The place of structural-self reflexivity in our ongoing educational journey as social workers

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Abstract

This paper explores the relevance of critical hermeneutics to the decisions social workers make about their continuing professional education. It is noted, to begin this exploration, that the various traditions of initial social work education necessitate a critical examination of ourselves, our understandings of society, an analysis of our relationship with others and a critical analysis of the power relationships of society. I argue that in order to remain true to their commitment to social justice, social workers need to ensure this examination remains a part of their ongoing continuing professional education (CPE). In this paper I outline the critical hermeneutics of Hans Herbert Kögler as I believe the three forms of reflexivity he describes provide a useful framework for social workers to carefully examine their decisions about continuing professional education.

Kögler argues that a structural-self reflexivity can only emerge out of the subject being in a dialogic relationship with someone who is outside of their own interpretive understanding. I argue the importance of this notion for social work, noting in particular, how this kind of dialogic relationship allows social workers the opportunity to explore their taken-for-granted understandings about their ‘practice world’. I suggest that these dialogic relationships provide essential opportunities for social workers to make informed decisions about their CPE. In this way, social workers can explore opportunities for CPE which will ensure their practice expands to all that is possible to be. The paper concludes with a consideration of how social workers can ensure a structural-self reflexivity informs their CPE decisions.

Introduction

Several years ago I investigated the changing notions of reflective practice held by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. The development of reflective practice is increasingly seen as an important focus for social workers’ initial preparation for practice and their continuing professional education (CPE). In my exploration of the social work literature on reflective practice strong connections are made between reflexivity and reflective practice.
Some particularly insightful work in this regard is that of Sheppard (1995, 1998) who explores reflexivity in relation to reflection and provides a well argued position on the situated nature of the social worker within the societal context. My explorations of this notion of reflexivity led me to become increasingly intrigued by its relevance to social work education. Indeed, my exploration of Sheppard’s notion of the social worker as reflexive practitioner ultimately led to me utilising the philosophical work of Hans Herbert Kögler as the basis for my masters thesis which I completed in 2003. Kögler, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Florida, wrote a series of articles exploring critical hermeneutics which I briefly outline in this paper. As I have worked with social workers over the past two years, assisting them to make decisions about their CPE, I have found that Kögler’s work continues to provide useful insights into my understandings of reflection, social work practice and social workers’ CPE.

In the following section I acknowledge the importance of the work of Argyris, Kolb, Mezirow and Schön, in the field of reflective practice and briefly sketch the relationships between some of their work and social worker understandings of reflective practice. I briefly introduce Sheppard’s notion of the social worker as reflexive practitioner and then describe an epistemological dilemma which emerges from Sheppard’s notion of social worker as reflexive practitioner. Then I go on to propose that Kögler’s exploration of the dialogic process provides us with a well thought out mechanism to, nevertheless, embrace this notion of reflexive practitioner. I show that Kögler’s exploration of reflexivity provides a useful framework to ask important questions about the critical hermeneutic context of social worker CPE decisions. In particular, that a utilisation of Kögler’s framework in making our CPE decisions will make it more likely we will not lose sight of the importance of social justice to social work practice.

**Professional knowledge, reflective practice and social work education**

In this brief introduction to reflective practice it is fitting to acknowledge the significant work of Argyris, Kolb, Mezirow and Schön and their explorations of reflection in the development of professional knowledge – although, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to consider these in detail. Schön’s work on reflective practice often appears in the parts of the social work literature that discuss the relationships between practice and learning. Argyris and Schön’s seminal work on reflective practice in 1974 was based on their analysis of the education and training of professionals. Schön’s later work (1983, 1987) continued to focus on professional competence and his work is widely drawn upon by social work educators. Although the work of Kolb (1984) is not drawn on by social work educators to the same extent as Schön’s, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge it, as it has still impacted upon the social work literature in relation to social worker understandings of practice learning. Kolb’s work was significant as he endeavoured to move beyond the constraints of cognitive theorists to formulate a theory explaining the intersections of experience, thinking and learning. Kolb’s ideas on experiential learning have led to a significant amount of research on the learning that happens within the social work fieldwork experience and his reflective learning cycle is often used to describe relationships between theory and practice (Ellis, 1998: 67).

