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DEMYSTIFYING CRITICAL REFLECTION

Improving Pedagogy and Practice
with Legitimation Code Theory

Legitimation Code Theory



4

CRITICAL REFLECTION AND CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK

Describing disciplinary values and knowledge

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Introduction

Critical reflection is a much-championed academic practice across higher education that is often presented as a university-wide graduate capability (Bosanquet 2011). It is also widely recognized as a professional skill, including in social work where it is included within the practice standards of the profession (c.f. Coulshed & Orme 2012; Australian Association of Social Workers 2013). Empirical studies, focussed on how students learn to be critically reflective thinkers, have demonstrated that comprehending the complex processes involved in critical reflection, is a challenge for most (Ross 2014; Newcomb et al. 2018), including social work students (Whitaker & Reimer 2017). In addition, research into its professional and pedagogic application has critiqued this as piecemeal and lacking integration even within disciplines (Fook et al. 2016), including social work (Fook et al. 2006).

This chapter aims to make explicit the principles underlying the theory and practice of critical reflection as outlined in social work textbooks, including how these vary according to the social work tradition being drawn upon. It begins with an outline of the academic fields that intersect in critical reflection in social work, including two competing paradigms within this – a conventional ‘individual-liberalist’ paradigm and a ‘critical social work’ paradigm. It then outlines the key theories, stances, processes and practices emphasized as constituting critical reflection. The recontextualization of this knowledge for students in social work textbooks is then described and analyzed through a close examination of how critical reflection is described in nine social work textbooks used in Australian social work courses. This analysis is facilitated using concepts from the Specialization dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). This enables an explicit description and analysis of the textbook principles that underlie

critical reflection, including key theories to be applied, dispositions to be fostered, practice knowledge to be developed, and particularly in critical social work, actions to be aimed for. It reveals that critical reflection as outlined to students requires them to develop both insight into particular social and practice theories, and also an ‘unsettled’ disposition towards social structures, which is ultimately purposed toward shifting social workers’ perceptions of their capacity to act.

Reviewing the literature: Critical reflection in social work

While there is no official definition of critical reflection in social work, the most widely cited theorist is Jan Fook, who with her colleagues has defined critical reflection as “the process by which adults identify the assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins of the assumptions, question the meaning of the assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting” (Fook et al. 2006: 12). In social work education critical reflection is central to students’ preparation for practice, providing a bridge between theories learned in the classroom and actions of practitioners in the field (Argyis & Schön 1974; Fook & Gardner 2006; Noble et al. 2016). For social workers working within the critical tradition, this also includes working towards a social justice agenda (Briskman et al. 2009; Noble et al. 2016; Hicks & Costello 2023). Discipline-oriented scholarship on critical reflection in social work outlines this as a professional practice that is both a theory and a process (Fook & Gardner 2007; Pockett et al. 2011). But it has also been critiqued as being notionally imprecise (Brookfield 2009; Gardner 2019) and lacking a theoretical (Iyer 1999) and empirical basis for practice (Fook et al. 2006).

Scholarship on teaching and learning critical reflection in social work has focussed on the challenges of teaching this practice and students’ readiness for learning. Teaching challenges include selecting between differing models for critical reflection (Carroll 2010; Hickson 2011; Noble et al. 2016), and a lack of clarity about how to effectively integrate its practice into social work education (Gardner 2019). Integrating ‘criticality’ into critical reflection (Theobald et al. 2017) has been complicated by differing interpretations of what the ‘critical’ in ‘critical reflection’ encompasses, with meanings variously including ‘analytic, openness, critique or using critical social theory’ (Theobald et al. 2017). The latter also intersects with other criticalities and critical practices in social work including critical theory, reflexivity, and critical social work (Noble et al. 2016; Webb 2019). Scholarship on student’s ‘readiness’ or ‘preparedness’ to learn critical reflection has focused on the effects of students’ differing degrees of personal or emotional maturity (Mezirow & Associates 2000: 11); emotional intelligence, personality, or unresolved past traumatic experiences (Gardner 2019; Yip 2006); personal histories (Fook & Gardner 2007); gender or cultural background (Sung & Leung 2006); capacity to see beyond the specifics of a situation (Giles & Pockett 2012); and degree of professional experience from

which to draw from in order to engage in the process (Redmond 2006). Such conceptions situate the learning challenges in learners themselves.

