Reflective Practice

A Model for Supervision and Practice in Social Work

BOOKLET VERSION

 Stan Houston
 School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
 Queen’s University Belfast
About the Author

Stan Houston is a Professor of Social Theory and Social Work in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen’s University Belfast. His professional background lies in child and family social work where he practised in various roles for nearly 20 years. His academic interests focus on the application of critical social theory and philosophy to social work practice. He is also interested in developing social work practice through action research.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people: members of the *steering group and, in particular, Mrs Marian O’Rourke and Ms Evelyn Magee; and all of the staff who participated so fully in the research.

*Steering Group

Alison Shaw NISCC
Barbara Gillen NHSCT
Brenda Horgan NISCC
Campbell Killick SEHSCT
Caroline McGonigle NHSCT
Christine McLaughlin WHSCT
Evelyn Magee NIDSWP
Geraldine Patterson SHSCT
Gillian McAuley Extern

Joanne Sansome NISCC Participation Partnership
Louise Ormsby YJA
Maxine Devenney Education Welfare Boards
Marian O’Rourke NISCC
Mary McColgan UU
Paul Thompson PBNI
Theo Raykoske BHSCT
Stephen Knox Barnardos
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Domain of Psychobiography</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Domain of Relationship</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Domain of Culture</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Domain of Organisation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Domain of Politics/Economy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlinking Concepts</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Others through Reflecting</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Model for Reflective Practice and Supervision in Social Work. Reflective practice is one of the core tenets of the professional role. It is important that social workers are able to show how, when and where reflection is used to inform and improve practice. Having in place a model that has been developed with the support of social work students, practitioners, managers, supervisors and educators across Northern Ireland is a significant step forward for the profession.

NISCC promotes the development of quality practice and supports the view that standards drive up quality. Having a model that supports best practice standards for social work across the health and social care, justice, education, voluntary and independent sectors is a welcome development that will have a positive impact on the quality of services delivered to vulnerable people in our communities.

Having identified reflective practice as an area that would benefit from additional resources, NISCC commissioned Professor Stan Houston from Queen’s University Belfast, to develop a model that could be used at qualifying and post qualifying levels, in practice and professional supervision in all settings across Northern Ireland to enhance social workers’ practice and improve outcomes for service users.

In collaboration with Professor Houston, NISCC established a steering group of key partners who contributed to the development of the model by bringing their extensive range of skills and experience to the process. The development process has also been supported by engagement with a wide range of social workers at key stages in their careers from a cross-section of practice settings throughout the region.
The DHSSPS 10 year strategy for social work, launched in April 2012: Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing, A Strategy for Social Work in Northern Ireland, 2012-2022, sets out a range of strategic priorities that include: “adding value/delivering outcomes; promoting a culture of continuous improvement and a focus on demonstrating the outcomes and learning from practice”. The model for reflective practice will directly support and make a valuable contribution to this culture of continuous improvement. We are confident that social workers, their employers and educators will be keen to embed the model in their culture and use it to underpin good governance of supervision and safe and effective practice.

This model promotes social work as a profession that is underpinned by standards of practice as well as requisite knowledge and skills. Use of the model provides a structure and framework that supports professional development and encourages evidence-based practice. It is critical that social workers take responsibility for their professionalism and their professional practice. Reflective practice is a core element of social work and use of a standardised model strengthens professional identity. Improved standards of reflective practice also enhance the worker’s competence and confidence and consequently contribute to better outcomes for service users.

I want to congratulate Professor Houston in leading on the development of this model for reflection in social work practice and supervision and to thank the steering group for their commitment to this project. The implementation of the model will be of significant value and will have considerable impact on the profession of social work in Northern Ireland. In doing so the model will contribute to improving the lives of service users, their families and the communities in which they live.

Colum Conway
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Social Care Council
Chapter 1
Introduction
This booklet is a brief guide to a psychosocial model for reflective practice and supervision in social work whether you are enabling others or are being enabled. The model will be of value to you in your day-to-day practice whether as a practitioner, a line manager, a supervisor, a student, a practice teacher or a mentor.

