

BOOK REVIEW

Critical Reflection in Context: Applications in Health and Social Care

Jan Fook & Fiona Gardner

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This book comprises an edited range of case studies using the Fook/Gardner critical reflection framework in health and social care settings. Its aim is to highlight the flexibility and innovation this critical reflection model has in many areas and how it has been applied by different writers. The book's bright cover suggests growth, new and hidden pathways entirely appropriate for critical reflection. The title clearly summarises the book's purpose. The design of the book appeals to practitioners, students, educators and researchers.

The initial chapter by Jan Fook outlines the purpose of the book, the need for critical reflection and refreshes the Fook/Gardner model. Fook goes on to describe the book's structure and its contributors. The book consists of nineteen short chapters and is organised into four separate sections - critical reflection in professional practice, supervision and management, research, and education. Each section will attract readers from specific areas of practice or education. The reader is able to move easily to specific sections and chapters of interest. However, the temptation with this book is to become engrossed in reading the sections sequentially. Each chapter ends with the contributor's reference list. Jan Fook concludes the book with the common themes of implementing critical reflection in health and social care settings as well as future implications.

The contributors in this book use the Fook/Gardner model and describe the benefits of practising critical reflection in specific contexts. This provides a balanced perspective from a number of different professions and strong examples of the diversity critical reflection has. In the opening chapter, Jan Fook defines her approach to critical reflection as 'integrated' by 'learning from experience' through stages of deconstruction and reconstruction. In each chapter, the Fook/Gardner model is generically applied in context or specifically modified appropriate to the setting. The contributors provide an international flavour from countries -Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ethiopia and Israel. The narratives from contributors provide rich personal reflections, descriptions of practice, research findings and observations.

The areas of critical reflection in professional practice span mental health, palliative care, spirituality and community health in a rural setting. Kathleen McLoughlin and Sinead McGilloway's chapter demonstrates how critical reflection can be integrated into practice through a 'repertory grid' technique that reconstructs systems and assumptions around end-of-life care. Fiona Gardner develops 'critical spirituality' and provides examples from her training group. Critical reflection is explored by Gavan Thomson in a group of health and community development workers and groups in the mental health setting by Fiona Gardner.

In the supervision and management section, critical reflection groups in statutory social work held in London are examined in chapters by Yolande Ferguson and Jeffrey Baker. Jeffrey Baker's chapter on 'cringe-ical reflection' is notable for the personal reflection he makes on his position of power as a manager over the workers in the team and the part he plays in the 'dehumanising' of statutory bureaucratic structures. His struggle to sustain critical reflection in such an environment is a theme no doubt familiar to many readers. Findings from peer supervision sessions are discussed by Fiona Gardner and Eddie Taalman from an interdisciplinary team health setting in Australia, as is Belinda Hearn's eye-catching chapter on playing 'hide and seek with pink elephants'.

The critical reflection in research section offers a refreshing alternative in research design that challenges dominant discourses and argues for transformative learning. Gurid Aga Askeland highlights the challenges of being a 'cultural novice' in piloting the use of critical reflection as a research method to explore social work in Ethiopia. Christine Morley highlights some thought provoking ethical tensions of being the researcher and participant using a critical reflection methodology to co-construct meaning and power relations with sexual assault practitioners working alongside victims and their experiences of the legal system in Australia. Janet Allen takes the reader on a personal journey to explore spirituality in her own clinical work with women survivors of sexual trauma.

Within education, critical reflection is discussed by Riki Savaya as developed for a course within a social work programme in Israel. Of interest to Australian readers, Roslyn Giles and Rosalie Pockett highlight their experiences in developing students who are critically reflective in their social work programme. An interesting chapter regarding online crucial reflection dialogue group with students is written by Gail Baikie and colleagues. This chapter tantalises the reader with how critical reflection can be applied electronically and to ponder future potential in this arena.

The book has a unique quality in the sharing of personal experiences of critical reflection from each writer. This engages the reader in the writer's world on an intimate level and invites the reader to consider their own experiences. The reader also learns that being critically reflective brings challenging dilemmas such as being open to vulnerability, being reflexive and sustaining participation of others in groups over time.

Jan Fook confides in the first chapter that it is her hope the book is successful in contributing towards the theory of critical reflection in a number of practical and organisational settings. Certainly the book captures the imagination of practitioners and academics alike around the application of critical reflection towards more effective individual and organisational learning. As the cover suggests, the invitation is made for readers to pave their own pathway towards critical reflection in their context.

Matt Rankine

Professional Teaching Fellow

University of Auckland, New Zealand