Learning materials aimed at supporting students' development of critical reflection skills often generalize both core steps in the process and the support of students from broad disciplinary areas. For instance, Aveyard, Sharp & Woolliams (2011) outline six questions for critical thinking in a book aimed at students in health and social care. But such breadth can obscure discipline-specific knowledge practices and concerns (Ryan 2013; Morley et al. 2020). As Tilakaratna & Szenes (2020) have demonstrated, there are discipline-specific clusters of meanings students are expected to demonstrate in critically reflective assessment in social work. This suggests generalized approaches to critical reflection may not be effective for students who lack the cultivated gaze of their discipline. Greater attention needs to be paid to the 'basis of selection' that defines critical reflection within disciplines, as it is presented to students. To support the academic success of social work students, therefore, a key project is to make the knowledge structures and practices of critical reflection in social work visible.

The context of critical reflection and critical traditions in social work

Social work is replete with criticality. In addition to critical reflection there is critical theory, critical practice, critical thinking, critical analysis and critical social work. These intersect with other critical practices such as reflexivity and anti-oppressive practice (Fook et al. 2006; Askeland & Fook 2009: 289; Brookfield 2009). To unpick these threads, this section outlines a context for critical reflection in social work including as it is practiced in the tradition of critical social work.

Social work is both a discipline and a practice with localized interpretations (Askeland & Fook 2009). This is illustrated in how it is defined by the International Federation of Social Workers (2014):

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.

That is, as a profession and an academic discipline social work draws from a varied multi-disciplinary theoretical base to inform a broad range of individual and collective practices that also has distinct regional variation.

Mapping has demonstrated social work has more than 250 theories in use (Fox & Horder 2017: 180), drawing from philosophy, the biological sciences, sociology, cultural studies, psychological sciences, life sciences, political science and economics (Chenoweth & McAuliffe 2017; Fox & Horder 2017; Watts & Hodgson 2019). In social work textbooks these are frequently expressed via long lists of theories that inform differing practice elements. A key effect is that a compromise is invariably created between engagement with the breadth of practice, versus depth of theory, with most texts directing students toward direct application of specific aspects of known theories and practices (Fox & Horder 2017: 178) rather than the underlying principles for selection.

Historically and contemporarily, social work is also a contested project with two key approaches broadly characterized as ‘conventional social work’ and ‘critical social work’ (Webb 2019). As Table 4.1 illustrates, conventional social work draws from liberal-individualism, placing greatest emphasis on individual client support and favouring what has been characterized as a ‘techno-rationalist’ approach to practice. Critical social work, emerging particularly from Canada and Australia (Ablett & Morley 2016), draws from intellectual movements focused on critiquing economic power and political domination, feminism, race theory, postmodernism and Marxist criticism (Allan 2009; Webb 2019: xxxi). It places a structural focus on the social and political context in people’s lives (Briskman et al. 2009: 4), emphasizing a commitment to personal and structural change (Pease & Nipperess 2016). Central to critical social work are notions that social work practice should be unsettled, questioning and conducted both ‘outside and against’ and ‘within and against’ the dominant system (Mullaly 2010), and committed to the progressive values of justice, equality and emancipation (Webb 2019). In this context, critical reflection is characterized as “a central and defining concept for critical social work” (Webb 2019: xxxvii) and a key practice for maintaining this perpetual questioning and critique.