By contrast, Mezirow’s exploration of the professional’s knowledge has influenced the wider literature of reflective practice but is less apparent in social workers’ discourse
on reflective practice. A brief comment on his work does, however, provide a good background to this overview of reflective practice and social work education because of his acknowledgement of the importance of context to knowledge. Mezirow (1990) discussed the importance of professionals undergoing a ‘perspective transformation’ so they can critically reflect on the knowledge they are using in their practice. In particular, he notes that a perspective transformation enables us to become clearer about how ‘our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world’ (Mezirow, 1990: 14).

These important considerations of how we perceive, understand and feel about our world are discussed frequently in the social work education and training literature. Indeed, social work education requires social workers to continuously critically reflect upon their assumed knowledge, their biographical journey, their values and their assumptions in relation to their work with clients. Yelloly and Henkel (1995: 32) in their exploration of the essential knowledge which must be taught on entry-level professional qualifications note:

We believe that one cannot consider knowledge separately from understanding, or from the values implied by selective acquisition and use of different forms of knowledge, or from the context in which knowledge is being applied. Knowledge is never complete, and is constantly being modified through practice and reflection.

Yelloly and Henkel’s exploration of knowledge through a consideration of values, contexts, practice and reflection is common in the social work literature. This consideration is also noted as fundamental to CPE by Duffy (2003: 30-31) who argues good CPE requires an examination of the values, beliefs, knowledge and assumptions of staff which inform and shape their work practices.

It is certainly argued by social work educators that we need to be able to consciously explore the background biographical aspects of our understanding of ourselves if we are to become better practitioners. That is, our ability to carry out good social work practice depends on the extent to which we are able to reflect on ourselves, our experiences and our values (Adams, Dominelli and Payne, 2002; Munford, 2003). This is a point also emphasised at the 2004 CPE conference by Jeawody, who noted, ‘self-awareness is a significant tool towards enhancement of professional practice and client interaction, and would derive enhanced benefit from being an integral part of educational processes’ (2004: 85). Jeawody argues, along with many other social work educators, that this goal of self-awareness can be enhanced through critical reflection and through a critical analysis of our practice.

Although the varying use of these terms ‘critical reflection’ and ‘critical analysis’, could be discussed at great length, suffice it to note here, that social workers use the term critical to mean widely varying things. This usage embraces notions of a critical reflection on the content of our actions, to a critical reflection upon ourselves or indeed upon the contexts of our practice or our profession. It is this latter meaning of critical, to refer to the importance of the contextualisation of our practice, which I would like to comment further upon here.

The idea of the professional social worker contextualising their knowledge within its economic, social and political fields is endorsed throughout the literature and is a key aspect of social worker education (Abels and Abels, 2001; Fook, 1993; Morley, 2002). As noted in the
brief reference to Mezirow above, professionals need to consider the contextualisation of their knowledge and in particular the ways in which their knowledge is shaped and constructed by societal contexts. Indeed, these aspects of critically reflecting upon the sources, and inherent values, of our knowledge are key components of social work education. As Jeeawody (2004: 82-83) has noted, much of social work practice is informed by the social justice and human rights movements. The literature on radical and critical social work practice requires social workers to reflect on the impacts of social structures on the lives of their clients and to work practically towards incorporating that knowledge into their practice. Further, social workers are expected to commit themselves to addressing the social structures that need to be changed (Fook, 1993).

