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POSTMODERN PEDAGOGY AND THE ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING AND SUSTAINING SKILLS OF CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

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Introduction

Teaching about postmodern practices and engaging in a postmodern pedagogy are two separate activities. Ideally, these two activities overlap and influence one another, although there are challenges to overcome within the modern neoliberal university context when attempting to embody a postmodern pedagogical stance. In this chapter, acknowledging the ever-evolving development of theory and practice, we describe how our postmodern pedagogy has adjusted over time as we have been engaged in teaching a particular model of critical reflection on practice (CRoP) to Master of Social Work (MSW) students and then further sustaining their new CRoP skills within practicum integration seminars. Indeed, it would appear incongruent to us for postmodern pedagogy not to change over time (Nylund & Tilsen, 2006). Although we consider postmodernism and critical theories as distinct from one another, they complement one another and are both elements of the form of critical reflection on practice we teach.

Postmodern and critical pedagogies are crucial for unsettling truth claims and mainstream practices which limit the full engagement of individuals and groups who are marginalized while also challenging neoliberalism and assaults against democratic public life (Giroux, 2004; Nylund & Tilson, 2006). These pedagogical approaches cannot be neutral; "Education always presupposes a vision of the future. In this respect a curriculum and its supporting pedagogy are a version of our own dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities" (Simon in Giroux, 2004, p. 33). With this recognition of the philosophical and political elements involved in teaching and learning, we begin this chapter by describing our philosophical positions, highlighting how each of us, all white cisgender women, come from slightly different philosophical positions yet together have developed a mutually supportive teaching and research team. We describe Fook's approach to critical reflection (Fook, 2000; Fook & Gardner, 2007) and outline how critical reflection as a transformative learning process has continued to evolve, more recently expanding purposefully to include

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understandings from the postmodern theory and practice of narrative therapy and the study of spirituality (Béres & Fook, 2020). We explain the context in which we have developed the CRoP course for MSW students in our Canadian university, including our descriptions of how we have been approaching the teaching and assessment of learning.

Philosophical positions: Our dreams for ourselves and our students

Having completed a PhD in critical pedagogy and cultural studies, alongside having received training in the postmodern practice of narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), I (Laura) began my role as a faculty member in a School of Social Work 20 years ago, keen to put my commitments to transformative approaches to teaching and learning into practice. Wishing to integrate a Foucauldian approach to unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions (Chambon, 1999) and the narrative position of being decentered but influential (White, 2007), I struggled, as a young, inexperienced professor, to teach a course on human development assigned to me. Feeling miserable about what I experienced as a lack of success in teaching this course, I responded by doing what now has become a habit—I critically reflected upon my experience, inviting students who wished to reflect with me to join me in both presenting (Béres et al., 2005, 2006) and writing (Béres et al., 2008) about our experiences. Over the intervening years, my values and hopes have further impacted my pedagogical practices and inspired the development of the required CRoP course I teach. I hope to inspire future social workers to maintain a stance of humility and critical reflection that unsettles privileges, taken-for-granted assumptions, and knowledge to open up new possibilities for their own practices and the people they serve.

My (Stephanie's) philosophical position has been inspired by critical, feminist intersectional theorists (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality, as coined by Crenshaw (1989) and credited to the work of Black feminists (e.g., Collins, 1991; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984) and Chicana feminists (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987, Moraga, 1983), is intrinsic to my thoughts on teaching and practice. My teaching philosophy rests on a belief that education should provide an empowering experience that is collaborative and creates critical consciousness (Dore, 1994; Freire, 1970). An ongoing area of learning for me is navigating my multiple identities of power while creating a collaborative learning environment. Teaching CRoP, with its focus on postmodern and critical theories (Béres & Fook, 2020), has helped me to integrate my philosophical positioning with my teaching practice. This teaching approach aligns with my hopes for education, which continue to be for future social workers to leave the classroom with the skills and commitments necessary to respond to oppression and promote social justice (Freire, 1970).

