boud, 2010, p. 36)

SO THIS IS THE SYSTEMIC BIT...................

So drawing on John Burnham (2005, p. 4) who defines relational reflexivity as:

"the intention, desire, processes and practices through which therapists and clients explicitly engage one another in coordinating their resources so as to create a relationship with therapeutic potential".

I propose that we also need to reflect and look at what has gone before, and what each of us (client and worker OR student and lecturer) are bringing to the *relational exchange* that is happening in *that particular moment.*

Or as a third year student James, says about being on placement:

"When you're thinking, when something happens, it's right out there, it's there in front of you. But when you're reflecting on it, after it, you're not actually in that moment, that exact feeling".

TOWARDS A MODEL OF RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY IN EDUCATION

-Small Learning Groups (maximum 15).

-Coming *prepared not planned* (Shotter, 2012).

-Systemic themes that *may* be useful.

-Conversation will emerge between us like in other dialogical and social constructionist approaches to teaching (Tseliou, Abakoumkin, Kokkini, Nanouri, Valai, 2016, Tseliou, 2007).

-Research with 2 Third year groups and 1 First year group.

Image: clipground.com

SYSTEMIC IDEAS FOR RELATIONALLY REFLEXIVE LEARNING GROUPS

Themes:

Creating the Space;

Experiences of Caring;

Experience of Family-genogram;

Experience of Family Roles;

Appreciation and Prejudice-use of GGRRRAAACCEEESSS in therapy practice (Burnham, 2012), and in Education Practice (Totsuko, 2014; Mills-Powell &Worthington, 2007);

www.pinterest.com

Appreciation and Prejudice in Practice (on placement);

Relational Reflexivity in Practice (on placement).

Tools:

-Use of Student Diary Pro to upload reflexive entries after each session.

-Feedback from Lecturer.

BUT………………

AS AN EDUCATOR WHERE WAS I IN THE PROCESS?

-Initially I focused on **students** needing to reflect more on themselves and their own experiences for work with clients (Aboutness position-Shotter, 2011).

-As the research began, I noticed I was more interested in what was emerging for me and going on between us from **within** the research process (Withness position-Shotter, 2011).

-Postmodernist Reflexivity (Simon, 2012) encourages researchers to write from within the learning and research process.

This approach includes:

-The use of Reflexive Diaries;

-The use of Video Reviews of sessions;

-Writing itself is seen as a form of Inquiry;

(Kebbe, 2016; Simon, 2012; Richardson, 1994).

Images www.cit.nusedu.sg

www.curationsoft.com

www.lifeoptimizer.com

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?
SOME INITIAL THOUGHTS FROM WITHIN THE PROCESS WITH STUDENTS…..

Several students mentioned in their reflexive diaries that they were more able to reflect or understood better how to reflect having completed these classes:

Marie notes:

I feel this class (on caring) was very beneficial as it got me to reflect in a way that was new to me, as I would never really have thought about why I had chosen social care as a profession".

Image www.writediary.com

DIFFICULTIES BEFORE-HOW TO "DO" REFLECTION

Kate, in her diary entry, notes:

"I was really interested when I heard about the placement research group, as in the past I have found it very hard to reflect on certain situations and also find it hard to talk about my feelings".

"I think when we started in first year we were just expected to know…. I didn't really know much about reflection at all" (Marie).

DIFFICULTIES BEFORE-HOW TO "DO" REFLECTION

Ronan a third year student says:

"In terms of work experience, we had to reflect on certain aspects like reflection on relationship-building …. but I've never had to reflect on myself as a whole".

Later on, at the Placement Review Day, he seems to have made this leap within the research process:

"I feel it gave a kind of different dimension to it, I suppose. I talked a lot more about the context of where I was coming from, as opposed to whenever I was writing up on previous placements I wrote specifically on just the placement, not where I'm coming from and why I

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Some students picked up on the idea of this group being a forum to reflect on what has gone before they commenced their social care education.

Emily: *"To actually sit back and think about your own circumstances rather than how to deal with others".*

Kate notes in her reflexive diary:

"I have learned a lot about myself and others that I would never (have) explored or found out before. I found that the research group helped me reflect on my past experiences and what I went through to come this far in life, and to help other people like myself that have Dyslexia".

EXPLORING OUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES

Katherine says she began to reflect on herself more, and thinks that this may have been what had been missing previously in her learning:

"I think we spend so much time reflecting on our abilities or on other people we don't actually reflect deep enough. I think these may be the classes that I will have a lightbulb moment of "I am acting this way because of this event".

If I look back on my reflections for placement (before) maybe this is why I have never felt I got the hang of it. Maybe I needed to get more personal than staying on the surface because what am I really learning from that?"

AND IN RELATION TO OUR PRACTICE?