The guide summarises the model for reflection developed by Professor Stan Houston at Queen's University Belfast. A social worker involved in the development of the model described reflective practice as the “heartbeat of social work”. Reflective practice is part of what defines and distinguishes social work practice. It is right and proper, therefore, that we invest in getting it as good as it can be. NISCC, in partnership with key stakeholders, commissioned the development of a model for reflection in social work that is relevant to practice in all contexts and settings and which contributes to, and supports, best practice with service users and carers. This model has been tested and verified with social workers in a range of settings and roles across Northern Ireland.

The booklet version is supplemented by a more extensive version “Reflective Practice: A Model for Supervision and Practice in Social Work” (Prof. S. Houston, NISCC, 2015) which provides a detailed explanation of the model in terms of its theoretical base, the construct of the domains and their application. A copy can be accessed from the Professional in Practice (PiP) section in the NISCC website www.niscc.info.

We recommend that you read the full version as a core text and use this booklet version as a more accessible reference guide. The important point to remember is that reflection is part of what you do in your day-to-day practice as well as something that you might want to spend time on in a structured way in supervision.

Why Reflect?

Reflection is a cognitive and emotionally intelligent process. It involves conscious scrutiny of how our personal, psychosocial characteristics and experience shape the way we view and react to others. Given that the other person’s experience may be widely different compared to our own, it is vital for social workers to build reflection into their daily practice. There are a number of sound reasons for this:

To avoid bias or distorted thinking;

To ensure we don’t reproduce or perpetuate oppression;

To connect with service users and the meaning in their lives;

To enhance insight into risk and need and how to safeguard and protect service users in a better way;
Key Aspects of the Model

The model is distinctive and original in that it draws on a range of sociological theories, in particular the work of Derek Layder (2006), and also incorporates theories of human growth and behaviour. Current literature tends to explain the “how” of reflection in social work but not so much the “what” in reflection. This model seeks to primarily address the “what” dimension of reflection.

The model essentially outlines the impact of five key domains of experience on social life.

Figure 1 - The Five Domains
These domains shape individual experience, reflection and behaviours for service users and social workers alike. The model also incorporates ideas about power and therefore enhances an understanding of anti-oppressive practice in social work. The value to you as a practitioner, in any setting, is that it enables you to reflect on how these domains have shaped your own experience, that of service users and the helping relationship.

How to Use the Model

The model should be used flexibly, pragmatically and in a phased manner. Don’t expect to use the model in its entirety in one session. Be selective; pick one or two of the domains – or even parts of them. Not everything has to be covered at once. Thus, you may want to prioritise one or more of the domains over others depending on the issues facing either you or a service user.

Over time, though, you may want to ensure that all the domains are covered to some extent. This will mean you have reflected holistically over a significant period of time and grasped the model in its entirety. The message is this: start with your practice and the most pressing issues facing you. Then go to the model and choose which section or domain(s) is most appropriate. Some domains will appear more familiar than others but the unfamiliar ones may highlight ‘blind-spots’ in our reflection. They are the ones not to forget. So, be selective in the here-and-now but also aim to be holistic over time.

Examples: a social worker might be dealing with a concerning case where there are attachment issues. Here, the domain of psychobiography can be used to make sense of what is occurring and reflect on the core issues.

Or, it could be that a social work student wants to reflect on how organisational procedures are impacting on her practice. In this case, she might draw on the domain of organisations as a number of theories of organisational processes are set out there.
Chapter 2
The Domain of Psychobiography
Summary

This domain highlights a person’s life path as it progresses along a trajectory through time and space in the social world. In other words, it establishes a person’s unique biographical and embodied history as it has unfolded from birth onwards charting the significance of various transitions from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood and then the experience of later life. At each point of transition there may be psychosocial challenges to face and resolve. This domain also looks at how significant events have impacted on the person emotionally. What is of concern here is the effect of loss, change, ageing, illness (mental and physical), disability, sensory impairment, psychological trauma, crisis, estrangement, reunion, and opportunities for growth and development. Throughout the life-course, we are also socially positioned according to our race, class, age, sexuality, religion and gender.

