Reflective Practice in Social Work

The mistakes on social intervention

Theory and *practice*.

Part 2

*Alessandro Sicora – alessandro.sicora@unical.it*
Strategies for a reflective social worker

- Unit 4. Reflective frameworks
- Unit 5. Reflective writing
- Unit 6. Use of criticism
- Conclusion (The end?)
Unit. 4. Questions, questions, questions... (reflexive frameworks)
Strategies for a structured reflection

• Borton’s key questions
• Gibbs’s framework
• Johns's model of structured reflection
Borton’s key questions

• *what*?
  – What did it happen? What did I feel? ....

• *so what*?
  – So what is the importance of this? So what did I learn?......

• *now what*?
  – Now what should I do? Now what should be the consequencies?
Gibbs's framework

• Gibbs's framework has achieved the status of a seminal theory in reflective practice and it would be difficult to find any paper or textbook on reflective practice written in the past 15 years that did not draw on his work in some way. Gibbs's cycle consists of six stages that guide you through the stages of the reflective process by asking a series of clue questions.
Gibbs reflective cycle

1. DESCRIPTION (What happened?)

2. FEELINGS (what were you thinking and feeling?)

3. EVALUATION (what was good and bad about the experience?)

4. ANALYSIS (what sense can you make of the situation?)

5. CONCLUSION (what else could you have done?)

6. ACTION PLAN (if it arose again what would you do?)
Stage 1: Description of the event

• Where were you?
• Who else was there?
• Why were you there?
• What were you doing?
• What were the other people doing?
• What was the context of the event?
• What happened?
• What was your part in this?
• What parts did the other people play?
• What was the result?
Stage 2: Feelings

• What were you thinking at the time?
• What were you thinking about when it happened?
• How did it make you feel then?
• What did other people's actions/words make you think?
• What did these make you feel?
• How did you feel about the outcome of the event?
• What do you think about it now?
• List the emotions that you have gone through from the start to the finish of the event
• Which of these is most significant or important to you?
Stage 3: evaluation

• What was good about the experience?
• What was bad about the experience, or didn't go so well?
Stage 4: Analysis

• What went well?
• What did I do well?
• What did others do well?
• What went wrong, or did not turn out the way I thought it should?
• In what ways did I contribute to this?
• In what ways did others contribute to this?
• Why might these things have happened?
Stage 5: Conclusion

What else could you have done?

• We have explored the issue from different angles and have a great deal more information on which to base our judgement

• It is here that we are likely to develop insight into our own and other people's behaviour in terms of how they contributed to the outcome of the event.
Stage 6: Action plan

If it arose again what would you do?
Johns's model of structured reflection (Palmer et al. 1994)

• Core question - What information do I need to access in order to learn through this experience?
Johns's model of structured reflection
(Palmer et al. 1994)

1. Description of the experience

• Phenomenon - describe the here and now experience

• Causal- what essential factors contributed to this experience?

• Context - what are the significant background factors to this experience?

• Clarifying - what are the key processes (far reflection) in this experience?
Johns's model of structured reflection (Palmer et al. 1994)

2. Reflection

• What was I trying to achieve?
• Why did I intervene as I did?
• What were the consequences of my actions far:
  - Myself?
  - The patient/family?
  - The people I work with?
• How did I feel about this experience when it was happening?
• How did the patient feel about it?
• How do I know how the client felt about it?
3. Influencing factors

• What internal factors influenced my decision-making?
• What external factors influenced my decision-making?
• What sources of knowledge did/should have influenced my decision-making?
Johns's model of structured reflection
(Palmer et al. 1994)

4. Could I have dealt with the situation better?
   • What other choices did I have?
   • What would be the consequences of these choices?
Johns's model of structured reflection
(Palmer et al. 1994)

5. Learning

• How do I feel now about this experience?
• How have I made sense of this experience in light of past experiences and future practice?
• How has this experience changed my ways of knowing
  - Empirics
  - Aesthetics
  - Ethics
  - Personal
Unit 5. Reflective writing
Strategies for reflective writing

• analiticic strategies
• creative strategies
analitic strategies

- Journal
- critical incident analyses (dialogue with questions and answers).
- “making a case” (with the purpose of exploring alternative ways of looking at the critical incident examined)
- on-going record
- SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).
- three-a-day (eg, "three things I have learned from this day ..." or, "three recommendations for the future that I learned from this experience are ...."
- page-a-day record of experiences
- ....
creative strategies

• Write a letter or an e-mail (without sending it)
• Write to someone, (i.e. to your mother or a close friend)
• Write as if you were another person
• Writing as if you were a journalist
• Telling a story, possibly a fictional story
• Poems
• Write an article in a particular style
• Construct mental/conceptual maps
• ....
Unit 6. “Criticism” as learning opportunity
Starting with a smile...

The only way to avoid criticism is to do nothing, say nothing, be nothing (E. Hubbard). Making mistakes is human, to blame others is even more human (Jacob's law).
What to do if you see a colleague doing something wrong?

