

# Reflective Practice

a course for social workers and managers

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## Critical Reflection & Analysis

*a recognized professional capability*

Social workers critically reflect on their practice, use analysis, apply professional judgement and reasoned discernment. We identify, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence. We continuously evaluate our impact and benefit to service users. We use supervision and other support to reflect on our work and sustain our practice and wellbeing. We apply our critical reflective skills to the context and conditions under which we practise. Our reflection enables us to challenge ourselves and others, and maintain our professional curiosity, creativity and self-awareness.

**BUT DO WE? REALLY?**

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## Reflection....

An overused and under-defined term?

What is reflection?	Why is it important?
How do we do it?	What gets in the way? What do we do instead?

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## Ruch's four levels of reflection (2000)

<p><b>Technical</b></p> <p>Pragmatic. Compares performance with knowledge of 'what should be done'</p>	<p><b>Practical</b></p> <p>The practitioner's self evaluation, insight and learning. Moving from 'reflection on action' to 'reflection in action'</p>
<p><b>Process</b></p> <p>Awareness of the impact of unconscious processes and intuitive responses on professional judgement</p>	<p><b>Critical</b></p> <p>Questioning the influence of power relationships and assumptions underpinning our view of the world</p>

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## Ruch's four levels of reflection (2000)

Technical/surface	Compliance	Normative – what <u>should</u> be done?	Organisation
Practical	Problem solving	Descriptive, pragmatic What is happening; How can it be solved?	Intervention
Process	Self awareness	Interpretive Why do things happen/ what is my part in it?	Individual
Critical	Transforming	Critical – why are we doing this (not that); what larger purpose do we serve?	Society

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**Reflective practitioners** possess a rich mixture of normative, interpretative and critical theory which allows them to continuously question and revise their theories, as well as pay attention to the moral and ethical aspects of practice

CWDC 2009

**Reflection** is a prerequisite to being an effective social worker as it requires an approach that questions our thoughts, experiences and actions. Horner 2004 This enables us to learn from experience and enhances our knowledge and skills. The important part is that through reflection, as social workers, we can change how we think, feel and behave to better meet the needs of service users and carers Constable 2007

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**The reflective practitioner** ... is aware of the socially situated relationship with their clients; has a clear understanding of their role and purpose; who understands themselves as a participant whose actions and interactions are part of the social work process; who is capable of analysing situations and evidence, with an awareness of the way their own experience affects this process; who can identify the intellectual and practice processes involved in assessment and intervention; who is aware of the assumptions underlying the ways they make sense of practice situations; and who is able to do so in relation to the nature and purpose of their practice. *Sheppard (1998)*

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### **Reflection vs Reflexivity**

- ✧ Reflection=a process of reflecting on practice
- ✧ Reflexivity=more of a stance of being able to locate oneself in the picture. To take a reflexive stance you need to be able to appreciate how your self and social position influences your thinking and actions *Fook (2012)*

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## Critical Reflection

- A dynamic process that explores how people feel, uncovers assumptions, oppressive power structures and challenges the status quo Bell, 2012
- Learning from/making (positive) meaning of experience Boud, Mezirow
- Process of unearthing deeper assumptions Schon (1983)
- Critical reflective practice entails insight, explanatory and creative thinking for each unique piece of practice. Over time, social work practitioners should become highly skilled in this so that it is also possible to reflect-in-action as well as reflecting-on-action. This ability to reflect in action is the core of integrated critical reflection College of Social Work Sep 2012

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**The internal supervisor** .... observing ourselves in relationship with the service user, monitoring the nature and quality of our work and continually reviewing how our self if both contribution to the work and being affected by it  
Casement, 1985

Because it requires such close and highly charged relationships with other people, a large proportion of the work involves experiencing a range of emotions which many others do not experience at work, or do not have to engage with and work with. We not only experience these emotions, but we need to regard them as material, as data-they are part of what is available for us to work with. Ward 2010

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## Why is it useful?