TABLE 4.1 Conventional and critical social work

Knowledge bases & practices in conventional social work	Knowledge bases & practices in critical social work
Positivist Scientific approach Techno-rational liberal-individualism Individual-oriented practices: Case management Psychological, psychoanalytic Strengths-based practice Evidence-based practice	Modernist theories – human rights, Marxism, feminism Postmodern, post structural, deconstructive theories Critical theories of the Frankfurt school Intersectional theories – feminisms, race-theory, ability & ableism Socialist-collectivist practices: Anti-oppressive practice Anti-discriminatory practice Social & institutional change

(compiled from Allan 2009; Brookfield 2009; Briskmann et al. 2009; Ablett & Morley 2016; Pease & Nipperess 2016; Morley et al. 2019; Webb 2019)

Critically reflective practice in social work is commonly presented as tracing from Dewey's (1933) "active, persistent and careful consideration" of belief in the face of knowledge (in Fook et al. 2006: 9) in order to gain new understandings (Boud et al. 1985), with the purpose of shifting social workers' self-perception of their own positionality and role (Boyd & Fales 1983: 100; Webb 2019: xxxvii). Other frequent referents include Socrates, Schön (Argyris & Schön 1974; Schön 1983, 1987); Foucault, Habermas, Freire, Brookfield, Kely, Polanyi and Boud (in Redmond 2004; Fook et al. 2006). In critical social work, criticality becomes imbued in practice through analysis (Tripp 1993: 24–25), with a particular focus on uncovering and challenging the "power dynamics that frame both hegemonic assumptions and practice" (Brookfield 2009: 293). There is an accompanying expectation this will result in social action towards social justice (Brookfield 2005; Payne 2009).

These factors – social work tradition, the multiplicity of theoretical referents and implied analytic practices – have significance for the successful enactment of the practice of critical reflection in social work education. To successfully enact critical reflection students are expected to draw upon the 'correct' range of theories and stances, and cite the 'correct' critical traditions which then can be applied in a reflexive and evaluative process to their own reactions to specific instances they have experienced in field practice (Noble et al. 2016). However, social work textbooks have been critiqued for either generating long-lists of theories without explaining these in depth or providing theoretical detail without explaining the basis of selection (Fox & Horder 2017; Watts 2018). This chapter analyzes critical reflection as it is presented in social work textbooks in order to uncover the basis of selection of theories and stances in critical reflection that students are expected to enact.

Object and method of analysis

To understand the knowledge practices of critical reflection that social work students are expected to demonstrate, nine social work textbooks and instructional texts were analyzed to describe the key content and themes outlined as important for critical reflection (see Table 4.2). Textbooks represent one of the main opportunities for articulating the cumulative knowledge in a field and are understood as a place the specific knowledges practices of social work are selected, interpreted and produced as specific pedagogic discourses (Ephross & Reisch 1982; Bernstein 1990; Tompkins et al. 2006). They are generally regarded by students as representing authoritative sources of expert knowledge (Baretti 2016) and are frequently foundational sources for educators in critical course planning (Kramer et al. 2003).

Analysing a group of textbooks presents an opportunity to describe and analyze what is most settled in the social work educational field as to the key principles and practices of critical reflection students must learn. As critical reflection is enacted across social work curricula and tested through

TABLE 4.2 Textbooks and instructional texts analyzed

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- Chenoweth, Lesley & Donna McAuliffe. 2017. *The road to social work and human services practice*, 5th edn. Melbourne: Cengage.
- Fook, Jan & Fiona Gardner. 2007. *Practicing critical reflection: A resource handbook*. Maidenhead, UK & New York: Open University Press.
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- Pockett, Roselie, Linsey Napier & Roslyn Giles. 2011. Critical reflection for practice. In Agi O’Hara, & Rosalie Pockett (eds.), *Skills for human service practice: Working with individuals, groups and communities*, 2nd edn. 9–19. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Redmond, B. Bairbre. 2006. Starting as we mean to go on: Introducing beginning social work students to reflective practice. In Sue White, Jan Fook & Fiona Gardner (eds.), *Critical reflection in health and social care*, 213–227. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
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assessment tools including reflective essays, role plays, field diaries, and field work reports and portfolios, texts were selected to reflect this practice range. These include textbooks focused on instructing students in reflective practice, general introductory social work textbooks, and textbooks aimed at educators with passages on reflective practice.

