

The logo for TUS (Technological University of the Shannon) is located in the top right corner of the slide. It consists of the letters 'TUS' in a bold, black, sans-serif font, positioned above a stylized, gold-colored graphic of a castle or tower with a central archway and a checkered base.

TUS

Social Care Ireland Conference 2023

Dr Karen Leonard

TUS Athlone

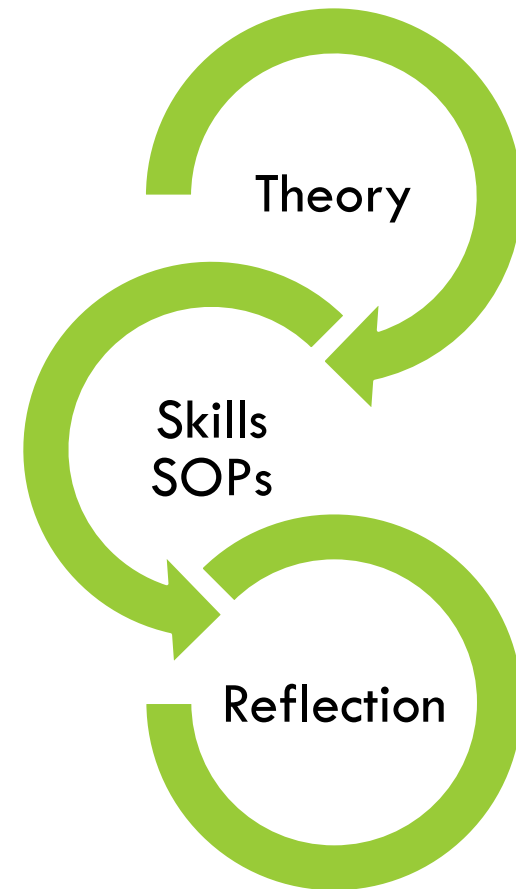
**CREATING SPACES FOR RELATIONAL RELEXIVITY
IN SOCIAL CARE EDUCATION**

THE SOCIAL CARE WORKER'S “TOOLKIT”

Knowledge and skills are important but the main “tool” available to the social care worker when connecting with others is their own **“use of self”**.

“Reflective Practice is the cornerstone of effective social care. Practitioners must be willing to constantly scrutinise their practice they must acknowledge their own vulnerabilities, counterproductive reactions, tendencies to blame clients, reluctance to seek support and guidance and, possibly, ineffective use of supervision”

(Fitzmaurice, 2013, p.187)



BUT HOW DO WE “TEACH” REFLECTION?

To large numbers of students?

In large lectures?

What about emotional safety?

Ethics and Disclosures - *“you can’t take back what you have said”*.

Some students tell us that their own family experiences have contributed to their interest in this area of work,

BUT

we provide very few opportunities for students to reflect on these processes.



FOCUS OF RESEARCH: A “PROBLEM” TO BE SOLVED?:

Natalie: A lot of people who get into social care, get into it for a reason, there's always something.

Karen: Okay?

Natalie:.....for most people there's a relative or some reason that's close to your heart.

Karen: We talked about caring in the first (session), and it could be a positive thing that we've been involved in caring.....

Pamela:It's just that because we've looked at it here when it does come up outside, it won't be as big a surprise, we'll be able to manage it better or be able to look for help, if we need it, quicker, becomes we've already kind of...

Karen: Become aware of it?

Pamela:Yes.

Natalie:Those are the things we don't ever cover in class you know that are (personal)...

(Excerpt from conversation with Nicole and Pamela, both first years in Red Group 05/03/18)

DIFFICULTIES BEFORE-HOW TO “DO” REFLECTION

“I think when we started in first year we were just expected to know.... I didn’t really know much about reflection at all” (Marie).

Kate, in her diary entry, noted:

“I was really interested when I heard about the placement research group, as in the past I have found it very hard to reflect on certain situations and also find it hard to talk about my feelings”.

MODELS OF REFLECTION IN SOCIAL CARE EDUCATION

E.g. Kolb's Model of Reflection

Learning is seen as a Cycle:

Practitioner engages in an activity with a client.

Then identifies their key learning.

This feeds back into their practice.