Within the present social service governance and management environment, however, there have been emerging dilemmas of who governs social work practice and what social workers need to learn. It has been noted that the profession of social work is increasingly subjected to the impacts of managerialism resulting in employers having increasing control over what social workers are taught and the development of competencies relating to specific occupational contexts (Munford, 2003; Nash and Munford, 2001). As Munford explains, this has resulted in a professional education environment where ‘striving for a social work that remains critical and self-reflective, and engaged with many bodies of knowledge, is often in conflict with a view that remains focused on the pragmatic and technocratic’ (2003: 50). In recent years this has resulted in an increased recognition in the need to re-kindle the fires of social justice in the profession of social work (Karger and Hernandez, 2004). An important aspect of this increased dialogue on social justice and the negative impacts of managerialism on social work centres on discussions of technical rationality (Payne, 1997; Parton, 2000; Sheppard, 1995; Sheppard, 1998).

Of particular note in this regard is the work of Sheppard, who cautions people in the professions to avoid placing too much emphasis on technicality, as this will lead to an erosion of the need for education and open up possibilities of increasing control of the profession by managers (Sheppard, 1995: 288). He argues that the more we see social work as the application of discrete skills in particular agencies, the more we will concentrate on preparing people for social work practice by simply training them in how to apply rules and use pre-determined tools in particular situations. This will ultimately lead, according to Sheppard, to the preparation of social workers for practice becoming social work training rather than professional social work education.

The reflexive practitioner

Sheppard (1998) posits the idea that concentrating our discussions on ‘reflective practice’ continues to emphasise a technical rationality through a focus on ‘product knowledge.’ I agree with Sheppard, that the more our CPE focuses on knowledge as product, the less effectively will we develop the critical comprehensive thinking that is required by professional social workers. Instead of using the term reflection, Sheppard proposes the term, ‘reflexivity’, thus, emphasising the importance of knowledge as process and he goes on to argue for the use of the term reflexive practitioner rather than reflective practitioner.

Sheppard (1998: 767) explains the relevance of this to social work in terms of the social worker being seen as both an active thinker who can assess and respond to the needs of
a client, and also as a social actor who is participating in the socially interactive situation. Rather than somehow placing themselves outside of interactions to reflect upon them, the practitioner recognises that he/she is reflexively involved in those interactions. My explorations of reflective practice endorse the relevance of this concept for social workers, although as I note in the next section there emerges a particular epistemological dilemma in the acceptance of this reflexivity.

To conclude this section, I note that an acceptance of the development of reflective practice as a key goal for our CPE as social workers, necessitates striving for educational experiences which:

- Acknowledge the social/political contexts of our knowledge;
- Recognise the situated contexts of an exploration of our biographical experiences on our understandings of practice;
- Draw on an analysis which links personal experiences to the socio-political context;
- Facilitate social workers to remain true to their commitment to social justice;
- Recognise the reflexive nature of our work with clients.

As noted earlier, I have found Kögler’s critical hermeneutics provides a sound epistemological framework which effectively draws together these important threads and it is his work which I now go on to briefly overview.

**Kögler’s three levels of social reality**

Hans Herbert Kögler is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Florida. His critical hermeneutics, which he articulated in several publications between 1996 and 1997, has two main aspects. Firstly, he describes three levels of social reality and the relationships between these three levels. Secondly, he delineates three modes of reflexivity, which I use in this paper to explore the decisions that social workers make about their CPE.

I believe Kögler’s *three part description of social reality* provides a well-argued framework which can embrace the theoretical and practical aspects of social work practice, but I only describe this briefly here before moving on to explain the key aspect of this paper, his *three modes of reflexivity*. Kögler (1997a: 142) describes the objective level of social reality as consisting of structural aspects like housing, government and professional contexts. He is interested in the way that external constraints are imposed differentially on the lives of individuals, and groups of individuals, for example with regard to gender, class and ethnicity. Kögler describes the second level of social reality, which he termed the practical level, in terms of people’s conscious, deliberate social practices. That is, people engage in social interactions through the exercise of conscious discretion as to what kinds of things they will do and say in their relationships with others. Finally, the third level of social reality that Kögler identifies is that of ‘interpretive schemes’. It is this level of social reality that Kögler discusses in the most incisive fashion since its relationship to the other two levels lies at the heart of his critical hermeneutics.