In textbooks critical reflection is typically outlined in a delineated section or chapter which introduces it as a practice skill which is then exemplified through case studies and/or explicated process models for reflection. It may also be referenced through later chapters which exemplify it through further case studies or by drawing students’ attention to occasions it would be appropriate to use. This study analyzes this at a meso level where clusters of related skills and understandings are described (Frey 2018). This was undertaken using a content analysis of key knowledges, dispositions and processes of critical reflection in the selected texts. This was coded through an inductive open coding method, with thematic groups clustered together and described. This was then deductively coded using the LCT relations of *epistemic relations* and *social relations* (see below). The selected themes, passages, and quotes outlined in Findings are derived directly from social work textbooks, with the

textbooks in which a particular element is emphasized listed as references. The quotations reported are referenced according to their original sources.

Analytic forms: Specialization

This chapter uses concepts from the Specialization dimension of LCT to describe and analyze the principles that underlie critical reflection in social work textbooks. LCT is a sociological framework for researching forms of social practice, including academic and professional practices (Maton 2014, 2016; Maton & Chen 2020). The framework presents several sets of concepts or ‘dimensions’. The Specialization dimension explores how knowledge and knowers are articulated within practices. It is centred on the concepts of epistemic relations and social relations.

Specialization begins from the simple notion that practices are about or oriented towards something and by someone. This points to an analytical distinction between: *epistemic relations* between practices and that part of the world towards which they are oriented; and *social relations* between practices and whomever is enacting those practices. In terms of knowledge claims, these relations are realized as: *epistemic relations* between knowledge and its proclaimed objects of study; and *social relations* between knowledge and its authors or subjects. These relations highlight questions of *what* can be legitimately described as knowledge and *who* can claim to be a legitimate knower. Knowledge claims may place more (+) or less (–) emphasis on epistemic relations and on social relations as the basis of legitimacy. In this study epistemic relations are recognized as the citation of theories, theoretical constructions, and descriptions of models and processes. Social relations are recognized as work aimed at shaping dispositions, judgments, values and a creative imagination.

As Figure 4.1 illustrates, when brought together the strengths of epistemic relations and social relations generate *specialization codes* (ER+/-, SR+/-) that are mapped on a Cartesian plane. This generates four principal codes: *knowledge codes* (ER+, SR–), where emphasis is placed on knowledge practices, but dispositions are relatively unimportant; *knower codes* (ER–, SR+), where knowledges are relatively unimportant but knower practices including dispositions and values are important; *élite codes* (ER+, SR+), where both knowledge practices and knower practices are important; and *relativist codes* (ER–, SR–), where neither is important (Maton 2016: 243).

Critically reflective elements in the social work textbooks analyzed include theoretical references and stances, process models and examples, attitudes and values. The findings below outline and analyze these depictions, first in relation to forms of critical knowledge including critical theories and processes. The degree of emphasis on this knowledge is conceptualized as strengths of epistemic relations. Then, the degree of emphasis on reflective forms of knowing, embodied as reflective dispositions and values, are conceptualized as strengths of social relations. These are brought together to describe the

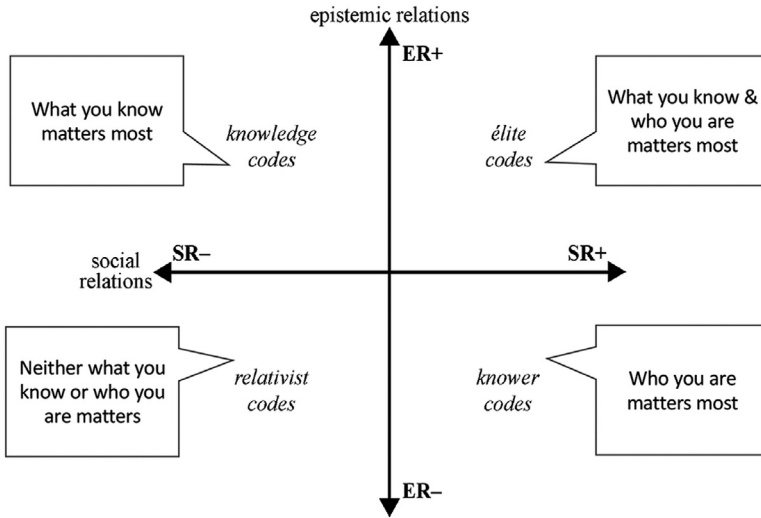


FIGURE 4.1 Specialization codes
Source: Adapted from Maton (2014: 30)