Within this domain, the construct of narrative is highly significant. This refers to the autobiographical story we build up about ourselves, others, our past and imagined, future lives. For some people, such stories can be oppressive, recounting the misuse of power by significant others, while contrasting narratives can depict positive adaptations to challenging circumstances. All in all, narratives integrate a person’s life history around a core, inner identity. What is more, they refer to the emotional world and moral quandaries. Thus, people, in the course of their psychosocial development, are sometimes forced to make significant decisions, impacting on themselves and others.

These decisions may centre on the management of interpersonal conflict, or whether to disengage from a relationship. Furthermore, narrative is a tool for bringing about therapeutic change in social work. A person can reach a more empowered stance in her life through telling and reinterpreting her story to an empathetic individual. In this process, people need to externalise and distance themselves from their disabling narratives – stories that perpetuate shame, poor self-esteem and self-disrespect. By doing so, they can then formulate alternative stories about themselves that lead to change or adaptation. Narrative, in social work, is therefore a means to a therapeutic end.
Connections

Social workers can make use of this section when working with:

• Older people who would benefit from reminiscence and reflection on their life-histories, when they have experienced significant loss, change or crisis
• Children and young people who have very fragmented life-histories. Thus, the idea of narrative can underpin life-history work
• Adults with mental health issues who need to re-frame their understanding of themselves and their past in a more positive way
• People with a disability who experience shame or stigma. It is vital that these negative aspects of identity are addressed therapeutically and in an empowering way
• Young people who have very turbulent emotions (which may lead to self-harm) such as anger, fear or sadness, particularly when they feel overwhelmed by the intensity of these emotions
• Any person who is making a significant transition in his or her life-cycle e.g. a child about to move into adolescence who is showing fear or apprehension about changing school and connecting with a new peer group
• An older person moving into residential care who feels depressed about the loss of role and activity.

Reflective Questions

These questions will help you to reflect on the service user’s experience.

1. How and in what way are they shaped by the domain of psychobiography?

2. What sort of narratives do they tell?

3. With what stage of the life-course are they engaging and what psychosocial challenges are they experiencing as a result?

4. What types of emotion are present in their lives and what impact do they have on their identity and lived experience?

Now reflect on the impact of this domain on your life.

1. How has it shaped your identity, life-course, emotional life and narrative?

2. How has it influenced your approach to these service users and your perspective on social work, more generally? Consider, here, how your gender, age, religion, culture, and social class affects the way you respond to service users with similar and different characteristics.
Chapter 3
The Domain of Relationship
Summary

This domain focuses on what happens in everyday, informal, social interaction involving dyads or small groups of significant others including families. Such interaction reflects the truism that we are social beings ‘all the way through’. When we first come into the world, we are deeply connected with our caregivers. As we mature, we develop a sense of our individuality. Yet, even though we move towards greater independence, our relationship with significant others continues to provide meaning, social support, comfort and a sense of belonging. Conversely, relationships can break down through negative projections, inter-personal power struggles, misunderstandings and unmet care and control needs. Whatever the outcome, though, people need to be seen in the context of their most intimate, close relationships (for example, peers, family, and friends). This point is affirmed in ecological and systems thinking.

Given what has been said, attachment theory is a crucial lens through which we can view this domain. Here, it is posited that children require a secure base with their carers to enable them to explore their social worlds confidently and subsequently develop cognitive, emotional, social and linguistic skills. In other words, a secure attachment assists people to mature into competent, responsible adults who are fully open to the challenges they may face in various settings. The corollary to this is children who experience impoverished care of some sort and the insecurity it may engender. As a consequence, exploratory actions might be compromised and human development thwarted. Furthermore, it is suggested secure children most likely develop positive inner working models whereas insecure children are at risk of succumbing to unconfident, anxious personalities. It is important to state, at this point, that attachment extends well beyond the spheres of childhood and adolescence into the remaining stages of the adult life-course.

From a different theoretical stance, it has been argued that our identity is a social construct because we react to how others react to us. Importantly, social interaction moulds our sense of self as we periodically wonder what people are thinking about us. These internal conversations shape our image of ourselves. This can have manifest implications as some individuals may be labelled in a pejorative manner by powerful players. In all of this, language is the medium through which selfhood emerges and continues to develop throughout the life-course. This viewpoint suggests the self is inherently social. We are not separate beings possessing fixed bundles of inner psychological traits that are immune to outside influences. From birth, we are thrown into sociality. If ‘relationship’ is central to positive identity-formation, then it is incumbent on social workers to place it at the heart of their practice.
Social workers can make use of this section when working with:

- Children and adults who have had a poor experience of attachment with parents, caregivers or significant others
- Young people who present with troubled and troublesome behaviour – e.g. in residential care or secure accommodation. In this context, attachment theory enables the social worker to think about what is causing the behaviour rather than just responding to it. It allows social workers to ‘dig’ beneath the surface
- People who have suffered loss and are undergoing a grief reaction. The theory sharpens social work empathy giving insights into the human need for relationship
- Parents, when a parenting capacity assessment in child protection is required. The ideas mentioned in this section enable social workers to ask specific questions about parenting roles and tasks in order to determine if ‘good enough’ care of children is being provided
- Families where there are interpersonal difficulties.

Reflective Questions

Reflect on service user/s

1. How have their lives been shaped by the domain of relationship?

2. What has their attachment experience been like and how has this shaped their inner working models?

3. Do they carry any stigma and have they been subject to any form of labelling? If so, what has this meant for their overall emotional well-being?

Now, as a social worker or enabler of social work practice, reflect on how this domain, in its varying facets, has impacted on you and your view of self and the social world.
Chapter 4
The Domain of Culture
Summary

Culture is a way of life that imbues meaning. It moulds how we approach social life in the most fundamental, taken-for-granted way, shaping our attitudes, beliefs, tastes and use of language. When thinking about culture, two core elements become apparent: the ‘material’ and the ‘symbolic’. The former refers to the range of artefacts which give our life meaning. Artefacts are physical, person-made objects which have significance. We can think here of totem poles, religious relics and rites, sculptures and also modern-day, consumer products. More practically, material culture includes technical, manufactured objects as well as a range of different types of building and engineered infrastructure.

Symbolic culture, by way of contrast, points more to the concepts constituting social life: the range of ideas, religious beliefs, norms, ideologies and values that shape how we interact with others. Symbolic culture also makes use of signs, gestures and language to convey meaning in various cultural contexts. Signs are synonymous with significant symbols in social life.

For instance, social location is indicated by various types of signs on the roads and streets of urban areas. Gestures, alternatively, are the signs we make with our bodies: hand gestures being one example. When it comes to language, though, we convey a (potentially) sophisticated range of ideas through recalled metaphors, practical instructions, requests for information, arguments and so on. In doing so, language not only represents reality but also constructs it.

In addition, culture inculcates a moral dimension to social affairs. In this connection, societal values are reflected in shared beliefs that generate social order. In turn, values generate norms. They represent the rules guiding behaviour. Some of these norms are formal and encoded in law or through religious belief; others are more colloquially applied in every day encounters where respect becomes a much required principle of interaction.

They also inform behavioural codes in institutions, such as schools and factories, or may be seen in the rules underpinning the sporting game.