I (Jane) was a social worker for over 25 years before returning to formal education to complete my PhD in social work and join academia. My approach to teaching, research, and practice is deeply embedded within a postmodern constructivist view. As a clinician, I worked in child and family mental health, focusing on trauma. This work led to an applied understanding of co-constructed realities and reflexive practice that has influenced my teaching. My own training led to a deeper understanding that my assumption of the impact of an adverse experience is secondary to how an individual understands that experience. Our individual perspectives are powerfully shaped, and therefore co-created, by our environment, ranging from the initial response to a disclosure, to the systemic response of criminal justice, to oppressive or supportive social messaging. Most importantly, I learned the importance of critically reflecting on the multiple ways my own perspective is impacted

by my environment, my experiences, and my awareness. CRoP, with its five frameworks and the concept of the critical incident (detailed below), felt instantly familiar.

My (Rosemary's) philosophical position is also informed by two decades of direct practice experience in mental health front-line and supervisory positions, and a decade of teaching and researching reflective supervision, leadership, and organizational culture and change. The interpretive paradigm, which views reality as subjective, contextual, and based on shared meanings (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), underlies my pedagogical approach. This paradigm fits with a postmodern approach that recognizes the social construction of meaning and the multiple meanings within language. My teaching philosophy incorporates elements of the CRoP model, encouraging students to be reflective by integrating experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) and reflective learning supervision models (Davys & Beddoe, 2021) into their coursework.

The four of us share similar commitments to our students and the professional practice of social work, yet have come from varying backgrounds and experiences. We each are engaged in postmodern pedagogy somewhat differently, as may be clear in our above descriptions of our philosophical positions. We each also have different experiences and expertise with Fook's approach to critical reflection, and from a postmodern point of view, this can be seen as a strength as we each bring our own personal perspective, enriching our teaching and research team with multiple points of view. We have, indeed, developed a community of practice and solidarity, which Morgenshtern and Schmid (2022) suggest is necessary for educators committed to incorporating critical reflection and power analysis into social work education. Morgenshtern and Schmid also argue for the importance of Fook's (2002) postmodern critical social work paradigm, which "legitimizes and includes difference, multiple perspectives and marginalized voices […] through stressing multiplicity, contradictions, fluidity, contextualizing and change" (p. 891).

The background and development of critical reflection on practice

Although traditional versions of reflection and reflexivity can reinforce neoliberal concepts of individualism, productivity, and efficiency, Fook's model of critical reflection draws upon, and integrates, postmodernism and critical social theory to support social workers' transformative learning and practice-based theory development. Fook's (2000) earlier work uses a postmodern and feminist lens to deconstruct and reconstruct notions of professional social work practice expertise. Acknowledging the widening gap between theory and practice and the over-privileging of scientific knowledge as opposed to the lived experience of the practitioner, Fook also reflects on the masculinization of professionalization over time as women's work sought further legitimization, disconnecting it from feminist analysis and a celebration of women's ways of knowing. Her development of critical reflection as both a theory and practice supports practitioners in honoring their own experience, moving away from only relying on generalizable scientific knowledge and towards the possibility of the creation of practice-based theory. Fook (2001) states the critically reflective approach is also useful "in making connections between personal lives and structural conditions, between concrete experience and more generalised theorising," going on to reflect upon her own personal experiences as someone with "a mixed and uncertain ethnic identity" as a way to unsettle reductionist generalizations about various cultures (p. 9). Fook's (2023) work has continued to develop, and in the fourth edition of her book *Social Work: A Critical Approach to Practice*, she considers how her thinking has changed over more than

20 years, particularly in response to the Black Lives Matter movement sparked by the death of George Floyd in the United States in 2020. She reflects on race relations and the irony of writing as a non-white woman for a primarily white audience acknowledging how she might also have been socialized into white ways of thinking. In this way, Fook's approach to critical reflection on practice has been developing as she has incorporated new learning from experience and as others have also contributed to its development.