Kögler describes our interpretive schemes as our patterns of meanings and understandings that are organised through the deep-seated conceptions that we hold about society, nature and ourselves. We draw upon these schemes, without conscious thought, through
our beliefs and values. Köglers (1997b: 233) understanding of ‘interpretive schemes’ is that they act as mediators between the first and second levels of social reality. He explains: the interpretive schemes are “symmetrically placed in between intentional acts (that draw on such schemes to make sense) and social conditions (that shape such schemes by imposing a certain structure on them in each individual)”. We are not necessarily aware, however, of all the assumptions and consequences of these background schemes.

This third level of social reality (our background, interpretive understanding) focuses on our implicit and reflective experience of the world. Yet, Köglers notes, the very interpretive schemes that are a part of that background were developed within the environment of the objective level of society. His critical hermeneutics explores the question, ‘How can we be both situated in our contexts and sufficiently distanced from them to be truly critical at the same time?’ That is, how can we be immersed in a specific context and reality whilst at the same time analytically observing the structural implications of that context? This dilemma, I argue, lies at the heart of how we think about social work knowledge and, therefore, social work education and social work continuing professional education. It is this dilemma which, I believe, is not sufficiently explored in the social work literature relating to reflective practice.

Köglers solution to this epistemological dilemma lies in his proposition that it is through communication with an outsider (outside of our own internal symbolic order) that we are able to reflect upon, and gain an understanding of, our own symbolic background (1997a: 162). Since our stance always depends on our own pre-understandings, we are only able to analyse the ‘power’ that is manifested at the structural level when we explore our social reality in a reflexive process with another. The outsider, through communication with us, finds words to explain, reconstruct or respond to what we are saying or experiencing. Our responses to their comments enable us to explore our hitherto unexplored symbolic-practical background (Köglers, 1997b: 245).

**Dialogic model**

Köglers argues (1996: 253) that through the dialogic process with another, what were once hidden symbolic forms may be seen. It allows us to distance ourselves sufficiently from our background so that we are able to apprehend, in new ways, the manner in which social practices have influenced our self-understanding. That is, a dialogic relationship with another can enable us to see those aspects of our background which inform the social practices we engage with. For example, we may be enabled to see, through this relationship, that there are aspects of our background which are exploitative, exclusionary or based on structures of domination and which have emerged from privilege relating to our race, class, and/or gender. Through the hermeneutic encounter with another we are empowered to re-construct our beliefs and assumptions in light of the dialogue that we have with each other.

This idea is also explored in the CPE literature (Cyboran, 2005; Duffy, 2003; Watkins and Marsick 1993). Watkins and Marsick (1993: 26) note that:

…to maximize the benefits of much workplace learning, people need to bring what they are learning into conscious awareness. They learn more effectively through a process of questioning, reflection, and feedback from others that permits deeper understanding to emerge from these otherwise everyday activities.
I believe it is this notion of bringing the unconscious into our conscious awareness that lies at the heart of Duffy’s contention (2003) that the staff developer is in a unique position to assist people’s learning. He argues that effective dialogue with the staff developer can enable people to move beyond their fixed, and potentially limiting, understandings of their work which have resulted in particular values, beliefs and assumptions influencing their work in unseen, un-reflected upon ways. Duffy (2003) argues that this exploration through dialogue is essential in CPE as people tend to tenaciously hold onto their current mental models in spite of the limitations, or even destructive influences, of these mental models on their practice.