specialization code revealed. Then the relationship between these forms is described and analyzed by examining how knowledge practices are put to work in the critical incident model operationalizing embodied practices in the specialization code.

Findings

Critical knowledges: Theories and processes in critical reflection

Theory and theorizations of critical reflection is highly visible in social work textbooks. This section describes the different forms these knowledges take, conceptualizing these as stronger epistemic relations (ER+). Four knowledge forms are described: theories to establish an intellectual basis for critical reflection; process methods for describing and reflecting on events; critical reflection as applied theory; the outcome of critical reflection as new knowledge.

Social work textbooks mostly introduced critical reflection via an outline of its theoretical foundations, citing lists of historic and contemporary theories or theorists who have contributed to the development of this as a practice. Illustrative examples of these theories can be found in the section ‘The Context of Critical Reflection’ earlier in this chapter, where the key theories and theorists listed are all derived from the textbooks analyzed in this study. As well as individuals, theorists and/or theories may also be condensed into groups and presented as paradigms such as ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ (from Mead, Dewey, Schön) and ‘reflection as social process’ (from Kant & Kemmis);

‘reflection as dialogue’ (from Habermas and Freire). Listing such forms in textbooks emphasizes the intellectual tradition of critical reflection and its legitimacy as a practice as well as signposting its key purpose as generating new understandings. These can be recognized as having stronger epistemic relations (ER+).

In order for students to generate new understandings through critical reflection, textbooks provide process models to guide the enactment of this. The most widely cited is the reflective framework developed by Jan Fook, known as the critical incident method or critical incident analysis (Fook et al. 2006; Fook & Gardner 2007; Ingram et al. 2014; Gardner 2019). Most texts outline step by step instructions and examples of this process whereby a professional incident provides a case study which is then described and elaborated through a thick description of the historic, social and institutional contexts that surround it such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and culture, sexuality, religion, ability or disability of both service user and social worker (Fook & Gardner 2007). In textbooks emphasizing a critical social work approach, emphasis is also placed on describing the power relations between worker and service user (Morley 2016; Gardner 2019). This highly structured process method of description and systematic analysis for critical reflection can also be recognized as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+).

To distinguish ‘critical reflection’ from ‘reflection’, texts direct students to apply theory to interrogate cases (Morley 2016: 27). Two clusters of theories are most commonly referenced – ‘modernist’, and ‘post structuralist’ or ‘post-modernist’ theories – with each selected for a particular analytic lens (Fook & Gardner 2007; Pockett et al. 2012). As outlined in Table 4.1, modernist theories include ‘grand narratives’ like human rights, class exploitation and feminism which can be applied to understand individual and social/structural power relations and oppressions within a case. Postmodern and/or post structural theories are applied to deconstruct and challenge assumptions of the situation made by the social worker and to emphasize the partiality of truth claims, different individual standpoints, constructions, discourses and assumptions (Fook & Gardner 2007; Fook 2012; Morley 2016; Noble et al. 2016; Gardner 2019).

Selecting the correct theoretical stances is particularly important in textbooks focussed on critical social work. For instance, Morley (2016: 27–30) describes how reflection without the right critical theory is “inadequate for critical social work because if our stated theory is conservative, reflection will only serve to reinforce establishment practice”. Attention is drawn as much toward rejecting the ‘wrong knowledges’ as to selecting the right theories of power and social transformation (Fook & Gardner 2007; Ingram et al. 2014; Morley 2016; Gardner 2019). Theories focussed on individual deficit or ‘blaming the victim’, ‘positivistic, scientific or techno-rational’ knowledges, atomized or highly specialized knowledges are rejected (Fook & Gardner 2007: 25), as are descriptions decontextualized from actual practice (Morley 2016: 28). Thus, a key basis for selection for students practicing critical reflection in critical social work is knowledge of the legitimate theories to be

applied to case examples. This can be recognized as demonstrating stronger epistemic relations (ER+).