In her diary entry Helen reflected on her experience of looking after somebody in her own life who had mental health difficulties.

"Taking part in this session has helped me to think about events from my past and how they may have influenced my future.....

I feel this will be of a benefit to me as I know what it is like to be on the other side".

"From taking part ...I found I learned a lot about myself that I have never realised before, particularly how my own insecurities can prevent relationships from being built with service users....

I am now more aware of my feelings and how they can impact on my daily life and I can work on these feelings instead of ignoring them or burying them".

IN CONCLUSION

Systemic thinking has lots to offer in helping social care students become more reflexive in preparation for practice contexts.

Students spoke in more relational ways about their practice rather than speaking of the client in terms of their problem or behavior.

Social Context of practitioner and client is very important in terms of reflection.

Relational Reflexivity *between* student and lecturer in the learning sessions.

Students found reflection more meaningful as it was more "personal" rather than competency-based or focused on the client or after the event.

REFERENCES

Boud, David. (2010). Relocating reflection in the context of practice. In Helen Bradbury, Nick Frost, Sue Kilminster and Miriam Zukas (Eds.), *Beyond Reflective Practice*. London: Routledge.

Burnham, John. (2012). Developments in Social GRRAAACCEEESSS: Visible and Invisible, Voiced and Unvoiced. In Britt Krause (ed.), *Mutual Perspectives: Culture and Reflexivity in Systemic Psychotherapy*. London: Karnac Books.

Burnham, John. (2005). Relational reflexivity: a tool for socially constructing therapeutic relationships. In Carmel Flaskas, Barry Mason and Amaryll Perlesz (Eds.). *The Space Between: Experience, Context and Process in the Therapeutic Relationship*. London: Karnac.

REFERENCES

Fitzmaurice, Eleanor. (2013). Managing challenging behaviour. In Kevin Lalor and Perry Share, (Eds.), *Applied Social Care* (3rd Edition). Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Frost, Nick. (2010). Professionalism and social change: the implications of social change for the 'reflective practitioner'. In Helen Bradbury, Nick Frost, Sue Kilminster and Miriam Zukas (Eds.), *Beyond Reflective Practice.* London: Routledge.

Gibbs, Graham. (1988).   *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods.* Oxford: Oxford Brookes University.

Gilligan, Robbie. (1991). *Irish Child Care Services: policy, practice and provision.* Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

REFERENCES

Kebbe, Lisen. (2016). Writing Essays as Dialogical Inquiry. In Gail Simon and Alex Chard (Eds.), *Systemic Inquiry Innovations in Reflexive Practice Research*. Farnhill: Everything is Connected Press.

Kolb, David, A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Lalor, Kevin and Share, Perry. (2013). *Understanding Social Care*. In Kevin Lalor and Perry Share, (Eds.), *Applied Social Care* (3rd Edition). Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

Mills-Powell, Dana and Worthington, Rory. (2007). Space for GRRAACCEESS: some reflections on training for cultural competence. *Journal of Family Therapy*. 29, pp. 364-367.

REFERENCES

Morrison, Tony. (2005). *Staff supervision in social care: making a real difference for staff and service users* (3rd Edition). London: Pavilion.

O'Neill, E. (2004). *Professional Supervision: Myths, Culture and Structure*. Tipperary: RMA Publications.

Richardson, Laurel. (1994). *A Method of Inquiry*. London: Sage.

Schön, Donald, A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books. Simon, Gail. (2006). *Genograms, Family Trees, Social Network Maps*. Presentation delivered to Relate Postgraduate Diploma. Manchester. 13th October 2006.

Shotter, John. (2011). *Getting It: Withness-Thinking and the Dialogical…..in Practice*. New York: Hampton Press.

Simon, Gail. (2012). Praction Research: A Model of Systemic Inquiry. *Human Systems: The Journal of Therapy, Consultation & Training*. Vol. 23: 1, pp. 103-124.

REFERENCES

Totsuka, Yoko. (2014). "Which aspects of social GGRRAAACCEEESSS grab you most?" The social GGRRAAACCEEESSS exercise for a supervision group to promote therapists' self-reflexivity. *Journal of Family Therapy*. 36: Supplement 1, pp. 86-106.

Tseliou, Eleftheria, Abakoumkin, Georgios, Kokkini, Vicky, Nanouri, Katerina and Valai, Fani. (2016). Reflexive Processes in Higher Education: Systemic dilemmas in teaching research methodology by means of "polyphonic dialogue" in Gail Simon and Imelda McCarthy (eds.). *Systemic Therapy as Transformative Practice*. Farnhill: Everything is Connected Press.

Tseliou, Eleftheria. (2007). 'Polyphonic dialogue' as a means of teaching systemic and social-constructionist ideas. *Journal of Family Therapy*. 29, pp. 330-333.