

# The role of the field educator in helping students develop critical reflection

**Hilary Lawson<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** This article offers advice to practice educators about the teaching of reflective and critically reflective practice to social work students on placement. It explains what is meant by critical reflection, it offers different tools and ways of teaching critical reflection to students, and it also strives to problematise the teaching of critical reflection – the meaning of which is itself contested and evolving – and to emphasise the need to subject all teaching tools to theoretical scrutiny and awareness of socially constructed context and assumptions. A critically reflective practice educator will interrogate the knowledge underpinning the skills and encourage the student to do the same. The article argues that students have different capacity to be reflective. It explores why many students find it difficult, and suggests that effective critical reflection develops only with time and experience.

**Keywords:**

1. Senior Teaching Fellow, University of Sussex, UK

**Address for correspondence:** H.A.Lawson@sussex.ac.uk

**Date of first (online) publication:** 3rd September 2018

## **Introduction**

An ability to be critically reflective is a defining characteristic of being a professional, and therefore facilitating the development of students' reflective capacities is a key task of practice supervisors and educators (as known as field educators) in their work with social work students. Being a practice educator is challenging and there is a thirst for teaching tools to assist in the task of turning students into ethically sound, skilled, knowledgeable social work practitioners in placements of ever-decreasing length. However, it is crucial the tools educators use are subject to theoretical scrutiny. This is of particular relevance in the teaching of critical reflection as ideas about the meaning of critical reflection are contested and evolving.

This article focuses on the teaching of critical practice and emphasises that tools and skills are embedded in societal assumptions. A critically reflective practice educator will interrogate the knowledge underpinning the skills and encourage the student to do the same. Students have different capacity to be reflective, many find it difficult, and effective critical reflection develops only with time and experience.

## **What do we mean by reflective and critically reflective practice?**

The words reflect, reflection and 'reflective' are in common usage, and so when students are introduced to them in a social work context they may have preconceived ideas that need to be unpicked. The social work literature reveals that the terms are contested and evolving. Most writers agree reflection is an ability to scrutinise and question the different elements of practice in an open and systematic way. Reflective practice involves the bringing to bear of a range of different knowledges to the matter in hand. As the understanding of what constitutes professional knowledge has developed, social work has become more robust at naming those different types of knowledge. Along with the 'hard' knowledge of theory and evidence drawn from research is knowledge learnt through doing the job which is called 'practice knowledge' or 'practice wisdom'.

Schön's work of the 1980s pointed the way for an opening up of the discussion about what constitutes professional knowledge. Historically, in the professions scientific technical knowledge ('knowing that') was accorded greater status than knowledge created through practice ('knowing how').

Schön's work proposed that not only was practice knowledge a legitimate form of knowledge, but that also it was created through practitioners' reflective processes.

There is also 'personal knowledge', which includes an understanding of ourselves and others from personal experience. So reflection is not just a matter of ruminating on what has just happened, it is about making links to what is already known. This is one of the reasons why practice educators cannot expect students to be effective reflective practitioners early on in their training – they have not had the experience to develop the practice knowledge which will inform their reflections, and their skills at tapping into their personal knowledge may be under-developed. So, early on in the placement, students should be encouraged to develop a systematic and structured way of reflecting on their practice, but the range of knowledge they bring to bear on the experiences under scrutiny will be limited.

Schön developed the idea of the reflective practitioner and suggested that there are two types of reflection: reflection 'on action' which occurs after the event, and reflection 'in action' which occurs simultaneously with it. The image of an insect twitching its antennae to pick up information from all different sensory sources captures the idea of reflection-in-action, a kind of thinking on the job. Thompson later added another, key, type of reflection, 'for action', which encourages practitioners to prepare well for the up and coming event.

Critically reflective practice implies a need to recognise the assumptions that lie behind beliefs and behaviours. It suggests that the different knowledges that are used in social work should be scrutinised and evaluated. Being critical means that nothing should be taken for granted, everything is questioned.