Finally, textbooks emphasize that a key outcome of the process of critical reflection is the creation of new possibilities for practice through a process of deconstruction and then reconstruction of a case where new practitioner actions are imagined (Morley 2016; Noble et al. 2016). For instance, in an extended case study Morley (2016: 147–158) deconstructs the feminist thinking she brought to a critical case involving a young victim of sexual assault she was supporting in making a police report. In this she critiques her own binary reasoning that led her to oppositional thinking when faced with a demanding detective, and through a deconstructive and reconstructive process imagines other responses she could have enacted, including creating alliances with other professionals she had previously constructed as antagonists.

In summary, critical reflection in social work textbooks can be recognized as including a series of elements that have stronger epistemic relations. These include categories of theoretical and process knowledges which serve to legitimize the practice of critical reflection, process models for undertaking critical reflection, critical lenses to analyze critical incidents and the development of new practice knowledges and social action. These knowledges are particularly important for establishing the ‘criticality’ in critical reflection. However, understanding the ‘reflective’ aspect of critical reflection requires an examination of embodied dispositions and values of this practice, and this is best examined using social relations.

Reflective embodiments: Dispositions and values in critical reflection

When outlining the reflective aspects of critical reflection, social work textbooks place great emphasis on an examination of the self in order to change one’s own perspectives of a situation and, through this, create new understandings that lead to new actions and practices. To this end, texts promote certain stances towards self-examination including: a critical unsettling of self and one’s assumptions about power and practice; a willingness to apply a critical deconstructive and reconstructive approach to a critical case; and reinforcement of a stance towards action for emancipatory social change. This section describes these forms, analysing them as SR+.

A key aspect of critical reflection emphasized in the social work textbooks is ‘unsettling’, a process whereby the social worker’s hidden assumptions of both the client’s and their own work contexts are surfaced and challenged in order to imagine new possibilities (Schön 1987; Fook & Gardner 2007: 25; Pockett et al. 2011; Noble et al. 2016). This is acknowledged as an emotional process (Pockett et al. 2011; Noble et al. 2016; Gardner 2019) that is discomfiting (Amsler 2011 in Gardner 2019) whereby the social worker must be willing to forgo certainty (Noble et al. 2016). Texts thus emphasize the necessity of developing the ‘emotional maturity’ to be able to engage in critical reflection (Mezirow 2000).

Associated with this is reflexivity, the interrogative practice in which social workers engage in a ongoing process of self-reflection. This includes reflection on how one has been shaped by one's social history and context (Ingram et al. 2021) and one's effects on others particularly in the context of a work role (Gardner 2019). In a critical social work context, analysing and challenging dominant paradigms and the effect of these on one's own world views (Morley 2016). In this, self-questioning is encouraged including through the provision of question prompts. For instance, Ingram et al. (2019: 30) provide a list of questions for reflexivity that include:

- How did I influence what happened?
- Why did I behave in that way?
- Why might I have felt the way I did during the situation, and now, when reflecting on it?
- How has who I am affected my view of what happened, my values, opportunities and life choices, and subsequently my reflection?
- What beliefs or ways of challenging my assumptions will allow me to look at this from others' perspectives?

These key elements of reflection – unsettling, surfacing hidden assumptions, and reflexivity – reveal both a value-set and disposition towards practice that can be recognized in Specialization (Maton 2014, 2016) as demonstrating stronger social relations (SR+). That is, critical reflection in social work includes the development of particular crucial values and dispositions.

