

INVITING (SOME) RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY INTO SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE AND EDUCATION

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LOCATING THE CONTEXT



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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).

While historically social care work was delivered by Religious Orders and volunteers.

Formal education of professional social care workers began in the 1970's and training is now delivered by Institutes of Technology up to Honours Degree level
(Gilligan, 1991).

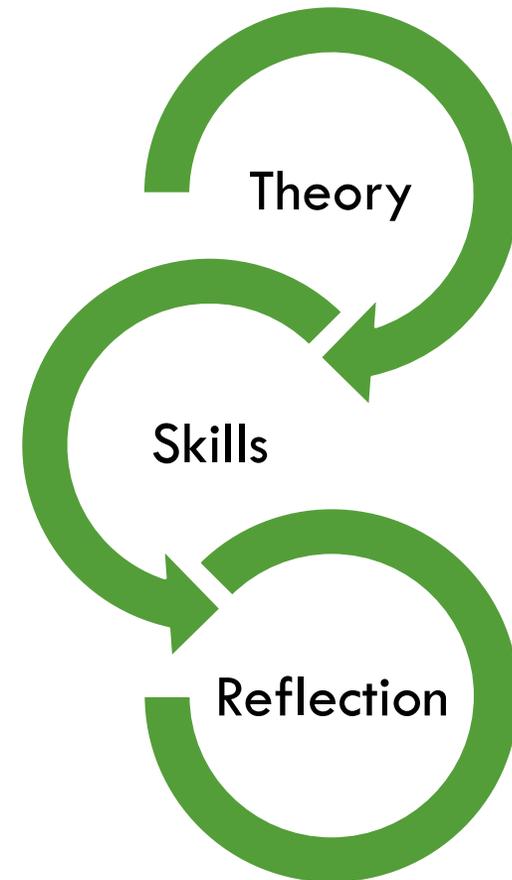


THE SOCIAL CARE WORKER'S “TOOLKIT”

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)



BUT HOW DO WE “TEACH” REFLECTION?

To large numbers of students?

In large lectures?

What about emotional safety?

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.

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FOCUS OF RESEARCH: A “PROBLEM” TO BE SOLVED?:

Natalie: A lot of people who get into social care, get into it for a reason, there's always something.

Karen: Okay?

Natalie: Mightn't mean it but for most people there's a relative or some reason that's close to your heart.

Karen: We talked about caring in the first (session), and it could be a positive thing that we've been involved in caring.....

Pamela: It's just that because we've looked at it here (in the research) when it does come up outside, it won't be as big a surprise, we'll be able to manage it better or be able to look for help, if we need it, quicker, becomes we've already kind of...

Karen: Become aware of it?

Pamela: Yes.

Natalie: Those are the things we don't ever cover in class you know that are...

Karen: It's too hard to. Like being honest about it, on my syllabus before I'd have on it “Reflection”. But it's hard You can't really teach reflection, well like you can teach models of reflection but you can't really say “you reflect”, well you can, but it's not making it particularly real for the person.

(Excerpt from conversation with Nicole and Pamela, both first years in Red Group 05/03/18)

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:

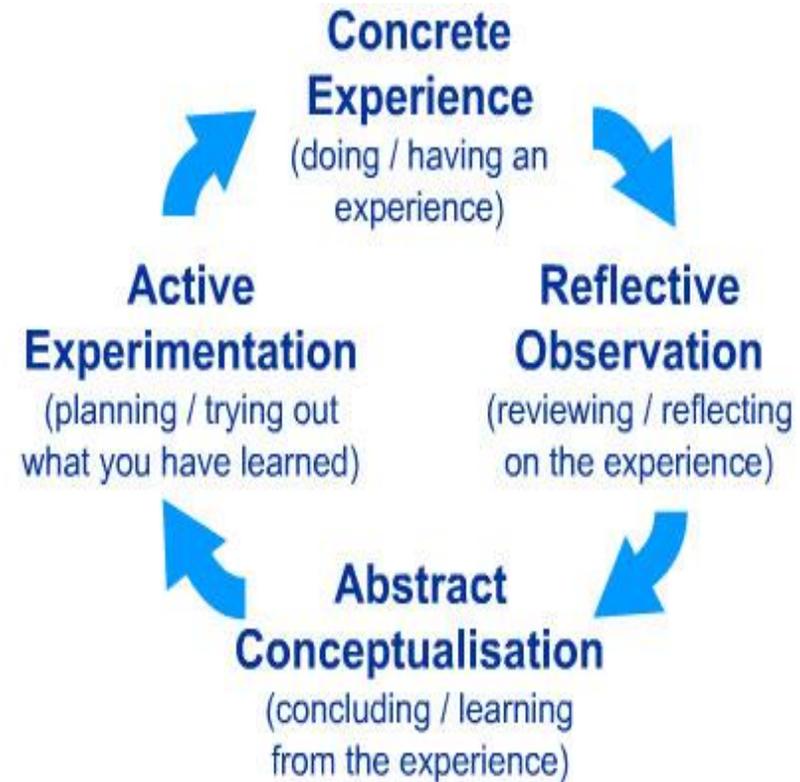
Kolb's Model of Reflection

--Learning as a Cycle:

Practitioner engages in an activity with a client.

Identifies their key learning.

This feeds back into their practice.



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”.

In my research 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



SOME IDEAS ON DEVELOPING RELATIONALLY REFLEXIVE LEARNING GROUPS

Themes:

Creating the Space;

Experiences of Caring;

Experience of Family-genogram;

Experience of Family Roles;

Appreciation and Prejudice-use of GRRRAAACCEESS 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 my research 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 (Witness position-Shotter, 2011).

-**Postmodernist Reflexivity** (Simon, 2012) encourages researchers to write from within the learning and research process, and so I moved from an initial focus on Action Research, to embrace a Reflexive Inquiry that focuses on my own practice as a social care educator.

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).

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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

Kieran a third year 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 passed (sic) 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 Rachel 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 in this research 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”.

AND THE UNEXPECTED.....

Ella in her reflexive diary notes:

"I feel the pre-placement classes greatly helped me as a person There were many different aspects of the group process that stood out for me, one being the fact that the group size was small.... Before attending these classes I would never have had the courage to speak openly about my experiences in life, as I would have considered them invalid....

The group size allowed me as a person to speak openly about my experiences without any judgement and I really believe this will help me in the future when working in the field especially during team or multidisciplinary meetings when I will have to speak openly about clients".

AND FINALLY A QUESTION (OR TWO!)

- Are there other disciplines that might benefit from a more systemic and relational approach to reflection?
- Are there other models that you have tried in your teaching?
What have you found helpful?
- How might educators and students respond to a model like this?

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