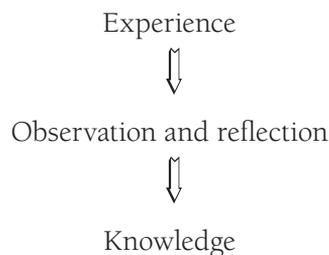
The educationalist Mezirow (1981) has been influential in the development of the nature of critical reflection. He drew on Habermas' conception of 'emancipatory action' in the phrase 'perspective transformation' to explain what happens to learners who are faced with a learning experience which completely turns their traditional belief systems up-side down. 'Perspective transformation' can be used to explain what some social work students experience when working in practice for the first time. They can be shocked to find that, for example, there are not clear answers to every problem, that the society we live in is not fair, that a great many families live in appalling social conditions through no fault of their own and so on.

Perspective transformation comes about through critical reflection, and here critical reflection involves 'being aware of, and alert to, the external

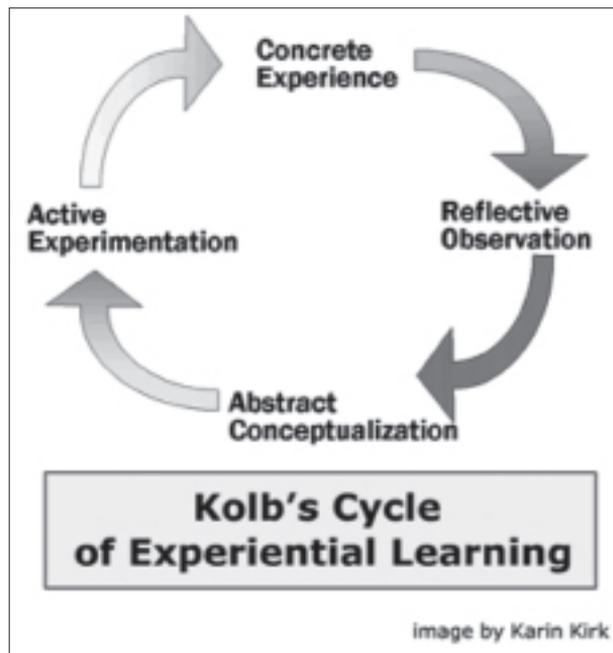
and internal constraints and forces that prevent us from seeing the world as it really is' (Jasper and Rolfe 2011, p.7). So, becoming critically aware has an 'emancipatory' quality which encourages the focus on power and power relations, and, as Fook writes, 'how structures of domination are created and maintained' (Fook, 2002, p.41). More than this, it encourages the individual practitioner to consider their position in this social world and their own part in maintaining those structures. It can be said, then, that Fook's model of critical reflection bears resemblance to anti-oppressive practice, and, like anti-oppressive practice, it encourages a practitioner to do some deep thinking about the assumptions they have held. This may be an extremely unsettling process for a social work student. Fook's work will be returned to later when I consider the question of how far a practice educator can help a student develop critical reflection in just a short placement.

## **The role of action in reflective practice**

A criticism of current social work practice is that although practitioners may be becoming more skilled in reflection, analysis and assessment of the families they work with, sometimes this is not sufficiently translated into action (see for example Munro, 2008). Reflective practice is practice which involves both learning *and* action, although the earliest writers on this subject were more concerned with how learners created learning, or knowledge, through reflective processes rather than what the learners then went on to do with that knowledge. For example, John Dewey, writing in the 1930s was one of the first to propose the concept of 'learning by doing'. His model of reflective learning can be represented as a linear model where experience, that is some kind of 'personal engagement with the world' (Rolfe et al, 2011), triggers reflection which results in knowledge. Dewey's model of reflective learning (1938) looks like this:



The much more familiar model of experiential learning proposed by David Kolb in the 1980s was, crucially, circular rather than linear and this conveyed an on-going process rather than a one-off event. Also, and significantly, to the processes of experience, reflection, and knowledge generation, Kolb added the requirement that once learning had been derived, this should then be acted upon to inform future action. This fourth phase was called active experimentation and Kolb's learning cycle is reproduced here:



In practice, as I discuss more fully below, it is difficult to separate out these four different stages. For example, reflection invariably involves applying knowledge derived from previous experiences or learning, so analysis and forming new understandings occurs in both the reflective and also the abstract conceptualisation stage. Also, when people learn through reflection there is a constant to-ing and fro-ing between the different stages, one stage doesn't neatly follow the other.

Many have argued that Kolb paid too little attention to the role of feelings in reflection (see for example Malkki, 2010). Practice educators will have first hand evidence of the way emotions impact on learning, in both

positive and negative ways, and I return to how the reflective processes can be hindered by student fear and anxiety below.

However, with all its imperfections this cycle of reflective learning has been used widely to inform what we mean by critical practice with subsequent social work authors developing it further. Payne et al (2009:4), for example offer a clear explanation of critical practice, but to the emphasis on reflection, learning and action they also highlight the importance of *change* in critical practice:

Critical thinking leads to critical action; the two together form critical practice. Inevitably, because critical thinking will use the experience of action and its outcomes to inform further thinking, critical practice is a cycle in which thinking is bound up with action.. ‘Reflexivity’ means being in a circular process in which social workers ‘put themselves in the picture’ by thinking and acting with the people they are serving, so that their understandings and actions inevitably are changed by their experiences with others. As part of the same process, they influence and change others and their social worlds (2009, p.4).

## **Creating the reflective space: Collaboration and co-constructing knowledge**

Good practice educators will be skilled in ensuring the student feels comfortable, empowered, heard and validated in the supervisory relationship, and this is crucial if students are to develop critically reflective abilities. Students’ anxieties and emotions should be contained by regular and supportive supervision sessions. The practice educator must be aware of power relations both within the practice teaching relationship and also more widely in the team or agency context.

Fook has written that ‘effective critical reflection can only take place in a climate which is egalitarian and participatory’ (2011, p.372). Collaborative working is achieved through the sharing of information: for example about the written and unwritten rules of the work place culture, some personal information about the practice educator offered in the spirit of ‘equalising’ the relationship, or resources to speed up the student’s learning and knowledge. Opportunities for the student to articulate her needs and to share decision-making such as in the drawing up of the learning

agreement should be given weight. The student's prior experience, skills and strengths should be noted and utilised so that she feels empowered. The language the practice educator uses is also important. The use of 'we' to convey a participative approach to developing the student's practice can feel both supportive and collaborative.

The first task of the practice educator is to ensure that both she and her student know what is meant by the different terms that are used when discussing reflective practice. The student should be encouraged to do her own research and come back to supervision with an article or two that she has found particularly illuminating. The practice educator agrees to read what the student has found, perhaps suggests some reading herself and agendas some time for discussion at the following supervision session. In this way both are engaged in on-going development of their understanding of reflective processes.

Thus reflective practice is a means by which knowledge is constructed through learning. Where the student and practice educator are engaged in effective supervision in which the student is encouraged to reflect on an event or some aspect of practice by the practice educator offering her full attention, insightful questioning and support, then knowledge is generated in the room. By this I mean the student learns something about himself, his practice and/or the service user. The practice educator and student are together engaged in the co-construction of knowledge.

## **Creating the reflective space: Models and frameworks for supervision**

Practice educators will also know that the beginning of every supervision session is key. However rushed the practice educator is, it is worth her pausing before entering the supervision room to ensure non-urgent telephone messages have been blocked, she is clear about her own agenda and outcomes for the session, and, importantly she has rehearsed that first all important invitation to the student to say how it's been and how she is. The opening 'how's it going?' question asked with genuine interest and concern, can set the reflective tone for the rest of the session.