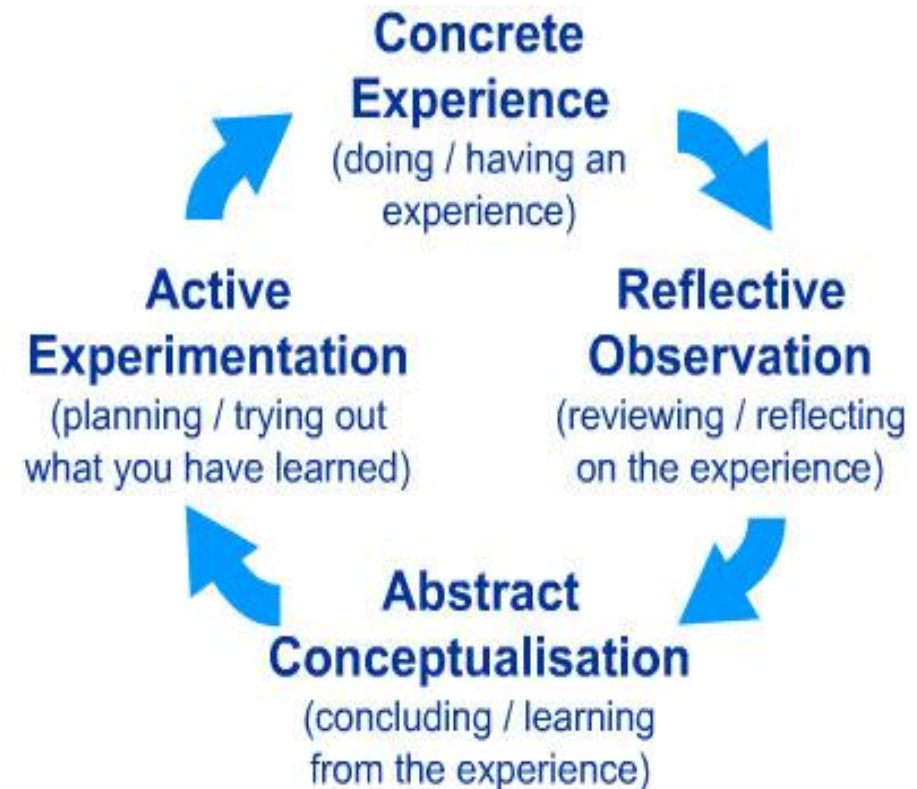


Image: simplypsychology.org

THESE ARE USEFUL BUT.....

Most models of reflection:

focus on reflecting *after the event*;

Tend to be *too idealistic*;

Social context is absent;

And are too *Individualistic* (Frost, 2010).

Therefore, we are encouraged as educators to:

“develop new ways of thinking about reflection that recognise the complexities and the *relational* qualities of practice” (Boud, 2010, p. 36).

SYSTEMIC RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY:

- Looks at *our relationship* with clients, *moment to moment*, and how things emerge between us together, rather than just focusing on what is going on for us internally (as with self-reflexivity) (Burnham, 2005)
- Is located within the area of systemic theory and practice.
- Reminds us that the *social context* that the client, practitioner (AND LECTURER) are located within means we have *multiple identities* (Watts-Jones, 2010) and these need to be reflected on as we work together.

REFLECTION CAN BE AN INTERNAL PROCESS (FIGURE 1), WHEREAS RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY TAKES ACCOUNT OF HOW A PERSON IS RESPONDING TO THE OTHER (IN THIS CASE MOSS TO ME AND VICE VERSA) WITHIN A MOMENT (FIGURE 2).



SO THIS IS THE SYSTEMIC BIT.....

So in the group we needed to reflect and look at what had gone on in our lives before, and what each of us was bringing to the **relational exchange** that was happening between us in the classroom in **that particular moment**.

Or as one third year student when speaking of being on practice placement put it:

“When you’re thinking, when something happens, it’s right out there, it’s there in front of you. But when you’re reflecting on it, after it, you’re not actually in that moment, that exact feeling”.

DEVELOPING A MODEL OF RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY FOR SOCIAL CARE EDUCATION

- Small Learning Groups (maximum 15).
- Coming *prepared not planned* (Shotter, 2012).
- Systemic themes that *may* be useful.
- Conversation would emerge between us like in other dialogical and social constructionist approaches to teaching (Tseliou, Abakoumkin, Kokkini, Nanouri, Valai, 2016, Tseliou, 2007).
- Research groups with 2 Third year groups and 1 First year group as part of the Placement Preparation Module.