When examining the domain of culture, the role of power and social control becomes evident. This is reflected in ethnocentrism. Through this lens, the observer views his own culture as the ‘gold standard’, the ideal against which other cultures must be measured (and found wanting). As a form of cultural power, it gives rise to xenophobia, fear of the stranger, sectarianism, concerns over ethnic purity and the ever-present threat of contamination. Hence, it is antithetical to emancipatory social work. An alternative lens is cultural relativism. This is where we examine other cultures on their own terms without importing preconceived views. Cultural relativism asserts there is no human culture which is necessarily better than others. Norms and language are all socially constructed, according to this perspective. Cultural relativism aligns with multiculturalism. Diversity, pluralism and respect for difference are all hallmarks of this type of cultural position. Importantly, in multiculturalism, minority peoples are not cajoled to assimilate to the host culture’s language and norms. Moreover, multiculturalism respects the rights of various subcultures to define their distinctive identities. Subcultures refer not only to ethnic groupings but also youth movements.
Connections

Social workers can make use of this section when working with:

- Minority groups, migrants and asylum seekers who require support or where some kind of risk or vulnerability is evident. Social workers must attempt to practise culturally-sensitive social work and tune-in to the customs, language and meaningful symbols of the group in order to empower them.
- Disadvantaged groups in order to respect and strengthen their self-identity. It is vital to recognise, here, that we derive our self-concept from our culture. We can connect this with professional interventions which attempt to enhance the self-esteem of ethnic minority children, children of diverse and radically different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds.
- Families facing some kind of oppression. This may require challenging unjust power or empowering service users to gain more social capital. It may involve opening spaces for alternative understandings in mental health practice, addressing violence and abuse in a gendered world, tackling disabling discourses, or dealing with social isolation in rural areas.
- Minority ethnic families in order to promote culturally-sensitive social work practice.
- Families who are disaffected and excluded and who need to be engaged within meaningful partnership and participation in decisions affecting their lives.
- Episodes of sectarianism whether they occur at an organisational or interpersonal level.

Reflective Questions

Reflect on three service users with whom you have had some association.

1. How has the domain of culture shaped their lives, meanings, goals and aspirations?
2. To what extent are they supported by communities around them?
3. To what extent does the prevailing culture discriminate against them?

Now think of your own experience. How has the domain of culture shaped your meaning, goals, aspirations and activity?

1. Have you ever experienced or challenged sectarianism?
2. What does being culturally sensitive mean to you?
Chapter 5
The Domain of Organisation
Most of us interact with and are affected (in some way) by formal organisations. These organisations include the workplace, various bureaucracies with which we come into contact (such as government bodies), schools we have attended, universities we may have graduated from and possibly care institutions in which our older relatives may now reside. As social workers, we may visit children living in residential care or secure accommodation. Other social workers may have been involved in the compulsory detention of adults in a mental health facility.

In the modern world, organisations embrace four key features: efficiency, predictability, quantity and technology. In a social work context, efficiency is shown in the way claims on the service are processed expeditiously in order to retain a capacity to assess new referrals. Predictability occurs when social workers adhere to strict procedures dictating how and when actions are to be performed. A fixation on quantity is manifest in managerial reviews of contract volumes and statistical outputs. Lastly, technology is reflected in computerised assessment frameworks, the electronic trend in human welfare and the move towards paperless records.

Organisations also encourage specialisation, hierarchy, technical competence, and formal written communication. They also embrace bureaucracy as a primary tool for organisational improvement, regulation and quality assurance.

This tool further supports the audit culture, where aims and objectives need to be clearly defined and targets enumerated. The attainment of targets is then appraised through a traffic light system of ‘green’, signifying the target was achieved, ‘red’ for unachieved and ‘amber’, representing partial achievement. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats give shape to the organisation’s strategic direction as does the ‘stakeholder analysis’. Customer engagement and feedback are integral to the process of managing the organisation. In some areas, these processes are transmuted in the shift from the modern to the postmodern organisation. If the former is typified by hierarchy, top-down power, specialised functions and an inclination towards rigidity, the latter moves in the direction of being more organic, networked, unspecialised, having devolved power and flexible arrangements.
Connections

Social workers can make use of this section when working with:

- Colleagues, managers, staff within their own and others’ agencies, and service users. Applying this knowledge to oneself, in what ways does bureaucracy help or hinder your role? How can you use recording to strengthen your professional practice and ensure it is safe? To what extent can you achieve a balance between administration and face-to-face service user contact? To what extent is discretion a part of your decision-making practice when using bureaucracy? How do organisations working in the community, voluntary, statutory and private sectors differ in role, structure, type and function and does this create differing expectations? How can standards of practice be linked to demonstrating effective and quality social service delivery in organisations? What are the factors that contribute to stress in the organisation and how might this be overcome? What factors can improve the workplace and morale within your organisation? How does organisational change impact on your role and function?