## Kolb's learning cycle

After the agenda setting stage has been completed Kolb's learning cycle can also be used as a way of helping the student structure her thinking and reflection. The first stage 'the experience'- for example participation in a hospital ward round- requires the student to tell the story. Some authors suggest the event is told as a series of factual statements recounting the main features of the experience before the student then describes how she felt and what she thought about the experience. This helps the student separate out 'facts' from 'feelings', an important skill in any assessment. As the student becomes more proficient, the practice educator will no longer want lengthy narratives from the student but will use prompts to help the student pick out the important facts of the experience. Students need help sifting through experience for the significant things said and done, risks and strengths in order to learn how to focus what they present in supervision.

The role of the practice supervisor and educator is to ask questions based on the different stages of Kolb's model. Questions such as 'who was there?' and 'How much did the service user contribute?' associated with establishing the facts of the experience, are followed by questions such as 'what worried you?' or 'how do you feel the service user felt?' to encourage reflection.

The next stage is where the student 'conceptualises and generalises' from that experience. In the case of the student in the example here, she may be able to apply what she knows about hospital hierarchies from her own experience as a patient in the past, and to link this to concepts of power, gender relations, medical model vs. social model discussed on her course. She might also have noticed how different professionals spoke to the patient, how they shared information, whether they allowed the patient a voice and be able to relate this to what she has learnt in her communication skills seminars. And so on. With the right prompts and questions this one event has enormous potential for reflection and learning.

However, it is crucial to use the model flexibly. Kolb's model has been criticised for its portrayal of a fixed circularity and of course the session would not be like this. For example, now that the student has used theory drawn from her own personal experience, that is 'personal knowledge', which she used to analyse the experience in the abstract conceptualisation stage, an acute practice educator would return to the reflection stage to ask how those past experiences had impacted on her in-situ feelings and

work in the ward round. In truth, the 'reflection' and 'analysis' stage of the learning cycle are entwined, and instead of a cycle there should be arrows buzzing back and forth between the different stages.

The fourth stage- active experimentation- is clearly future and action-oriented. But even here it could be seen there is both specific learning 'What will you do differently next time?', and then more general learning 'what have you learnt about multi-professional learning?'

## **Davy's and Beddoe's reflective learning model**

Davy's and Beddoe (2009) have proposed a model for promoting reflection in supervision that they refer to as the Reflective Learning Model. It consists of 'The Event', 'Exploration' divided into 'Impact' and 'Implications', then 'Experimentation' and finally 'Evaluation'. After the student has been encouraged to explain 'the event' they then move into the 'exploration' phase. The authors have broken this phase down into two parts, firstly encouraging the student to reflect on the student's own role in what happened including how the event impacted on them personally, before moving into the second aspect of exploration, 'implications' which focuses more broadly on the 'case' and the theories, policies and so on that can be used to shed light and inform future action. In the next stage, 'experimentation' the practice educator needs to be sure that the learning from the exploration is going to be put to good use. Davy's and Beddoe's insistence that this is often the stage that is given too little attention is an important point. They write:

(The student is helped to think about) Is this the best plan? What are the limitations? What will happen if the plan fails? What resources does the student need....The student is provided with support to consider how he or she will act on the plan and encouraged to identify fears or knowledge gaps which will make implementation problematic. The supervisor is thus able to consider what extra tuition, support or resources the student may need to promote a successful outcome' (2009, p.12)

The final stage is evaluation. At this point the practice educator checks with the student whether they have understood everything in the previous discussion, what they have learned and whether they have sufficient information and resources to put the plan devised into action.

