



DEVELOPING TOGETHER

SOCIAL WORK TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

Applying theory in a given service-user context

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Aims:

- to enable student to identify possible theories which may be of relevance and then to explore and reflect upon their relevance
- to provide the student with a tool to apply independently to case work or other learning scenarios

This exercise could be useful to the PE in developing an understanding of the student's understanding of and ability to apply theory to practice. It will also help the student to develop their toolkit of approaches to identifying underpinning knowledge through modelling and teaching by the PE.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this learning activity the student should be able to:

- Identify and briefly describe some theories or knowledge relevant to the scenario under discussion and the placement setting (eg. this will include, but is not limited to, 3 Conversations Model and strengths-based practice)
- Start to develop this knowledge by applying it critically to other case work or scenarios provided by the PE, with or without guidance.

Preparatory activity:

In the fortnight prior to this supervision session the student should arrange to shadow an experienced worker completing an assessment.

Student to then reflect on what worked well and why this could be so and on what didn't work so well and why this could be so.

Student to undertake reading/research relevant to the activity, eg. research dementia if the person being assessed has dementia, and access any reading or prior learning on social work theories.

Resources to be used:

Example bullet point matrix from Maclean and Harrison (2015) (see page 4)

Blank bullet point matrix to complete during the exercise

A relevant case scenario drawn from student's workload or fabricated, and made available the week before supervision.

Theories textbook or theory cards to draw upon e.g. Payne (2014) Maclean (2009)



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Underpinning knowledge:

Awareness of theories (could only be those considered at university which will be expanded upon), identifying relevant or key person/situation factors

Teaching Plan/Stages:

Before

1. Ensure student has an opportunity to carry out preparatory tasks and identify the supervision session for this activity.

During

2. Introduce the activity and discuss the aims and learning outcomes.
3. Introduce and talk through the bullet point matrix theory tool (Maclean and Harrison 2015)
4. Present the case for analysis (this will either be a case the student is working on or an anonymised case scenario) with a level of similarity to the shadowing the student completed as a preparatory activity – if it is a case the student is not actively involved in, then a written scenario will be required and the practice educator will need to write this and ensure that it is available in advance.
5. Encourage the student to identify pertinent factors or issues, beginning with **service-user identity issues**, then **presenting issues**, moving to **agency context** and finishing with **work to be undertaken**. The practice educator may need to offer assistance (through prompting, not stating) to encourage the student to apply adequate breadth or depth.
6. Student to record on the matrix. If the student and practice educator have different ideas of what is relevant, this can prompt a discussion around the use of **bias**, the use of **personal and professional values** or the possible impact of approaching the intervention with a **narrow or closed focus**.
7. Encourage and support the student to identify possible areas of theory relevant to the factors listed. When a theory or body of knowledge is identified, a discussion should be had regarding its relevance to the case or possible impact on social work practice. For instance, if the service user has Dementia, theories of communication for people with Dementia may be relevant. There should be discussion that recognises that this is not an exhaustive list.
8. Once a range of theories have been identified, ask the student to select one they are more comfortable with and discuss what their understanding of the theory is (practice educator to input and guide) and then discuss together how it could be applied and what impact it could have on social work with this person/scenario. If student is having difficulty, it may be necessary to help the student explore the potential consequences of not actively considering what we know about this theory when working with this family.



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9. Ask student to select a second theory – depending on their existing knowledge base, it may be appropriate to increase the challenge by asking them to select one they know less about and repeat points 7 and 8 above.

After/Follow-up activities:

1. Student to select one or two of the theories that have been noted, but not explored further in this activity, and research them.
2. Student to present at next supervision an account of one or two of those theories and reflect on their use in social work (this can be supported by talking with other workers in the team, consideration of other cases the student is involved in).
3. Practice educator may need to signpost student to appropriate setting-specific resources (e.g. Alheimers Society, SCIE etc) (PCF 5)
4. Practice educator to also select one or two theories they know less about or do not explicitly consider often in their daily practice and research them and then present at next supervision an account of the theory and reflect on its use in social work.
5. Reflection on personal values in relation to the theories discussed and their application in this case, whether personal or professional, and the extent to which they may encourage or restrict the use of the theories discussed (PCF 2)
6. Undertake an assessment with someone with similarities to the case used in this activity (PCF 7, 5)

Student's reflection on and evaluation of activity:

At the end of the activity enquire how the student found it, focussing on what they learned, what they found easy/difficult about the exercise, the extent to which the exercise enabled them to build upon existing knowledge.

Ask the student to complete their daily reflection on this activity using Kolb's reflective cycle.

If the student's verbal feedback was that it was 'too easy', 'too challenging' or 'too boring', ask them to reflect on why this was the case and how the exercise could be developed, so that follow-up activities can be appropriately directed.

Some questions to prompt PE reflection on and Evaluation of activity:

To what extent was the student able, with/without support, to complete the activity and have meaningful conversations about theory and how they do, or could, apply in practice?

How extensive or limited was the range of theories identified by the student?

What does this tell you about the student's knowledge base/learning needs/ability to undertake research/ability to explore and deepen existing knowledge?



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What went well and why could this be?

What could be improved, by whom and how?

What do you think the student learned from this activity and how can you further explore this to ensure (deep) learning has occurred?

How do you plan to respond to the student's feedback on/evaluation of this activity?

How much and what evidence have you gathered of the student's capabilities or needs under any of the PCF domains? What do you need to do next in this regard?

Would you complete this activity again, either with this student or A.N.Other and why/why not? Use a reflective cycle to explore whether your own practice (both as practice educator/social worker) will change as a result of this.



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Using bullet points/key issues to identify theory

Another exercise which can be useful to help students identify relevant theories is to encourage them to identify key areas through the use of bullet points.

When a student is working with a service user, ask them to identify:

- some key aspects of the service user identity
- key aspects of the presenting issues
- key points of the work to be undertaken
- key aspects of agency context and practice

For example:

