Good judgment comes from experience.
And often experience comes from bad judgment”

(Rita Mae Brown)

Critical Reflection:
choosing the path of most resistance

Robyn Kemp

ThemPra Social Pedagogy
Community Interest Company
Social Pedagogy & critical reflection: an historic and a contemporary partnership

- 18th century Johann Pestalozzi – observation and reflection as essential components of the education of head, heart and hands
- 19th century, Karl Mager – social pedagogy as ‘the theory of all the personal, social and moral education in a given society’
- Friedrich Diesterweg – ‘It forbids: arbitrary assumptions and manipulations of human nature; any encouragement to act blindly and mechanically; any kind of drill; rote learning; uniformity; force-feeding with subject matter that is not understood etc.’
- 20th century, Paulo Freire – promoted praxis (action that is informed) and the ‘problem-posing’ concept of education: ‘must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world.’
Modern Social Pedagogy

Academic discipline

Branch of research

Profession

SCIENCE

EDUCATION

PRACTICE

Prof Hamalainen, 2014,
Developing Modern Social Pedagogy

Badry & Knapp, 2003
Defining Critical Reflection

Oxford English Dictionary

Reflection - ‘Serious thought or consideration’

Critical – ‘Involving the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgement’
UK descriptions of critical reflection

- Jan Fook and Fiona Gardner, 2007

‘unsettling individual assumptions to bring about social changes.’

Emphasises that:

- Reflection is deeper than popular notions of thinking
- Critical reflection is based on an understanding of the individual in societal context and links between the individual and society
- Critical reflection is both a theory and a practice
- Critical reflection links changed awareness with changed action’ (p16)
UK descriptions of critical reflection

- Gillian Ruch, 2007
  ‘Critical reflection ... seeks to transform practice by challenging the existing social, political and cultural conditions that promote certain ‘constitutive interests’ at the expense of others and the structural forces that distort or constrain professional practice.’ (p661)

- Neil Thompson, 2008
  ‘looking beneath the surface of the presenting problem and situation (critical depth), and more widely at the social circumstances in which practice is taking place (critical breadth)’. (p1)
Contexts of social pedagogy and critical reflection

- Societal
- Geographical
- Political
- Cultural
- Economic
- Institutional
- Organisational
- Individual

Empowerment
Power
Participation
Control
Rights
Dominance
Influence
Learning
Relationships

Critical Reflection
Why should we critically reflect?
1. Professional responsibility

Centrality of ethical practice in social pedagogy

Code of SW ethics, Ireland & UK

- Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons / human rights (UK)
- Pursuit of social justice (UK)
- Integrity of professional practice / professional integrity (UK)
- Confidentiality & competence in professional practice

We have power and must understand and use it responsibly
2. To learn, adjust & develop

The Learning Zone Model, Senninger (2000)
3. Lazy brains!

The human condition is predisposed to take the *path of least resistance*

**Automaticity** ‘the control of one's internal psychological processes by external stimuli and events in one's immediate environment, often without knowledge or awareness of such control..., despite good intentions’, Bargh & Williams, 2006:1

**Social constructivism**

‘we don’t see the world as it is, we see it as we are’ Anais Nin

‘the hearer, not the speaker, determines the meaning’ Heinz Von Foerster
Influences on practice
Some societal level influences

- **Neoliberalism:** ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey, 2005:2).

- **Consumerism:** the promotion of the consumer’s interests; the theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable; a preoccupation with and an inclination toward the buying of stuff and things

- **Individualism:** favouring freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control.

- **Communication:** emails, video conferencing, social networks

And more...
Some institutional level influences

- New Public Management – emphasis on the 3Ms:
  - Markets: free trade in public services; commodification of children
  - Managers: top down managerialism, increased bureaucracy
  - Measurements: outcomes/target-driven policy & practice
- Recession & austerity: increased need vs decreasing funds
- Dominance of certain theoretical perspectives, e.g. attachment, behaviourism
- Reductionism, simplification – ‘social workers should do the simple things properly’ Laming, 2003
Individual level influences

- Professional
- Personal
- Others & own needs
- Private
- Own needs
- Other’s needs
Some individual level influences

- Organisational targets, goals, values, preferences
  - Culture, leadership styles, systems, structures, methods and practices
- Workforce morale, perceptions of own and others’ power, status, position “first, cover your back”
- Organisational and personal image of the child and social welfare client
- Physical and emotional states, e.g. hunger, fatigue, stress
- Own experiences, values, cultures, prejudices, assumptions, preferences
- Our ability to observe without judgement
- And more...
“By asking me the question, you’re telling me I’m wrong!”

How can we develop as critically reflective practitioners, organisations and educationalists?
The learning zone and the sea
Social pedagogical approach to critical reflection

- Central values include *Equality, Respect, Empathy, Curiosity*
- Process of deconstruction for holistic scrutiny
  - Actively concerned with the relational
  - Asks critical questions, analyses assumptions, challenges prejudices
- Participants are open to:
  - New information & learning
  - Accommodating a range of perspectives alongside own
  - Making and owning mistakes
  - Letting go of old ideas
  - Sitting with uncertainty & complexity
- Culminates in identifying learning and the associated necessary changes to practice
Critical Topics & Questions

- Power – who has it, who doesn’t, who wants/needs more? *the most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any* – Alice Walker
- Why were certain theories, models or methods chosen?
- Whose perspective dominates and why?
- Joy *(is relational vitamins, Berit Bae)* – how does the person experience joy, what opportunities have been created?
- How have I listened? Have I fully utilised all my senses?
- How could relationships be affected by this course of action?
- What damage /unintended consequences could result?
- What roles do optimism and hope play in how we are talking and thinking about this person/case?
I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear.

Rosa Parks
References

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• Mager, 1844
• Friere, 1970
• Bargh & Williams
• Kahneman
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