- It raises awareness
- It challenges accepted situations
- Creates alternatives
- Offers multi-perspectives
- Provides a greater depth of analysis and learning Bell 2012

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## Using knowledge critically

- Not accepting the situation at face value and looking beneath the surface to see what assumptions and forms of reasoning are influencing the circumstances (*critical depth*); and
- Locating what is happening in its wider social context-that is, seeing what processes are occurring at a micro level as part of a more holistic and political picture at the macro level (*critical breadth*) Thompson & Thompson (2008)

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## Professional Dangerousness

- Can occur when workers responsible for child protection leave a child at risk of significant harm as a consequence of their assumptions, attitudes or behaviour. *Wallis 2010*
- The process by which individual workers or multi-disciplinary networks can, mostly unwittingly, act in such a way as to collude with, maintain or increase the dangerous dynamics of the family *Reder and Duncan, 1999*

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## Critical reflection involves

- **Learning** from experience and creating practice theory and meaning from it
- **Ongoing** scrutiny of practice and examination of assumptions embedded in actions or experience
- **Linking** of these assumptions with many different origins (personal, emotional, social, cultural, historical, political)
- **Review** and re-evaluation of these assumptions according to relevant criteria (depending on context, purpose etc.)
- **Reworking** of concepts and practise based on re-evaluation *Fook (2006)*

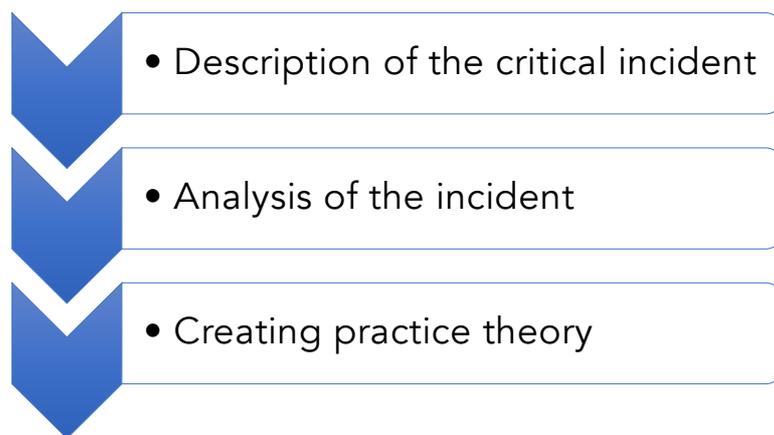
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### 3 possible outcomes of critical reflection

1. Might be **action**-you will literally do something different
2. Might be **changed perspective** which subtly alters course of events
3. Might **not be anything**. I.e. I am making an informed decision to continue as I am. The outcome may be the same but you arrive at it in a robust way. Your hypothesis/argument will stand up to scrutiny Bell 2012

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### Critical Incident Technique



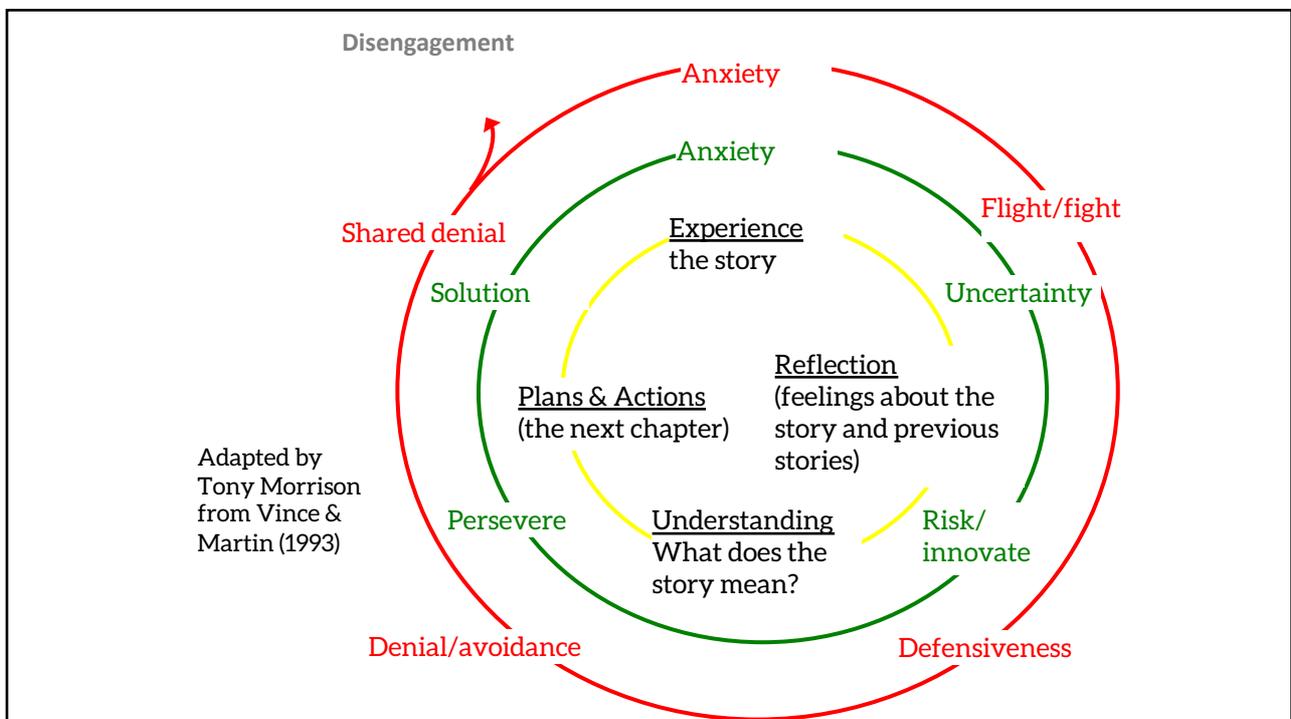
Ruch 2012

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## Barriers to Reflective Practice

- In order to practice in relationship-based ways, social workers have to be alert...not only to their own personal defensive strategies but also to the prevalence of organisational defences which can distance the professional relationships *Ruch, 2012*
- Strong support and constructive challenge of front line practitioners will not be possible if the agency context is one of overwhelming workloads with a limited capacity, or lack of permission to invest in relationship building or critical reflection. *Brandon et al (2012)*
- The culture of targets and audit in the delivery of public services....has made the effective delivery of humane and responsive services more difficult to achieve and maintain *Dartington 2010*

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## Ideas to overcome barriers....

- Within the supervision process, specific meetings three times a year aimed primarily at learning from critical reflection
- Reflective Supervision group
- Action Learning Set
- Use of VERP (Video Enhanced Reflective Practice) or similar method
- Reflective journal
- Mastering a critically reflective stance-always curious and always questioning

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## The importance of open vs. closed knowledge

### Open knowledge is:

- Informed
- Sensitive
- Creative
- Rewarding
- Challenging of stereotypes and discriminatory assumptions
- A sound basis for working in partnership
- Empowering (of ourselves and others)
- Ethical; and
- Increases the chances of being effective

### Closed knowledge is:

- Uninformed
- Potentially insensitive
- Stifling
- Unrewarding
- Potentially reliant on stereotypes and discriminatory assumptions
- A dubious basis for working in partnership
- Potentially disempowering (of ourselves and others)
- Potentially unethical; and it
- Decreases the chances of being effective

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## Critically reflective questions

- What assumptions am I making? How do my implicit assumptions differ from my explicit ones?
- Where have they come from?
- How do they impact on my task and role?
- How does this change my understanding & how can I use this awareness to change my practice?
- How do I influence what I see?
- How does what I am looking for influence what I find? Fook (2006)

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## Cultural Review

1. What do I know about individuals/families from this particular cultural background or life experience?
2. Where does my knowledge come from?
3. What prejudices may I hold (positively or negatively)?
4. What do I know/expect about the lives/needs of children in such context?
5. What might surprise me about this family and why?
6. How might this family/community/children perceive me? What impact might the assessment have on the family's life?
7. What agency norms/practices do I bring about 'good parenting', risk, thresholds and resources constraints?

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