Reflective Questions

Reflect on three service users with whom you have had some association.

1. How and in what way are they shaped by the domain of organisation?

2. How have they reacted to bureaucracy?

3. How have organisations helped or hindered their well-being?

Now reflect on yourself in terms of the impact of this domain on your life.

1. How has it shaped your professional practice?

2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of bureaucracy in welfare organisations?
Chapter 6
The Domain of Politics/Economy
Summary

What chiefly defines this domain is the modern consumerist, market economy and its emphasis on sound economic performance, wealth creation, austerity management and market stability. It is further defined in public policies characterised by the ‘D-L-P formula’ where ‘D’ stands for deregulation of the economy; ‘L’ stands for the liberalisation of trade; and ‘P’ stands for privatisation of State-owned welfare and enterprise. In this formulation, a universalistic, welfare regime is viewed as a drain on the economy, one that needs to be radically pruned back and replaced in some areas with the notion of workfare. Government, generally, is seen as a resource-intensive structure in need of down-sizing. Furthermore, family values are exhorted through family-friendly policies.

However, two central problems flow from this economic model: commodification and inequality. Both involve the (mis)use of power and have implications for social work. Commodification refers to the way in which various aspects of life are turned into commodities or things for sale. When commodification occurs in an unbridled way, market values colonize social life. People are no longer subjects but rather units of production whose labour is bought and sold without sentiment. In short, people become de-personalised objects. More than that, important areas of life, such as education, become a product to be sold as opposed to a way of developing people. Commodification also ensures that people in receipt of welfare services are drawn into market forces: means-tested benefits and targeted provision being two examples.

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) have addressed the second area, that of inequalities, in great depth. They convincingly show that inequalities are growing in neo-liberal societies at an alarming rate. Not only that, they suggest that inequality leads to life-diminishing effects on a range of key measures. Thus, such societies experience higher rates of teenage pregnancy, crime and violence, obesity, educational non-achievement and mental ill-health. A key finding is that all classes in neo-liberal societies are adversely affected by the disparities in wealth, not just the down-trodden underclasses. More affluent members of these societies suffer as well due to higher rates of crime and impoverished environments. Notably, Wilkinson and Pickett have shown how countries (for example, Sweden and Norway) with less income disparity, had better social outcomes on a range of measures.
Social workers can make use of this section when working with:

- Service users who are experiencing poverty, inequality and class discrimination
- Vulnerable older people given the move to self-directed care and the danger of financial exploitation in a climate of cuts to resources and services. What is your response to service users facing these issues? To what extent do you engage in welfare rights as a central part of your role? To what extent do you engage in advocacy, mediation and negotiation on behalf of such service users? Do you ever highlight unmet need to your line managers? To what extent do you factor material inequality in to your assessments, viewing it as a key cause of social problems such as poor mental health and child development? How far is social work a class-based activity? What is the impact of cuts in services on you and the service users with whom you work?

Reflective Questions

Think of three service users with whom you are associated.

1. How has the domain of politics/economy either directly or indirectly shaped their lives?
2. How has the prevailing welfare regime impacted on the delivery of services to them?
3. What impact has inequality had on their life-opportunities and well-being?

Considerations for you...