Bringing these together, descriptions of critical reflection in social work textbooks can thus be described as demonstrating both stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and stronger social relations (SR+), establishing critical reflection as having an *élite code* (ER+, SR+) (see Figure 4.2). That is, what is legitimized in textbooks as important in critical reflection is both possessing the right specialist theoretical and technique-based knowledges and developing the right reflective dispositions and values.

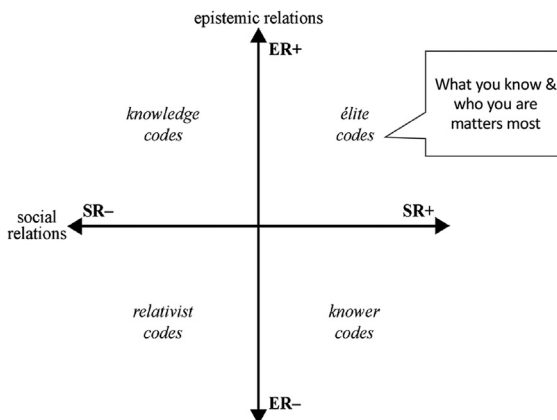


FIGURE 4.2 Critical reflection in social work as an *élite code*

But while this *élite* code indicates the importance of knowing key theories as well as demonstrating particular values and dispositions, with over 250 social work theories in use (Fox & Horder 2017), students still require insight as to the basis for selection of specific theories for use in critical reflection. This raises the question as to how students are directed to understand how these knowledge forms work together to enact critical reflection in practice, what is the basis for selecting which element, and what form of knowledge is to be used when?

Critical reflection in critical social work: Theory in service of practice

Examining how the critical incident model is outlined in textbooks exemplifies how elements with ER+ and SR+ are brought together in critical reflection, as illustrated in Figure 4.3. The critical incident model is promoted as bridging the gap between assumptions social workers may make about a situation, including of their own possibilities for action and the actual range of possibilities available to them (Fook & Gardner 2007: 24). Ingram et al. (2014: 20–21) elaborate this process as requiring:

not only the ability to be critically analytical of an incident and the emotions of the main actors; the social worker also needs to be able to draw upon an ability to understand different perspectives and value them, alongside a readiness to deconstruct and challenge dominant views and inherent power dynamics.

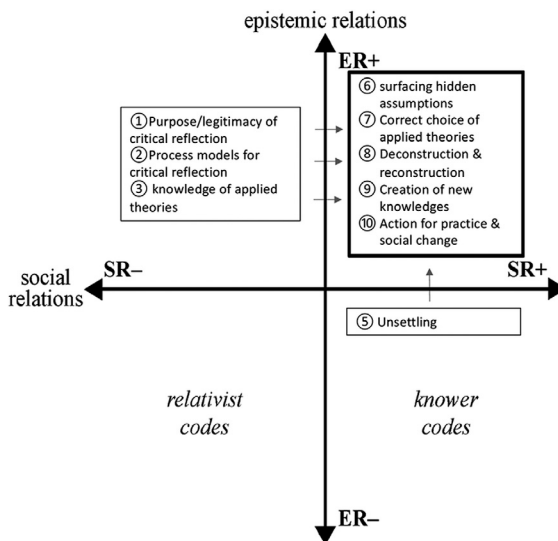


FIGURE 4.3 Theory in service of practice

Here, the in processes of the critical incident model (2) in Figure 4.3 (recognized earlier as ER+) are both knowledge applications of theories to a situation (3) including critical analysis (1) but also knower elements like changing worker perceptions of the situation (5) (SR+) to promote reconceptualized worker thinking (8). In this way some practices with ER+ can be observed being put to purposes that build qualities that have SR+.

Likewise in order to perceive the differing perspectives of those involved and imagine new possibilities of practice, textbooks emphasize the importance of using theory to aid reflection. For instance, Fook (2002) outlines how applying post-structuralist critiques of modernism (7) to a critical incident is useful for forewarning the social worker to not erroneously assume life experience can be fully attributed to social structure (6). That is, theoretical critique is applied to unsettle (5) and shape the social worker's interpretation of their and their client's own positionality and the possible range of actions within this (9). Thus, while textbooks may foreground techniques with lists of theories (ER+), the purpose is not to invite students into theoretical knowledge-building, which would see the practice remain ER+. Rather, students are being invited to apply theory in order to develop their reflective and critical dispositions (SR+). In this way, critical reflection in critical social work textbooks can be understood as offering theory in service of reflective practice.