## Question-based frameworks

A simple framework that can be used to good effect in a supervision session is Bolton's (1970) 3 questions, 'What? So What? Now What?' representing the description of the event, the analysis and the next steps. This framework keeps the focus on the case or event under discussion and can be particularly useful if the student's newness tends to render the supervision session overly dominated by her own personal reactions and feelings. If on the other hand the student seems reluctant to bring herself into the reflective discussion, as well as the more general 'how did that make you feel?' or 'did that trigger anything for you personally?', the question 'what did you learn?' and 'what did you learn about yourself?' are helpful questions to encourage reflexivity.

Another question based technique for ensuring practice is well-structured and purposeful is Thompson's model which encourages practitioners to focus on their role and goals. The questions are 'What are you trying to achieve?' How are you going to achieve it? and the third important question to ensure goals are achievable and strategies appropriate is 'How will you know when you have achieved it?' (Thompson 2008, p.81)

Practice educators will find for themselves which questions elicit the responses they are after with different students. Using these frameworks or strategies – if not explicitly then at least holding them in mind to guide the discussion- can be enormously helpful to lend structure to the supervision sessions. Reflective discussions can by their very nature wander into unexpected territory triggering past experiences or tapping into deeply held feelings and assumptions. As we have seen, critical reflection encourages the deep mining of those embedded seams. However, supervision sessions are not therapy sessions and it is the service user who must be the ultimate focus of the session.

Although frameworks offer the structure that is necessary to ensure critical practice is effective, writers such as Bhuyan et al (2017) highlight the need to interrogate theories from which questions stem. Morley (2008, p.409) writes that skills are embedded in societal assumptions. She writes that 'Technicist approaches to the teaching and learning of practice skills, which are often assumed to be separate from theory and devoid of context, deny that how and why we choose to use skills in our practice at particular times is guided by assumptions and values that may reflect various, often unstated theoretical positions' and that students 'need to develop an understanding that the theoretical frameworks that we draw upon,

consciously or not, actually inform how we assess a person's situation'.

Bhuyan et al encourage us to also question whether there may be a disconnect between practice educators' use of the rhetoric of critical reflection and concomitant discourses such as social justice and anti-oppressive practices, and their own social work practice. While all practice educators should be striving towards empowering and critical social work practices, authors such as Zuchowski (2015) and Maynard et al (2015) suggest maintaining a critical, rights-based stance in supervision with the student may more easily be achieved by off-site practice educators who are not attached to the organisation setting.

## **Developing reflection in the new student**

Reflective practice is challenging for the new student because those at the beginning of new learning tend to search for concrete answers to problems. Critical reflection suggests both that there are no easy answers and also that what answers there are, are to be found by dint of the hard work of the student. The student is not a passive recipient of knowledge but needs to search for and engage with a range of sources in order to make sense of practice. The practice educator should expect the student to be somewhere at the dependent end of the 'dependent-autonomous' continuum at least during the first half of the first placement. The practice educator should also think carefully about the didactic-facilitative matrix when structuring the supervision sessions. The student will need high levels of facilitative input throughout the placement- that is constructive and detailed feedback, praise and support. Initially, the student will also need high levels of 'didactic' input about reflective practice.

The practice educator should suggest reading, explain models, show examples of reflective practice in action through case studies, process recordings and so on. If the student can observe a colleague's reflective supervision session that could be enormously instructional. The practice supervisor and educator will also be modelling reflective practice throughout the student-practice educator supervision session, a very effective teaching tool.

## **Reflective images, distortions and filters**

I recently asked a group of practice educators to suggest some novel ways of 'teaching reflection'. One chose to use a range of photographic images to emphasise the way 'to reflect' can mean to throw back or be mirrored. The images represented different kinds of reflection, for example the sharp 'true' reflection of a mirror, the wavy somewhat hazy reflections of landscapes in lakes on a sunny day and then the comic distortions of funfair halls of mirrors. The point is made that reflective processes are complex and what we see is just one aspect of reality. An image portrayed through a rear view mirror emphasises the way in which when we look back things may seem different. Landscapes in lakes can be blurred and indistinct. Fun fair mirrors can do what our own minds often do, focus on and enlarge some elements and diminish others. This can be a powerful exercise which encourages students to begin to understand the complexity of reflective processes, and how distortions can occur. The student could then be asked to reflect on a recent experience – taking part in a first team meeting for example- and begin to unpick the different filters that she might be using in her reflection. This might raise feelings (such as anxiety preventing her listening effectively), faulty assumptions (such as that everyone in the room was feeling confident except her), theory (she might be applying group role theory just learnt at college) and so on. Awareness of filters is an important step in critical reflection.