Fook and Gardner's (2007) *Practising Critical Reflection Handbook* initially provided the basis for the development of the CRoP course we created in our Canadian MSW program. I (Laura) consulted with Jan Fook, who assisted in the creation of the university-based CRoP course despite the handbook primarily describing how CRoP can be facilitated in a three-day workshop format provided over several weeks or months. Jan and I also incorporated a small research component in the first offering of the CRoP course, which resulted in the publication of *Learning Critical Reflection: Experiences of the Transformative Learning Process* (Béres & Fook, 2020). In this book, Jan and I expand the four frameworks she and Fiona Gardner (2007) present as part of the practice and theory of critical reflection in their handbook to the following five frameworks: reflective practice, reflexivity, post-structural thinking and postmodern narrative practice, critical perspectives, and spirituality (Béres & Fook, 2020). Below, we describe the five frameworks of CRoP along with how we teach and sustain these skills of critical reflection.

The context of our teaching and facilitation of critical reflection on practice

The required CRoP course was created for our MSW program at the time that we shifted the program from a Generalist to a Direct Practice focus. This change process involved faculty members considering what was crucial within the curriculum to ensure that social work values and ethics were interwoven within practice theories and skills. Brown (2020) points out that there can be a dichotomy created between clinical/direct practice social work skills versus social justice commitments. I (Laura) wanted to ensure that critical reflection, as Fook (2000) has developed it with its postmodern and critical approaches, was incorporated as a required course to ensure the integration of social justice and critical perspectives within reflective practice and alongside the development of direct practice interventions. Although the MSW program does not include the requirement of the completion of a major research paper, students do learn practice and program evaluation, and unfortunately , as Fook points out, mainstream approaches to evaluation have tended to devalue practitioner expertise. CRoP provides a model which supports students in a transformative process, examining power relations while developing practice-based theory, and deconstructing of mainstream discourses. Unsurprisingly, the deconstruction of discourses of vocation, perfectionism, and individualism have at the same time created the opportunity for students to be kinder to themselves as they have moved away from previously taken-for-granted dualisms of "good versus bad social worker" and begun to explore what it would mean to embrace Winnicott's concept of "good enough" (Baird et al., 2023; West, 2016).

The structure and content of the CRoP course

The CRoP course is offered over 12 weeks, meeting three hours each week. We (Laura and Stephanie) currently each teach one section of the course. Advanced Standing MSW students who hold a BSW degree are registered in one section of the course in the first term

of their three-term/one-year program. The other section is offered to MSW students, in the first term of the second year of their program, who are in a two-year program for students with an undergraduate degree in something other than social work.

The CRoP course begins with an overview of how critical perspectives like critical social theory are what make critical reflection on practice "critical" (Brookfield, 2016) as well as a description of what to expect from the overall CRoP process. We explain that a critical incident for the purposes of critical reflection is merely something that the social work student has experienced that continues to come to mind. It can be something they experienced in their personal lives, but it is preferable to choose an incident from their employment, volunteer, or practicum experiences. There are no restrictions as to when the incident had to have occurred, as what is more important is that it continues to come to mind from time to time. Something may still bother them about the incident, as they worry they could have done something better, or they may continue to feel good about how they managed a challenge of some sort. The fact they continue to think back on the incident suggests there is potentially more to learn from it. They are asked to write a short 1-page description of their incident for the purposes of then learning how to critically reflect upon it. We explain that the class will be divided into small groups of 4–5 students to work together through stages one and two of the CRoP process. Over the years, we have adjusted our approach to creating these small working groups. Initially, encouraging students to create their own groups resulted in feedback that this was stressful, and they preferred to be assigned to groups by course instructors. In addition, feedback from racialized students, alongside consultation with racialized colleagues, has resulted in attempting to ensure any racialized student is not the only racialized student within a group. We have been working diligently to diversify the student body in our program, so it has slowly become easier over the years to ensure racialized students do not need to feel alone in their experiences in the groups.