In a similar vein to Kögler, Duffy maintains that dialogue with another is key to the exploration of staff mental models. He says that it is through dialogue and the development of shared understandings that educators are enabled to assist professionals to identify how their thinking is influencing their practice (Duffy, 2003: 35). Both Duffy and Kögler argue that the dialogic encounter with another enables aspects of the unconscious to be made conscious. Although Duffy provides a succinct overview of the educative, interpersonal strategies that the staff developer can use to shift people’s mental models he doesn’t explore the qualities of the communicative outsider – such qualities, Kögler maintains, are particularly pertinent.

Kögler suggests that the person with whom one engages must, to some extent, be in an outside position to ourselves – a position that he defines as ‘the relative outside-position of the situated interpreter” (Kögler, 1997a: 162). In other words, they must be someone who uses different interpretive schemes to us, to inform their social practices. Kögler (1997b: 245) argues that the relative outsider may be someone who is of a different gender, different ethnicity and/or different class. It is necessary for them to be a relative outsider since Kögler rejects the idea of it being possible for someone to act as an objective, free-floating intellectual who is able to reflect on themselves and their experiences by distancing themselves from their own social practices. He argues, therefore, that we need to explore our understandings with someone who has been situated in their own particular context and who has interpretive schemes we are not familiar with. The natural unfamiliarity that the interpreter experiences with regard to the other and his or her taken for granted assumptions and practices provokes the explicit reconstruction of such background structures’ (Kögler, 1997b: 245). It is only through having a dialogical encounter with someone who is a relative outsider to our own context that we are enabled to effectively explore our own position in, and understandings of, society.

The communication with someone who is a relative outsider to our own symbolic order, helps us to gain some distance from ourselves and, thereby, see ourselves and our location in society more clearly. Once some distance has been achieved from the situated-biographical self, Kögler proposes that the two parties who are in dialogue, are able to identify how their assumptions are influenced by the effects and functions of structural power (1996: 263). It is possible that the exploration of these power structures may lead to power relations being defined as oppressive. For example, the dialogical encounter may assist us to understand how different applications of power have led to particular groups being privileged over other groups and where we are located in terms of that privileging.

It has been argued elsewhere (Lynch, 2003; Sheppard, 1998) that this focus upon the importance of a reflexive relationship with another is particularly relevant to social work. As
outlined above, social workers are certainly interested in expanding their understanding of who they are, and how this understanding impacts upon their relationships with clients and the decisions they make about their CPE. Further, the critical social worker has a responsibility to continuously explore the place of social justice in their practice and the ways in which their role is contributing to, or challenging, marginalising processes in society. It is these ideas that I now consider in relation to the three levels of reflexivity which Köglé delineates.

Köglé’s three levels of reflexivity and their application to social worker CPE

Köglé identifies in his work that there are three possible modes of reflexivity that can emerge from a person’s critical-hermeneutic encounter with another. He describes these as: instrumental reflexivity; practical reflexivity; and structural self-reflexivity. Although Köglé’s work is not written to aid the thinking of social workers or continuing professional educators, I am proposing that his well reasoned analysis of knowledge has important links to the theory and practices which inform both these disciplines. In particular, I believe a consideration of these three modes of reflexivity provides a useful schema for social workers to ask key questions about their ongoing professional education.

In the three sub-sections below I provide an overview of each of the three modes of reflexivity delineated by Köglé and discuss briefly the relevance of each mode of reflexivity to social work. Within each sub-section I outline a series of questions which I propose can usefully assist social workers when they are making their CPE decisions. Köglé (1997b: 224) suggests that if we move progressively through the three modes of reflexivity – from instrumental reflexivity to practical reflexivity to structural reflexivity – we are making a transition in increasing degrees of complexity and abstraction. As the title of this paper suggests, I am certainly arguing that an application of Köglé’s third mode of structural-self reflexivity is particularly relevant to our ongoing development as social workers. This is because I believe that an exploration of Köglé’s structural-self reflexivity can assist us in exploring our understandings of critical social work practice – particularly with regard to the influences upon our practice of both the structures of society and the different manifestations of power within our own communities. I am not arguing, however, that the other two modes of reflexivity are irrelevant for our practice. It is for this reason that I have suggested relevant reflective questions relating to all three forms of reflexivity. I suggest that effective consideration of the questions posited in all three forms of reflexivity can contribute to the ongoing development of our practice.