Munro's (2008) work on distortions in decision-making is useful follow-up reading. She writes about the problems of tunnel vision in decision-making which may prevent practitioners seeing the whole picture of possible responses, choosing instead to focus on limited options. A close-up on a segment of a photo next to a wide-angled lens view of the same view represents this well. Practice educators have had some fun choosing photos where the close-up reveals a very different story from the whole. Munro also refers to short-sighted decision-making where practitioners are too concerned with the immediate future rather than the long view. Again, a creative practice educator could produce an image contrasting the here and now and the long-view, both backward and forward facing, for example a teenager shown both as a child and also an older parent.

## **Exercises to develop on-action reflection**

### **Reflective journal**

The reflective journal is absolutely key in developing reflective practice. However loudly the student may groan when the practice educator reminds her to make regular entries into the reflective diary, it is important the practice educator keeps asking the student about it. Systematic reflection is a habit that is easily lost when a student becomes a busy qualified practitioner, and it is important it becomes embedded into the budding professional's work culture at this early stage.

A new student may need some structure to help them order their thoughts. This can be devised between the practice educator and the student within the session, as there is no one 'best' structure. A typical structure might be three sections – 'what happened?' 'analysis' and 'action'. Parker's (2010) structure pays attention to thought, feelings and behaviour and also knowledge used, and learning achieved. He suggests the following: brief description of significant event; what was I feeling at the time? How did I react and why/ What was informing my decisions?; On reflection I achieved/learned; What could I have done differently?; What are my future learning needs? (2010, p.39)

Some students will say they don't find writing the best way to help them reflect and it is true that everyone has different preferred ways of reflecting. However, it has been shown that writing is an effective way of learning as the act of writing transforms incoherent thoughts into meanings. It is also instrumental in the development of professional identity as the writer is engaged in the 'making sense' of the interaction between the self and professional practice (see Rai's 2006 work on writing as professional development).

### **Critical incident analysis**

Another way to encourage students to channel their reflective processes on practice in a structured way is to suggest they undertake a critical incident analysis on a recent event. The term 'critical' here refers to the skills of critical reflection rather than the incident itself needing to be 'critical'. Indeed, the incident chosen for analysis could be very commonplace and it could be a positive rather than negative or troubling event. Critical

incident analyses are usually written up but may also be presented verbally in supervision. As Green Lister and Crisp note typically critical incident analyses consist of 'a description of an event, reflections based on an analysis of practice and, then, a critical re-examination of existing and developing knowledge, skills and values' (2007, p.48).

A framework designed to encourage detailed and structured reflection would include questions under the following headings: Account of the incident; Initial Responses to the Incident; Issues and dilemmas highlighted by the incident; Learning derived; and Outcomes for the various participants and also the practitioner. The practice educator could alter the questions asked according to what aspects of the student were in need of development, for example, focus could be given to the role, the legislation or the emotions involved. It is the framework which is important as it aids structure. CIAs can help the integration of theory into practice and facilitate the scrutiny of values and assumptions. Practice educators have commented that they are useful but can be time-consuming, and so best to be used when there has been a specific occurrence with much learning potential.

Mirsky's (2012) work engagingly titled 'Getting to Know the Piece of Fluff in our Ears' focuses on analysing students' personal narratives to develop their cultural self-awareness. Mirsky also emphasises the importance of being mindful of the theoretical underpinnings of analyses.