Likewise, practices recognisable as SR+ are also informed by elements with ER+ particularly in texts that emphasize critical social work. For instance, some textbooks caution that self-reflecting on power relations only in an individualized manner can lead students astray into denying their own power in order to appear to work as equals alongside their clients (Hicks & Costello, 2023) rather than focussing on the end goal of changing one's practice. "The identification of *responsibility* within a critical framework is never about individualizing structural problems or blaming the victim, but aims to highlight one's *ability to respond*" (10) (Morley 2016: 30 emphasis in original). Even dominant practice models may be challenged on this basis. For instance, Morley (2016: 29) presents Taylor's (2013) critique of Fook & Gardner's (2007) approach, emphasizing an alternative approach which focuses on "analysing and changing the social relations of practice rather than the thoughts and feelings of the individual practitioner" (10). That is, emphasizing a process model that keeps the goal of future action to change professional practices and social structures to the fore. It can thus be understood that critical reflection, as exemplified through its application in the critical incident model in textbooks, never settles in the space of theory or reflection alone. Rather, as Figure 4.3 illustrates, with the destination the creation of new ways of thinking of practice, in it is created a dynamic space with ongoing dialogue between critical theory and reflective disposition.

Conclusion

Critical reflection as presented in social work textbooks is a complex theory, process, and embodied practice that resists easy analysis. This study has shown how social work textbooks, in seeking to develop critically reflective practice in students and give them access to the discourses of the field, foreground extensively the theories, processes and dispositions that have led to the development of this practice. This complexity requires students to develop a familiarity with a range of theories and the judgement to know which ones to select to put to the purpose of critical reflection and which to put to use in application. When applying this practice to critical case studies, students are expected to undertake a stepped deconstruction and reconstruction of the case, select and apply the correct theories to come to a contextual understanding of the situation, and then unsettle their assumptions about this. In this their analysis is directed both inward to understand their own reactions and how these are shaped by their own positionality, and outwards to consider how they are perceived by others. If working from the perspective of critical social work, this analysis also considers workers' own positional power and power to effect social change without oppressing others.

Using specialization codes to describe and analyze the key principles that guide the practice of critical reflection in social work textbooks reveals critical reflection in social work as having an *élite* code. This makes visible that critical reflection in social work requires both knowledge of specific theories and processes and also the development of dispositions and values. Elements recognized as having stronger epistemic relations (ER+) include theories that define the purpose and legitimacy of critical reflection; model processes for reflection; and specific theories for application including modernist and post structuralist theories. Elements with stronger social relations (SR+) exemplify how critical reflection requires the development of a disposition that is questioning, unsettled and attuned to change.

Diving deeper, the close examination of the critical incident method illustrates how elements with stronger epistemic relations work with elements with stronger social relations and vice versa. This demonstrates students must be familiar with a specific range of theories and have a knowledge of which to apply when, and also have the dispositional development to move beyond their own perspective by using these applied theories and processes to conceptualize new possibilities for practice and in critical social work, social change. It also illustrates that the successful enactment of critical reflection requires an ongoing dialogue between elements with stronger epistemic relations, such as critical theoretical and process methods, and elements with stronger social relations, such as self-reflection on one's own power and positionality.

Detailing this complexity from textbooks illustrates how easy it is for students to mistake the code by focussing on the extensive theorization, mistaking critical reflection for a knowledge code; or concentrating on self-reflection without applying the necessary criticality and missing the end goal of changed professional practice. By surfacing and describing these knowledges and reflective dispositions and analysing the underlying principles that inform these, this analysis aims to contribute to the literature of critical pedagogies for social work and the wider field of literature on critical reflection.

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