DEVELOPING RELATIONALLY REFLEXIVE LEARNING GROUPS

Themes included:

Creating the Space;

Experiences of Caring;

Experience of Family-genogram;

Experience of Family Roles;

Appreciation and Prejudice-use of the Social GRRRAAACCEESSS in education (Burnham, 2012, Totsuko, 2014; Mills-Powell & Worthington, 2007);

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Appreciation and Prejudice in Practice (on placement);

Relational Reflexivity in Practice (on placement).

Tools:

-Use of Student Diary Pro to upload reflexive entries after each session.

-Feedback sheets from student.

-Video Reviews

BUT AS A LECTURER WHERE WAS I IN THE PROCESS?

Postmodernist Reflexivity (Simon, 2012) encourages researchers to write from within the learning and research process, and so I moved from an initial focus on Action Research, to embrace a **Reflexive Inquiry** that focused on my practice also as a social care educator.

This approach included:

-The use of Reflexive Diaries;



-The use of Video Reviews of sessions;



-Writing itself as a form of Inquiry;



(Kebbe, 2016; Simon, 2012; Richardson, 1994).

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THE DIFFERENCE THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

Several students mentioned in their reflexive diaries that they were more able to reflect or understood better how to reflect having completed these classes:

Marie said:



I feel this class (on caring) was very beneficial as it got me to reflect in a way that was new to me, as I would never really have thought about why I had chosen social care as a profession".

DIFFICULTIES BEFORE-HOW TO “DO” REFLECTION

Kieran a third year says:

“In terms of work experience, we had to reflect on certain aspects like reflection on relationship-building but I’ve never had to reflect on myself as a whole”.

Later on, at the Placement Review Day, he seems to have made this leap within the process:

“I feel it gave a kind of different dimension to it, I suppose. I talked a lot more about the context of where I was coming from, as opposed to whenever I was writing up on previous placements I wrote specifically on just the placement, not where I’m coming from and why I approach it like that”.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.....

Some students picked up on the idea of this group being a forum to reflect on what has gone before they commenced their social care education.

Emily: *“To actually sit back and think about your own circumstances rather than how to deal with others”.*

Kate notes in her reflexive diary:

“I have learned a lot about myself and others that I would never (have) explored or found out before. I found that the research group helped me reflect on my past experiences and what I went through to come this far in life, and to help other people like myself...”.

EXPLORING OUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES

Katherine says she began to reflect on herself more, and thinks that this may have been what had been missing previously in her learning:

"I think we spend so much time reflecting on our abilities or on other people we don't actually reflect deep enough. I think these may be the classes that I will have a lightbulb moment of "I am acting this way because of this event".

If I look back on my reflections for placement (before) maybe this is why I have never felt I got the hang of it. Maybe I needed to get more personal than staying on the surface because what am I really learning from that?"

AND THE UNEXPECTED.....

Ella in her reflexive diary notes:

"I feel the pre-placement classes greatly helped me as a person There were many different aspects of the group process that stood out for me, one being the fact that the group size was small.... Before attending these classes I would never have had the courage to speak openly about my experiences in life, as I would have considered them invalid....

The group size allowed me as a person to speak openly about my experiences without any judgement and I really believe this will help me in the future when working in the field especially during team or multidisciplinary meetings when I will have to speak openly about clients".

STUDENT LEARNING FROM MODULE:

What I learnt from this module?

I am more aware of quality in social care How I am affects others

I Need to feel supported

My family can impact on my practice

There can be little difference between my story and a client's story

I can try to be more in the moment with a person

There are all different types of families

I feel more confident

I am part of the relationship with a client *I feel guilty*

I can speak up at meetings

My role in my family can affect the work

WHAT STUDENTS NOTICED-IMPACT ON THEIR PRACTICE

From their involvement in this different learning and relationally reflexive process, students noticed:

- differences in how they thought about, positioned themselves, and responded to service users and other professionals when on placement;
- They gave examples of how they felt the process helped them become more aware of themselves, their own life and family experiences;
- and the impact of these on themselves and their readiness for social care practice.
- Increase in empathy for client's circumstances.
- Students become more aware of the form of care they were providing to clients as they were becoming more reflexive of their experiences of care within their families.

AND IN RELATION TO THEIR PRACTICE?

In her diary Rachel reflected on her experience of looking after somebody in her life who had mental health difficulties.



“Taking part in this session has helped me to think about events from my past and how they may influence my future.....

I feel this will be of a benefit to me as I know what it is like to be on the other side”.



“...I learned a lot about myself that I have never realised before, particularly how my own insecurities can prevent relationships from being built with service users....