The concept of, and need for, critical acceptance (Fook & Gardner, 2007; Salomons, 2020) is explored within the earlier classes alongside the possibility of experiencing feelings of vulnerability (Béres, 2020) when discussing their incidents within their groups. Recognizing the complexity involved, students are encouraged to discuss what they require of one another within their groups to feel sufficiently supported *and* challenged to learn anew from their CRoP process. At the same time, we encourage students to maintain boundaries and to "pass" on answering any question posed about their incident should it be experienced as potentially leading to the disclosure of personal details they do not wish to share.

The five frameworks of CRoP

Within the first couple of weeks of the course, in addition to covering the above concepts, we also slowly move into describing the two stages of the CRoP process and presenting the five frameworks used in each stage, as described below (Béres & Fook, 2020). We suggest the five frameworks operate like five different lenses, which are used to assist students in deconstructing and reconstructing their understanding of their incidents. Each lens provides a slightly different point of view and access into the underlying values, assumptions, and commitments contained within their descriptions of their incidents.

Reflective practice

The first framework, reflective practice, is influenced by Schön's (1983) work on reflecting-in and reflecting-on practice and the recognition that what is learned in a classroom setting

rarely transitions smoothly into practice. This framework asks students to consider what assumptions and implicit theories they rely on when their espoused and explicit practice theories let them down in a practice situation. If this framework were used without the addition of the other four, it would be closely aligned to Kolb's (1984) circular notion of reflection on practice. Possible questions include what explicit theory was initially guiding my practice in my situation? If my explicit theory failed to guide me in my practice, what implicit theory did I fall back upon? What are my values or beliefs that are implied—which either guided my reaction in the incident or are apparent in how I described the incident?

Reflexivity

The framework of reflexivity provides a lens that closely aligns with traditional notions of self-reflection, asking students to consider their emotions, physical reactions, and how their past personal experiences and social location influence their approach to understanding their incident. This framework also encourages consideration of how to engage in a personal embodied reflection so as not to rely solely on cognitive and affective reactions within the CRoP process. Possible questions include how do my identities influence my experience of the situation? How does my stage in life impact my impression of the incident? What was I feeling physically and emotionally during the incident or during the recall of the incident?

Post-structural thinking and postmodern narrative practice

The post-structural and postmodern narrative practice framework asks students to consider what other stories and whose points of view they may not have previously considered, whether they have set up any binaries in their thinking, and the possible influence of discourses in their written description. Narrative therapy practices particularly contribute to a clearer need to externalize the incident from the social worker's sense of self and the usefulness of considering the absent but implied values contained within their description of the incident (White, 2007). Possible questions include what words jump out at me in my description of the incident? Why have I chosen these? What discourses are possibly being drawn upon as I use those words? Do my words indicate binaries or polarized thinking? Are there points of view that are left out of the description of my incident? Have I blamed myself or internalized any problem within the description of the incident?

Critical perspectives

The critical perspectives framework incorporates critical social theory, feminist theory, and critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995), ensuring an examination of power, asking students to consider who in their incident has access to what sort of power, and how race and gender are impacting people within the incident. This framework also encourages an examination of the impacts of colonization in the incident. Possible questions include what forms of oppression or broad social structures of power are in play here? Is race or cultural diversity contributing to power differentials in this situation/incident? What level of power does each person in the situation have access to?

Spirituality

Finally, the spirituality framework asks students to think about what has surfaced through the first four CRoP frameworks and what that suggests they value. This is linked to what

gives them a sense of meaning and purpose in their professional lives. Possible questions include what is coming out at the end of stage one about my personal fundamental values? Are there broader connections from this analysis of this situation to my work or my life more generally? Is there greater meaning in this work for me and does it keep me motivated?

