

**CULTIVATING AND
FOSTERING SOCIAL
WORK STUDENTS'
AWARENESS OF SELF
BY MEANS OF
CRITICAL
REFLECTIVITY: THE
HORSE ON THE
DINING-ROOM TABLE**



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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION



- Introduction
- Developing a professional self
- The self and self-awareness
- Using critical reflectivity for self-awareness
- Critical reflectivity in the module on loss and trauma by means of “the horse on the dining-room table”
- Three types of questions using critical reflectivity
- Discussion
- Conclusion

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INTRODUCTION



- The purpose of this presentation is to provide a brief overview on the practice of employing critical reflectivity to develop awareness of self about the connections between personal experiences and the broader social context.
- Kondrat's (1999) alternative framework for exploring the 'self' in self-awareness.
- Critical reflectivity -perceptive about the self as a construct that emerges within specific societal structures, as well as how they produce and reproduce these social structures.
- Conceptualisation of the self on a macro-level

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL SELF



The development of the professional self is considered by many educators as an essential component of graduate training.



SELF AND SELF-AWARENESS



- How the concept of self is constructed depends on the disciplinary tradition employed and the context in which the concept is used.
- Within the African context social work educators sought to depart from their 'Western' traditions and develop approaches to professional teaching and practice appropriate to the African postcolonial context.
- The conceptualisation of the self or selfhood from an African worldview.
- Three selfhoods - do not exist as autonomous, independent entities and in isolation.
- They are interdependent, interrelated and co-exist in a collaborative and collective way, hence the concept of a collective or interdependent.
- "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1970: 141).



- The Global Standards for SW Education
- Within a macro-conceptualisation - “an internal sense of personality integration and continuity that encompasses one’s life history, accrued identification and values, and relationships with others”;
- “the identity that one constructs represents a set of internalized meanings that one attributes to the self in a social position or role.
- An identity, then, serves as a standard or reference for who one is." Thus, who am I the personal, who am I as the professional and who are we?



- Being self-aware is a process that continues throughout the lifespan of the social worker.
- Necessitates that training programs bear additional responsibility for promoting self-awareness, where respect for the Self, the 'Other' and the Context is fostered.





- Conventionally three traditional approaches to professional self-awareness:
 - Simple conscious awareness (awareness of whatever is being experienced)
 - Reflective self-awareness (awareness of a self who is experiencing something)
 - Reflexive self-awareness (the self's awareness of how his/her awareness is constituted in direct experience)
- An understanding of the self from a sociological approach or structural explanation should be included in the way social work educators help the student developing self-awareness.

USING CRITICAL REFLECTIVITY FOR SELF-AWARENESS



- Kondrat (1999: 460-470) outlines a macro-conceptualisation of the self, derived from critical theory, namely *critical reflectivity*.
- One of the main points of departure of critical theory is that social problems are created more by the structure of society and the cultural assumptions generated by dominant groups that oppress subordinate groups.
- As a theoretical framework for social work, it has been enriched by an analysis of the complex processes of colonialism, decolonisation and de-colonialism, while on grass root level it helps "social workers to avoid assuming that the way things are, is the way they have to be"

- Self-awareness from a critical reflectivity standpoint - enables the social work student in their journey to be mindful and sensitive for and cognisant of the broader influence of how 'self' is formed within a broader context of living and how that can impact on their interaction with people.



metacognition historical
analysis political
socio-economic **reflection**
prior multiple_perspectives
critical



- Module on loss and trauma
- The class is multi-racial and a presentation of the socio-demographic profile of the broader community.
- An oral agreement is concluded during the first class session
- Group assignment
- Contract: Respectful, tolerant, and empathic environment is stressed and implemented during class sessions.



- The story about ‘The horse on the dining room table’ by Kalish (1985), becomes a metaphor of how gender influences interaction and the helping relationship with grieving and traumatised individuals and families.
- Students are enabled to conceptualise the self as intricately submerged “in society’s structures both as agent and as a product” regarding beliefs, assumptions and customs in times of the death of a loved one.

A Death Ritual

- During an African burial, an animal would often be sacrificed. They believed that it was a respectful thing to do and that it served as food on their long journey to the heavens. Most of the time they would give sacrifice of an ox, if the person was the last living in their family the ox would help take them to the afterlife. Africans were also buried with their personal possessions. Africans could only refer to some one as dead if they were the last one in their family to die.





THREE TYPES OF QUESTIONS USING CRITICAL REFLECTIVITY





ABOUT “THE WORLD”

Inquiry is conducted in correspondence with others whose perspectives may reflect different positions within the social structure.

- What do I know about how people in my community are supposed to act with regard to others in the same location (in relation to the social categories class, race, gender).
- In what ways do my assumptions and activities contribute to the maintenance or transformation of such social structures in the case of death?
- What role does gender/race/class play regarding dying and death in my culture?
- How do gender and race inform perspectives regarding death and dying in my community?

ABOUT “MY WORLD”:



“What do I believe about my place in the world?

- What is my understanding of how to act in relation to someone belonging to a different race, gender, status, and so forth? ”
- And from what sources have I learned these social lessons?”
- What is my understanding of my culture’s/religion’s point of view on death and dying?
- How do I see/understand the interpretations of the characters in the story and on what is my interpretations based?
- What is my understanding of how to react towards an individual (man/woman/ child) who is experiencing or has experienced dying and death of a significant other? What informs me?
- In what way are my beliefs about the person, family or community a reflection of other systems like ideology, religion or culture?



These are questions that relate to similarities and differences between what the self understands about “my world” (society and self) and “the world” (the lived objective circumstances of social life:

- “To what extent do I accept uncritically the values, beliefs, assumptions, and prescriptions I have received as a result of my socialisation into my community?”
- “Are there inconsistencies or distortions between my received beliefs/assumptions and the concrete conditions of individual and group life?”
- How would I have behaved if I was the narrator, the sage, the guests, the host and the hostess?
- What is my place and role in situations regarding death, dying and trauma, personally and in the family?

- The story provides space to speak about their everyday lives regarding death and dying.
- They are enabled to deconstruct, exchange and change existing constructions and create new perspectives during class discussions.



DISCUSSION



- The origins of the profession emphasise the social side of human existence.
- The “need to scientise” social work knowledge within an individual and intrapsychic explanation of human behaviour and personal problems.
- Student must also be helped to approach the self as it emerges within specific social contexts or the self as a co-constructor of his or her direct settings.



- A transformative agenda stressing the importance of the role of social structure is always a reflection on society and vice versa or ‘understanding the individual in social context
- The parable of ‘The Horse on the dining-room table’ serves as one avenue of cultivating self-awareness using critical reflectivity from a macro-conceptualisation of social work;
 - Sensitising social work students how they are both “social actors of their subjective understandings of society and self”
 - Neither social conditions nor intersubjective meanings alone are able to embrace all of reality.





CONCLUSION

- A macro-conceptualisation of self-awareness by means of critical reflectivity can be a small step to ensure that social work education does not become a “colonialist project that has dismissed and displaced’ the voices of other countless cultural systems.
- It is a challenge to take cognisance of, to develop understanding of different ‘languages’, belief systems, ceremonies, and ways of life in the self and others; and how it can enhance the process of social service rendering.