### **Exercises to develop in-action reflection: Capturing own and others' internal conversations**

To develop 'in-action' reflection a student can observe an experienced practitioner, perhaps for example conducting a home visit with a service user. The student should take notes and then subsequently 'interview' the practitioner trying to understand what sense the practitioner made of the interview as it unfolded and why she made the interventions she did. In this way the practitioner makes explicit her internal reflective processes, a retrospective analysis of her internal in-action conversations. The student will find s/he will need to think carefully about the questions s/he asks the practitioner to elicit the information s/he wants- after all, these reflections and subsequent actions will happen fleetingly, simultaneously and perhaps out of awareness. The student will need help from the practice educator

preparing for this task, and returning to the models of reflective practice outlined above, and the questions attached to the different parts of the model will be instructive.

In-action reflection can also be captured through the use of recording equipment. Once permission has been sought from the service user, the student can record the interview and then play sections back in the supervision session stopping every now and again to explain to the practice educator the thoughts and feelings that were in the student's head at the time.

This could also be written up as a process record. This is a record usually divided into two columns, with the first column containing the dialogue either as a detailed narrative but preferably as direct speech, and the second column contains the student's thoughts and feelings at the time of the interview. A third column to identify different skills used can also be drawn. Where the student is unable to record the session with a digital audio recorder, if they write up the session immediately afterwards they will be surprised at how much they can remember. The process record is a very effective tool for use in supervision sessions. A criticism is that it can be time-consuming, but the student would only have to record and reflect on a small section of the interview for much learning to be derived.

## **Why might some students struggle with reflective practice?**

As experienced practice supervisors and educators know, some students are harder to engage in reflective processes than others. So why do some students struggle with this crucial aspect of the work? Firstly, as I hope I have shown, reflection occurs at many different levels. If a practice educator has encouraged their student to be systematic and structured about the way they reflect so that, for example, the student has got into the habit of returning from every visit and reflecting on how well they did, what they learned and what they might do differently next time, then that is a healthy start.

With many students, the practice educator will be able to engage in reflective discussions in which the student connects with and explores some very deep feelings and beliefs. With other students, this never quite happens. What makes the difference?

Being a part of any group which has its own value system and ways of

doing things will be a significant factor. A student may belong to a family who is reticent about feelings and therefore she may find it hard to even connect with her feelings, let alone express and examine them. Structural factors such as class, gender, ethnicity may play a part, too.

Fook and Askeland (2007, p.523) have noted that critical reflection can challenge norms 'regarding acceptable forms of interpersonal relating, especially regarding personal privacy'. So for some students it may be important to keep up appearances that everything is fine. Too much probing stirs up vulnerabilities and anxieties. Some students will find it more challenging than others to acknowledge mistakes they have made believing mistakes should remain hidden and not exposed for scrutiny.

Some cultures value silence and privacy more than others, and students may experience the invitation for self disclosure as too personal and intrusive. Fook and Askeland write: 'It appears to contravene unspoken cultures around what is regarded as polite public behaviour'. They also note that ways of speaking and the use of silence vary between countries:

For example, for Japanese people silence may imply truthfulness, social discretion, embarrassment or defiance as well as a way of gaining social acceptance or to avoid penalty. Even when asked a question, they may prefer to remain silent until they have heard others' opinions. For Chinese people silence may indicate politeness to the speaker or reflection and assessment of the situation (2007, p.523)

So, a practice educator will need to be aware of different cultural factors which may be hindering the student's ability to open up both herself and her work to scrutiny. But of course for any student who is being encouraged to examine their deeply held beliefs it is going to be anxiety provoking. It is our value systems that make us who we are and this self scrutiny can unsettle the sense of identity. It can also raise feelings of disloyalty as the student is encouraged to question beliefs that have come down through parents and communities. An added complication is that the world of social work practice is one where uncertainty and questioning abounds, so the student is being encouraged to prise themselves free of certain tightly held assumptions about themselves and their world and swap them for a place that looks a lot less secure and known.

