



Questions for Reflection

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Reflection is a process of people “exploring their understanding of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and the impact it has on themselves and others” (Boud, 1999, p. 123). Reflection can help increase students’ awareness of their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences and therefore build a greater capacity for empathy with clients. Reflection leads students to be curious about the human condition, and to challenge their existing assumptions. It can help students to analyze and integrate past and current knowledge into their practice. Finally, as reflective practice encourages students to stay in touch with their own responses and personal needs, it is a vital component of self-care and professional development.

Specific guidelines are useful for field educators in encouraging student reflection. Stephen Brookfield, a health educator, says:

Critically reflective practitioners constantly research [their] assumptions by seeing practice through four complementary lenses; these lenses are: the lens of their own autobiographies, the lens of learners’ eyes, the lens of colleagues’ perceptions and the lens of theoretical, philosophical, and research literature. (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197)

Brookfield’s areas of reflection can be adapted for social workers and implemented in several areas of field education. His four complementary lenses can suggest a number of questions as social work students reflect on a challenging situation in field placement.

- **Your autobiography as a learner.** What are your thoughts and feelings regarding this situation? What are your assumptions about the situation? How might your own history and experiences influence your thoughts and feelings and assumptions regarding the issue?
- **Your clients’ eyes.** From what perspective might your client(s) be viewing the situation? What appears to be most important to them? What about the situation appears to elicit the strongest feelings or reactions for them, and why? What are their assumptions about the situation? What do they think and feel about their interaction

with you?

- **Your colleagues' perceptions.** What feedback did you receive from colleagues – fellow students, other social workers, colleagues from other professions – regarding this situation? What feedback did you receive from your field instructor? What new insights came from their perspectives? How might you implement these new insights into practice?
- **Theoretical, philosophical and research literature.** How did the theories and evidence-based research you learned in class inform your assessment of the main focus to address, and the reasons you intervened as you did? How did they affect your thoughts, feelings and assumptions?

These questions can guide the student in reflection before, during or after an interview with a client (Boud, Keough & Walker, 1985; Schon, 1987). Boud (1999) describes how reflection can shape a reflective journal in a field seminar. These questions can also be incorporated into the supervisory conversation, including the process recording, in field placement. Throughout field education, Brookfield's guidelines can encourage the reflective process.

References

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- Brookfield, S. (1998). Critically reflective practice. *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions, 18*, 197-295.