“Talk about it. There are moments of spontaneous meeting, moments of structured meetings, of supervision. There are also personal moments. Maybe your colleague is in trouble. It happened to me. And I told him: you should perhaps take a step back. So you can help him to avoid major disasters. Saying it is not easy but in the long run, I think, this maintains professional loyalty” (social worker Elena).
Criticism as an opportunity for organizational learning

• Criticism as an opportunity
• Types of Critical
• How to deal with criticism
• How to criticise
Critics can be:

• general failure that leads to the rejection of ourselves and the activation of protective mechanisms

or

• a learning tool to be used without too much stress and with the freedom to accept or reject the criticism
Types of criticism

• relevant criticism
  « useful to correct mistakes

• unjustified criticism
  « questions:
    – do many people criticise me?
    – does it come from competent people?
    – are known and reasonable the standards of evaluation?
    – critics is objective?

• vague criticism
  « to be turned into something more concrete
Assertive strategies to deal with criticism

1. surprise the other person
2. admit the truth
3. ask for feedback
1. Surprise the other person

The serene recognition of the possibility that in the criticism received there may be some truth helps to:

• receive criticism without becoming anxious or becoming defensive,
• eliminate the effects on us of unjustified criticism.

Possible answers:
“You could be right about...”, “You have a point...”, “What you say is not unfounded..”, “Maybe I could...”
1. Surprise the other person - examples

Example 1
Criticism: “You are always late!”
Reply: “Maybe this time I am a bit late...”

Example 2
Criticism: “Whenever I talk about a mistakes of yours, you get on the defensive”
Reply: “You could be right about my tendency. I do not like to react like this when I make mistakes...”
2. Admit the truth

Accept mistakes and failures without too much excuse for them helps to desensitize to criticism (as it allows to recognize errors as what they are) and to look ahead, instead of falling into depression and self-criticism.

Possible answers:

• "You're right. I have not completed the report in time. So I am planning next month to deliver the report on time."

• "You're right. I probably did not pay enough attention. Do you have any advice for me to do better?"
3. Ask for a specific feedback

• Active listening is a stimulus to those who criticizes you and gives you information you can use and stops the complaints on critics.

Possible answers:
• "What have I done wrong, specifically?"
• "If you were in my shoes, what would you have done differently?"
• "I am not sure of having understood what is your point of view on the problem. Please would you do me some examples?"
• “Is this all you think about how I can improve my performance?”
3. Ask for a specific feedback - examples

Vague criticism
• “The report you presented is very careless”
• “You don't like working in time, don't you?”

Assertive replies
• “What specifically is careless?”
• What made you think so?
Obstacles to criticism

• “Syndrome of the mind": we take for granted that others understand what we expect from them
• we do not like receiving criticism and therefore we avoid doing them
• we expect that the problems resolve themself
• we think it is good for nothing (but beware of "self-fulfilling prophecy")
• .... (Suggest other factors)
Factors that make criticism really effective

• In communication always distinguish the plan of the content from the plan of the relationship

• *soft with people, hard on problems*

• We want to solve the problem, not to mortufy the person (*but are we really sure of this?*)
Make criticism with the assertive method DSSC

- Describe
- State
- Specify
- Confirm
Method DSSR: 1. describe

**To do**

- objectively describe the behavior of the other
- use concrete terms
- specifically describe time, place and action
- describe the action, not the "why"

**Not to do**

- describe your emotional reaction to such behavior
- use vague and abstract words
- generalize (ie never/always)/
- make assumptions about the reasons or motives
Method DSSR: 2. state

To do
• declare your feelings
• express them calmly
• declare what you feel just in term of achievement the desired objective
• point directly to the specific behavior to criticize

Not to do
• deny them
• not to control your emotional reactions
• declare it to repel or attack the other person
• criticize the entire personality of the other person
Method DSSR: 3. specify

**To do**

- request the modification of a behavior
- ask for a small change
- specify the concrete actions that you want to delete or change
- specify (if appropriate) which behavior you want to change and reach an agreement

**Not to do**

- mention only a change
- ask for too many or too far-reaching changes
- require changes in personality traits
- believe that only the other should change
Method DSSR: 4. confirm

To do
• say you believe in the ability of the other to make the change
• end on a positive note

Not to do
• reveal your doubts about his ability to change
• end on a negative note
Method DSSR - example

• In a hospital you see that two workers are chatting rather than looking after the patients.

  A. “I wish that you give a bit 'more of attention to patients'

  B. “"Gina and Maria, I am concerned that patients feel ignored because of conversations between you. I'd rather prefer you turned immediately to them. I am convinced that this will help us gain a good reputation and I hope I can count on you to become two of the best wokers of this hospital”

  C. "Gina and Maria, I'm going to report to our Director on your behavior, if you continue to ignore patients'
Conclusion: the end?

Reflection, and above all reflection on our mistakes, is not only technically possible but is also ethically desirable because it improves the quality of services provided by we social workers. Activity is fed by a permanent tension to achieve something impossible. That is the total elimination of any mistakes or the attempt to reach the unreachable horizon. It is a journey that may not lead to any goal, but the ultimate destination of which is undoubtedly our personal and professional development, the achievement of sharper eyes to look at reality in a more pervasive way and of more capable hands to shape more effective interventions.