Instrumental reflexivity
Köglé (1997b: 224) uses the term ‘instrumental reflexivity’ to describe the way a person reflects on different ways and means to achieve accepted social goals. In this mode of reflexivity there is no questioning of what those social goals are. People are, thus, reflecting on the best ways or techniques to achieve goals, which they have already accepted or taken for granted. There has been no distancing of oneself from the goals or from the source of those goals. I suggest that a social work practice application of this idea might embrace the reflections social workers have upon different or better ways to achieve the accepted goals of the agency and the social work profession. It is certainly common for social workers to explore these aspects of their practice in their relationships with in-line supervisors. Some key questions that a social worker could ask themselves with regard to instrumental reflexivity and their CPE might be:
What CPE could I undertake to ensure I am able to:

- Comply more effectively with the organisation’s policies and procedures?
- Attain the competency assessment requirements of ANZASW and work with my clients according to the standards of practice of the profession?
- Reflect upon how my practice differs from that of my agency colleagues?

I believe that the current structures and systems in the workplaces of social workers which have emerged through the increasing professionalisation of social work in this country have ensured that this form of reflexivity is increasingly present in social worker considerations of their CPE.

**Practical reflexivity**

In the practical mode of reflexivity that Kögle (1997: 224) posits, persons move beyond reflections upon different ways to achieve goals and reflect upon the actual goals and values that inform their actions. They make judgements about these goals and values and either reject, expand upon or accept them. In this mode, a step is taken backwards from the situations people find themselves in and a conscious effort is made to determine which goals to pursue. Persons are, thus, opening themselves to other possibilities and other directions. As I have noted elsewhere (Lynch, 2003: 62), this form of reflexivity is particularly important for social workers as the determination of the goals the social worker is working towards can create fundamental dilemmas for them. Both initial social work training and social worker CPE emphasise the importance of developing good social work judgement to facilitate social workers being able to deal with these dilemmas. I argue that this exercise of judgement and the development of a conscious repertoire of practice theory to assist the social worker in managing the competing demands of social work practice can be described by this domain of reflexivity as articulated by Kögle.

In addition, I see strong connections between Kögle’s practical mode of reflexivity and social worker discussions of practice wisdom. Sheppard explores important aspects of this through his concept ‘practice validity’ which he defines as the conscious consideration of the extent to which the knowledge we are using for our social work practice ‘takes a form consistent with the nature and purpose of social work’ (Sheppard, 1998: 771). He argues that the more we reflect upon social work knowledge from a practice led approach, the more likely we are to be considering the practice validity of our knowledge. That is, our conscious reflections on our actions may open up other ways of working which may benefit our clients more than the commonly accepted ways of working in the agency or in their usual repertoire of interventions. Sheppard’s description of practice validity is strongly concordant with the way Kögle discusses his practical reflexivity.

I suggest that some key questions which social workers can ask about their CPE decisions with regard to practical reflexivity could include:

- What CPE activities would encourage me to further develop my critical reflections on my social work practice?
- To what extent are my present supervision arrangements expanding, deepening and developing my practice?
- What CPE activities might open up other ways of working which may benefit the people
I work with more than the commonly accepted ways of working in the agency and my usual repertoire of interventions?

Good social worker employers can, in my opinion, ensure that there are systems in place to encourage social workers to ask these kinds of questions when they are making their CPE decisions – certainly, I see these questions as key to effective social worker performance appraisal systems. The responsibility for developing a practical reflexivity is, however, an important part of the reflective social worker’s own ongoing commitment to developing their practice wisdom and should not be a responsibility only located with the employer.