Practice supervisors and educators are only students a few years along the road, and just as students may feel threatened by exposing deeply held personal norms, so might the practice educator. If this is the case, the

practice educator may not be providing the necessary cues to stimulate the student's reflective processes, either consciously or out of awareness. If a practice educator is finding her student hard work in this respect, it would be important to reflect on why this might be with a supervisor who can help the practice educator take an objective look. It might even be worth the practice educator writing a process record of the session with her student to throw some light on what goes on there.

## **Conclusion**

I have suggested in this article that helping students become critically reflective is challenging and field educators' role may be more about establishing the foundations rather than producing critically reflective high flyers. Students should leave their qualifying programmes with an understanding of what critical and reflective reasoning is, and to be able to practice in a structured and systematic way drawing on the full range of knowledge that they have at their disposal. That source of knowledge will continue to expand in first year of qualified practice and beyond.

Practice educators have a crucial role in helping students develop the personal knowledge created through deep reflection and this can only occur when students feel safe and supported. As well as establishing a practice teaching relationship conducive to deep learning, there is information to share and exercises to use in the making of the reflective student. The British Association of Social Work's assessment framework, the Professional Capability Framework states that at the end of the final placement a student should be able to apply imagination, creativity and curiosity to practice and my hope is that this article will help the practice educator be creative and curious in the teaching task.

## **Note**

A version of this article was first published on *Community Care Inform* ([www.ccinform.co.uk](http://www.ccinform.co.uk)). It is reproduced with permission of the publisher.

## References:

- Bhuyan, R, Bejan, R. and Jeyapal, D. (2017), Social workers' perspectives on social justice in social work education: when mainstreaming social justice masks structural inequalities. *Social Work Education*, 36, 4, 373-390
- Borton, T. (1970) *Reach Touch and Teach*, London: Hutchinson
- Davys, A. and Beddoe, L. (2009) The reflective learning model: Supervision of social work students, *Social Work Education* iFirst Article, pp. 1-15
- Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. London: John Wiley.
- Fook, J. and Askeland G. (2007) Challenges of critical reflection: 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained'. *Social Work Education*, 26, 5, 520-533
- Green Lister, P. and Crisp, B. (2007) Critical incident analyses: A practice learning tool for students and practitioners. *Practice*, 19, 1, 47-60
- Kolb, D (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall
- Maynard, S.P, Mertz, L.K.P. and Fortune, A.E. (2015) Off-site supervision in social work education: What makes it work? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51, 519-534
- Mirsky, J. (2012), Getting to know the piece of fluff in our ears: Expanding practitioners' cultural self-awareness, *Social Work Education*, 32, 5, 626-638
- Morley, C. (2008) Teaching critical practice: Resisting structural domination through critical reflection. *Social Work Education*, 27, 4, 407-421
- Munro, E. (2008) *Effective Child Protection*. London: Sage
- Parker, J. (2010) *Effective Practice Learning in Social Work*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Exeter: Learning Matters
- Payne, M, Adams, R. and Dominelli, L. (2009) *Critical Practice in Social Work*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Basingstoke:Palgrave Macmillan
- Rai, L. (2006) owning (up to) reflective writing in social work education. *Social Work Education*, 25, 8,785-797
- Rolfe, G, Jasper, M. and Freshwater, D. (2011) *Critical Reflection in Practice: Generating knowledge for care*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Basingstoke:Palgrave Macmillan
- Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner How Professionals Think In Action*, Aldershot, Ashgate
- Thompson, S. and Thompson, N.(2008), *The Critically Reflective Practitioner*. Basingstoke:Palgrave Macmillan
- Zuchowski, I. (2015), Being the university: liaison persons'. Reflections on placements with off-site supervisors. *Social Work Education*, 34, 3, 301-314