I am now more aware of my feelings and how they can impact on my daily life and I can work on these feelings instead of ignoring them or burying them”.

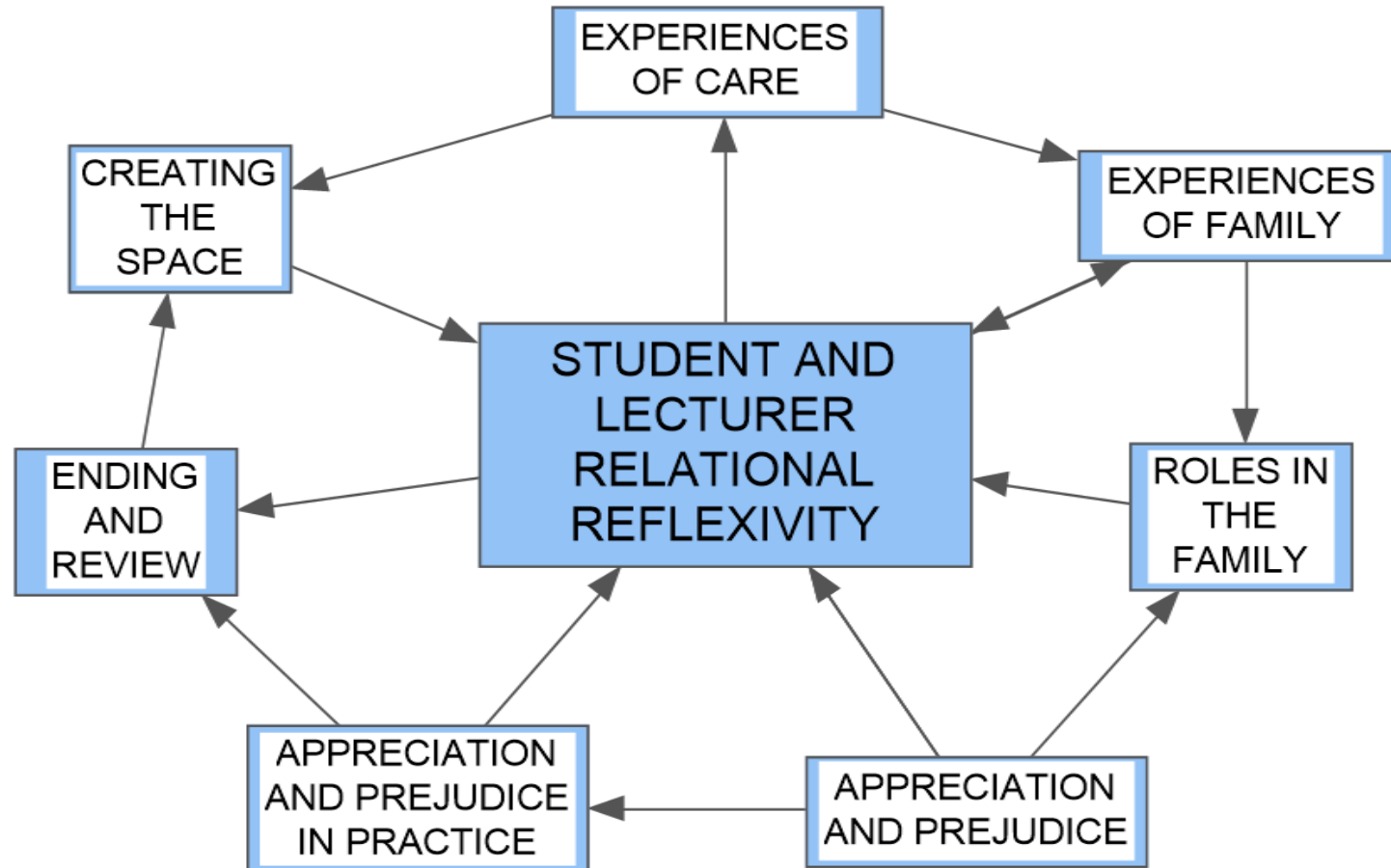
AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF REFLECTION-PUBLIC RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

This form of teaching and learning brings benefits for students, lecturers and service users in terms of quality of education and care provision.

Based on this research, a model of relational reflexivity has been developed that can be used in social care programmes.

This model sees the student reflecting on their past experiences within their family of origin, and asks them to think about how these experiences may help or hinder them in practice when interacting and building relationships with others.

AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR REFLECTION- PUBLIC RELATIONAL REFLEXIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM



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