**Structural-self reflexivity**

Kögler refers to the third mode of reflexivity that he identifies as both ‘structural self-reflexivity’ and ‘critical reflexivity’. In this reflexivity, people reflect on how the goals and values that shape their life and actions have come to be. This mode requires an acknowledgement of the impact of our non-reason on the everyday practices of our lives. We need to consider the social, cultural and political contexts that we find ourselves in and how being in these contexts has shaped and influenced our lives. As identified in the discussion above on the reflexive practitioner, there are, however, difficulties in being able to do this because of the situated nature of our lives. In other words, if we accept that people are located within particular contexts which have shaped their values and beliefs, how is it possible that these same people can put these same values and beliefs aside to critically reflect on their situation? As Kögler (1996: 267-268) himself summarises: ‘the subject is obviously supposed to be both situated and distanced, engaged and critically reflective, immersed in a specific context while analytically observing the structural implications of that very context’. This mode of reflexivity relies, therefore, on the development of a reflexive, dialogical encounter with another, as I have explained above.

I have suggested that Kögler’s explanation of the importance of the reflexive distance that can emerge from the dialogic relationship with another is valid for social work, since social work education has just such a goal. That is, social workers are expected to examine their own social backgrounds in their training, in their supervision and their practice with clients. Social workers are expected to explore their own pre-understandings and examine the implications of these upon their practice. Further, they are expected to consider the connections between these pre-understandings and the larger structures of society, paying particular regard to the processes of dominance and subordination which contribute to marginalisation of particular groups. Kögler’s critical hermeneutics provides social workers with a way of comprehending how this examination of relationships using concepts of reflexivity can ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of society and our place within it. I argue that it is this third mode of reflexivity, structural-self reflexivity that is especially relevant to the decisions social workers make about their practice. It is this form of reflexivity which provides us with a means to connect the political nature of our profession to our interpersonal relationships with each other and the people we work with.

Although, the social worker’s initial education and training is designed to develop just such reflections, I argue that we must ensure our CPE maintains this level of reflection. Some key CPE questions which may assist in keeping a structural self-reflexivity on the CPE agenda are:
• How can I develop a strong relationship with a relative outsider (in Kögler’s terms) that will provide me with opportunities to have ongoing discussions about my CPE?
• How can I ensure a structural analysis remains present in my practice?
• What personal/professional journeys might further assist me in the re-construction of my own understanding of the place of social work in my communities?
• What CPE experiences would allow me to continue to reflect on the relevance of the Treaty of Waitangi to the lives of people in my communities and to my social work practice?
• How can I continue to reflect upon the relationships between social policy, the lives of the people I work with and my social work practice?

It is through the asking of these questions that I believe we can create a meaningful balance in our practice between supporting individuals, families and communities who are experiencing injustices and suffering on the one hand, and working to change those objective social conditions which create or contribute to their suffering and injustices. I argue that this exploration of structural self-reflexivity ultimately enables us to achieve the full realisation of the dual purpose of social work as identified by the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics (1993).

Conclusion

In this paper I have briefly traced the importance of reflective practice to social work education both in terms of initial social work education and social work CPE. I used the work of Sheppard to introduce the important notion of the social worker as reflexive practitioner and went on to discuss Kögler’s three modes of reflexivity in relation to social workers’ decisions about their CPE. I have argued that good CPE decisions are more likely to be made if the social worker considers the three different aspects of instrumental reflexivity, practical reflexivity and structural-self reflexivity. In particular, Kögler’s exploration of structural self-reflexivity and the notion of the dialogic relationship with a relative outsider provides a sound framework to keep alive the social justice aspects of the social work profession. A thorough critical reflection on our CPE decisions using Kögler’s framework will encourage us to consider the relationships between the biographical nature of the individual professional and the structural aspects of power and knowledge in our society. In short, an application of Kögler’s ideas may well assist us in ensuring that our social work practice expands to all that it is possible to be.

References


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