We (Laura and Stephanie), as instructors of the two sections of the course, share our own critical incidents from our counseling practice within the class, supporting students in beginning to develop questions from the five frameworks to ask us to demonstrate stage one of the process before they engage in the process themselves within their small groups. Although we initially did not provide examples of questions and encouraged students to develop the skills in creating their own questions once they understood the five CRoP frameworks, we have become more flexible over time. We now share possible generic questions with the students while also encouraging them to become comfortable in rewording them and creating more specific questions based on critical incident content.

Assignments

Although challenging to create assignments based on postmodern sensibilities within the requirements of a university program, we have spent time adjusting the CRoP course and assignments, scaffolding activities (Vygotsky, 1978) to gradually prepare and support students in their learning of the CRoP process.

Students write a short description of their critical incident to be submitted for an ungraded review by their instructor so we can provide feedback as to whether there appears to be sufficient material in the description to carry them through the CRoP process. Within each of weeks three through five, we present theoretical material for the first hour of the course and then have students work in their small groups together. Each week they have time for at least two students to present their incident to their group and have their peers ask questions informed by the five CRoP frameworks. We (Laura and Stephanie) circulate among the groups, assisting them with putting their theoretical learning of CRoP into practice with one another.

During week six, we have an in-class test worth 20% of the final grade. We are transparent about what will be included in the test, explaining ahead of time that students will be asked to bring their written description of their incident, which continues to be ungraded, and then they will be asked to describe the five CRoP frameworks, generate 3–4 questions that could be asked of their incident from each of those frameworks, answer those questions and then state where their thinking about the incident has taken them at this point. The students have often provided feedback that this assignment requires them to operationalize what they have learned about CRoP, with many indicating experiencing "aha" moments and insights during the writing of the test.

The week following the test, which coincides with the end of stage one, we hold a shorter class to discuss different states it is possible to experience at the end of stage one (Fook & Gardner, 2007), and the benefits of taking time for a defined interval or pause before beginning stage two. One previous student commented that this pause was like the Japanese concept of "ma" (Greve, 2011), providing the space and time to see both stage one and stage two more clearly as separate elements of the overall process. We suggest that taking time away from the structured CRoP process in the classroom setting, to walk, engage in mindfulness practices, or do something creative (El-Lahib et al., 2022), can provide yet

another way of accessing further clarity regarding their learning—a more embodied way of knowing, as a former CRoP student has described it (Botelho, 2021). This interval is usually extended further with the Fall term Reading Week break after which we pick up with stage two.

During weeks 10 and 11, we review further academic material regarding the process of critical reflection in the first hour and then give students time to work in their small groups again. During this stage, their focus is on asking questions based on the five CRoP frameworks again but with a future focus, being curious about what might be different in their practice moving forward, based on having become clearer about their values and assumptions, the impact of certain discourses on their thinking, or more aware of the impacts of power structures on their practice preferences. We also encourage students to take some of their small group time to plan for their group presentations, worth 20% of their final grade. Each group presents in the penultimate class, focusing on their learning process or shared themes uncovered.

In the final class, we spend time considering how the CRoP process can be engaged in more fluidly now that students have engaged in the process once and it is more fully understood. Some people use personal journaling to continue engaging in critical reflection, while others develop small peer-support groups (Gardner, 2014; Mayor & Pollack, 2022), and we describe how it can be incorporated within the practicum integration seminars. The students also complete a final assignment worth 40% of their final grade, choosing one of two formats. Those students who prefer structure and guidance choose to complete a formal academic paper with a rubric, focusing on what they have learned from the CRoP process and linking new insights to academic literature. Others choose to develop an alternative and more creative final project in consultation with their particular instructor, including, for example, further exploration of their CRoP learning through art projects, creation of short storybooks, newsletters, poetry, photovoice projects, cooking, yoga, and dance. Most recently, one student wrote about meeting with an Elder and Knowledge Keeper to further incorporate Indigenous knowledge into his CRoP process. Finally, students are given feedback on their participation, worth 20% of their final grade.