Now consider how the domain of politics/economy has impacted on your own life either directly or indirectly: to what extent have inequalities affected your own life opportunities?
Chapter 7
Interlinking Concepts
Power

Power is everywhere and anywhere. It operates at the macro sphere of the State and also the micro world of social interaction and relationship. Hence, it is present throughout each of the domains of psychobiography, relationship, culture, organisation and politics/economy. Although power can be possessed by a social group in order to control others, it is also a force for positive enablement, for creating purposeful change. Thus, it is a force for negative oppression but also a force for human betterment and, moreover, a neutral resource in some situations.

Connections

• Consider how power is exercised in the various organisations with which social workers have contact. Think about children’s homes, hospitals, schools, nursing homes: how is power demonstrated, who holds the power, in what ways are service users empowered? How much choice do service users have in these organisations?
• Think about how power is expressed in the various families with whom you have contact
• Think about the organisation in which you work. How is power demonstrated, positively or negatively?

Agency and Structure

Agency refers to the person's capacity (or power) to effect change in her life or circumstances. It is embedded in the domain of psychobiography. Structure, by way of contrast, refers to reproduced social rules, norms, and expected ways of behaving, which flow from the domains of culture, organisation and politics/economy. Structure can limit behaviour but enable things to happen. The key question is how much freedom do we have to change and how much is controlled by outside forces?

Connections

• Consider how much agency you have to effect change in your organisation? Or, is your role here more determined by your organisation’s structure: its rules and requirements?
• Consider how much agency you have to effect change in the lives of service users? Or, is change hampered by the fact that service users’ lives are primarily determined by wider social forces?
Chapter 8
Enabling Others through Reflecting on the Domains
Summary

We are now in a position to consider how these domains can be used within an enabling process to strengthen reflective practice. In this process, there are five stages of reflective inquiry (see Figure 2 below). Each makes use of the domains outlined earlier. The five stages build up, cumulatively, to deepen the participants’ understanding of themselves, their role, and the needs of service users. The intention, therefore, is to apply them sequentially.

Figure 2 - Model for Enabling Process

- **Stage One**
  Reflecting on self

- **Stage Two**
  Reflecting on the enabling process

- **Stage Three**
  Reflecting on the service user’s experience

- **Stage Four**
  Reflecting on social work practice

- **Stage Five**
  Final-reflection – bringing it all together
Stage One

Social worker and enabler apply the model to their own life experience

In this initial stage, the participants consider separately how each of the domains have impacted on their lives, outlooks, beliefs, purposes and ambitions – and crucially, their view on social work as a helping process.

Stage Two

Social worker and enabler consider how the domains shape their interaction in supervision, mentoring or coaching

In this second stage, the participants explore together how the domains influence their interaction in the enabling process. For example, how is power demonstrated? If the social worker and enabler have experienced distinctly different psychobiographies, or come from different cultures, how does this influence how they relate to one another?

Stage Three

Social worker and enabler apply the model to ‘tune-in’ to the service user’s experience and plan the social work process

Building on the preceding stages, the social worker and enabler jointly attempt to understand how the domains, and the power operating within them, have shaped a service user’s life, meanings, perspectives, needs, experience and the risks they face or present.

Stage Four

Social worker and enabler apply the model to reflect on the social worker’s interaction with the service user

In this stage, the participants examine how the domains affect the social worker’s interaction with the service user. It is important here to examine how the domains influence the social work process of assessment, goal-setting, intervention and evaluation.

Stage Five

Towards final reflection

This is the final, cumulative stage in the reflexive process. Here, the insights gleaned from the preceding stages, are brought together, examined, processed and synthesised. The focus of attention is on the preceding stages which have looked at how the domains influence the personal and professional self, enabling and being enabled, the service user’s meanings and the nature of the social work process. By reviewing these antecedent stages, the social worker and enabler search for recurrent themes around the use of power, and the social worker’s use of self in the practice arena. How does who we are, because of our background and range of social experience, shape how we carry out emancipatory social work practice with service users whose experience may differ radically from our own? Responses to this question come as a result of a process of meta-reflection, a process which integrates the insights from stages one to four.
Notes

30.

Reflective Practice: A Model for Supervision and Practice in Social Work