Assessing social work practice using the PCF

Integrated Critical analysis and reflective practice

Critical reflection and critically reflective practice are central to social work – indeed ‘Critical Reflection and Analysis’ is one of the nine domains of the PCF, with capability statements built into all levels. However, aspects of critical analysis and reflective practice are built into many domains within the PCF. For example, how does a student social worker learn about ‘professional and personal boundaries’ without the ability to reflect on their experiences from practice?

Some central principles within critical analysis and reflective practice that should be demonstrated are the ability to

- plan, conceiving a range of different hypotheses and scenarios (domain 5,6)
- identify and draw on different sources of knowledge, theory and research to assess and plan their work (domain 5)
- describe and analyse what took place, including impact on self and others (domain 6)
- evaluate what took place, including critiquing own practice and considering alternative approaches that might have been used or that you might use in the future (domain 6,7)
- revise hypothesis in light of this action and reflection and plan next steps (domain 6,2)
- draw on evidence to use your professional judgement to influence decision making (domain 5,6)

It thus entails insight, exploratory 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

Case example:

Retha was finding the case really taxing. There was a lot of pressure to ‘do’ something because of concerns about what ‘might’ happen. She consulted her professional lead on safeguarding (domain 1) and together they considered the legal frameworks that were available to support any intervention (domain 8). The key question was whether it would be ‘proportionate’ to the risks identified to seek to remove her client Eddie from the current situation (domain 7). A number of different potential hypotheses and ideas were considered to develop a range of options for intervention (domain 6). Ultimately, Retha decided that the key balance to be made concerned Eddie’s human rights. On balance, was his rights to private and family life (article 8) of less significance in this case as opposed to his right not to be subjected to ‘inhumane or degrading treatment under article 2?’ (domains 2 & 4)
reflect-in-action as well as reflecting on action. This ability to ‘reflect-in action’ is the core of integrated critical reflection.

The PCF expects integration of critical reflection across all its domains, and the ability to apply critical reflective skills is a key aspect of social work practice and development.

Many qualifying and post qualifying programmes currently require students to submit critical analyses of practice through, for example An Analysis of Practice, a Critical Incident Analysis (example attached) or excerpts from a Reflective Journal. These tasks should stimulate critically reflective practice and also provide evidence for assessment.
EXAMPLE OF CRITICAL INCIDENT ANALYSIS (UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL)- student

Think of an "incident" from your placement experience. The incident or event can be a simple, every day situation which made you think about what you did and why. Such as:

- Something you were doing for the first time.
- Meeting a person or a group of people for the first time.
- An occasion where you felt that your intervention really made a difference.
- Something that went unusually well.
- An incident where there was some sort of "breakdown", i.e. where things did not go as planned.
- An incident that you think captures the essence of anti racist and anti discriminatory social work practice.
- An incident that was particularly demanding.
- An incident that made you question your own practice.

Analysing the Incident

Using these headings briefly outline the incident/event/situation- try not to go into too much background detail - just give enough to put it in context.

- What led up to it and who was involved
- Brief but specific details of what happened
- What you were thinking about as it was taking place
- What you were feeling during and after the incident
- What you wanted to accomplish in dealing with the situation
- What you found most demanding
- Why the incident seems important or "interesting" to you
- How your practice may have:
  - contributed to oppression
  - be failing to identify the potential for oppression
  - be anti-oppressive
- The social work theories you used that help you understand some of the issues.
- What 'gaps' have you identified in your understanding of the issues raised and what can you do about them,
- What you have learnt about social work from considering the incidents,
- How can you develop your practice and that of the service within your work setting?

In addition, students could be asked to identify in a column on the RHS of the page how their analysis links to the 9 domains of the PCF