Adjustments and pedagogically sustaining skills of critical reflection

The first few years that CRoP was offered, it was only taught within a standalone course, and following that course, students were expected to use the ASPIRE model (Sutton, 2006) to reflect upon their practice within practicum integration seminars. The ASPIRE model is similar to Kolb's (1984) reflective model as it suggests students assess, plan, intervene, reflect, and then evaluate before assessing, planning, and intervening again. The postmodern and critical perspectives of CRoP are missing from this approach. Student feedback suggested that integrating CRoP into the practicum integration seminars would assist them in further consolidating and sustaining their skills of critical reflection. In consultation with the Field Education and MSW Coordinators who oversee placements and the related integration seminars, we decided to weave CRoP into the practicum integration seminars, ensuring students drew upon CRoP in their reflective practice projects when they present a case with which they have worked. We have also ensured students consider ways of including CRoP in their learning contracts, committing to finding ways to integrate critical reflection in their placement experiences.

A community of practice

In the first year of integrating CRoP into the practicum integration seminars, the four of us each facilitated one of the seminars. Each seminar was made up of 10–12 students and was a mix of both Advanced Standing and Year Two MSW students, meeting for two hours every other week from January through June while the students were in placement three days each week. While the four of us were facilitating the seminars, we also met as soon after each seminar as possible to support one another in reflecting upon our own skills in sustaining students' CRoP skills in this more informal setting (Baird et al., 2023). Since the structure of the seminars does not provide the time necessary to include a full CRoP process with both stages one and two, we have attempted to incorporate a more fluid approach to CRoP so that students are better able to develop and sustain their habit of questioning assumptions and points of view. We all experienced the pressure to complete fulsome check-ins with students and review material to assist them in preparing for their final case presentations in the seminars, and so it was helpful to meet to remind one another also of our commitment to attempt to weave CRoP questions into the seminars within these time constraints. This experience of the time pressure was consistent with feedback provided by students about time being one of the biggest challenges to incorporating critical reflection in their ongoing practice.

Unsurprisingly, from a postmodern point of view, learning "how" and "what" to teach for learning and sustaining skills of critical reflection will continue to be an ongoing process. Our own experiences and observations as a teaching and research team, continuous reflections from students, and beginning research findings (Baird et al., 2023; Béres et al., 2023) have shaped our approach and, as described above, some of the content we cover in the CRoP course. How we support the ongoing, more fluid integration of critical reflection in the practicum integration seminars, particularly, is a work in progress. Although we benefited from meeting as a small community of practice group to learn about each other's pedagogical approaches and to share our approaches and struggles with teaching CRoP in the seminars in the first year of attempting this, a change in the timetable resulted in challenges in finding the time to meet in the second and third years we were integrating CRoP into the seminars. However, having developed our community of practice and a shared sense of commitment carried us through. Meanwhile, Stephanie and I (Laura) have been able to consult regularly on the content and process of the CRoP course, continuing to make adjustments each year. For example, this past year we were able to incorporate content on Indigenous Knowledges created by Indigenous colleagues at Western University (Brunette-Debassige, 2022). This material was specifically developed to assist non-Indigenous instructors in their attempts to decolonize and indigenize their courses.

Conclusion

In describing how we are continuing to develop our abilities in sustaining students' skills of CRoP, we have provided an example of how to engage in postmodern pedagogy. We have found that creating a community of practice has supported our commitments to transformative learning and enabled us to better support students in developing CRoP as a professional habit. Working together has allowed us to weave and scaffold CRoP across the curriculum much more effectively than any one of us could have managed alone. Indeed, incorporating a postmodern approach to teaching any content will potentially be more

successful if supported by a community of practice open to collaboration and change. It is not a simple matter to engage in a postmodern pedagogy within the structures and expectations of an academic institution, but witnessing transformative learning and experiencing collegial support makes it a rewarding endeavor.

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