



# DEVELOPING TOGETHER

SOCIAL WORK  
TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

## **Skills to Enable Analysis**

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# Learning Outcomes



We hope the outcomes will be from this webinar will be:

- To have considered what analysis in social work means
- To have explored some of the barriers to analysis
- Have had the opportunity to refresh and explore the importance of analysis
- Select and apply an appropriate tool or framework to enable analysis

# What is Analysis?



The dictionary definition:

*A detailed examination of anything complex in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features: a thorough study*



In social work texts, definitions of analysis includes:

- How we think
- Linking to critical theory
- Creating and testing hypotheses

**ANALYSIS IS NOT A SINGLE  
EVENT**

Essentially analysis is **breaking down information, exploring what information means and restructuring what is 'known' into a professional judgement** or recommendation (Siobhan Maclean, The Art of Analysis - Student Connect Webinar 2020)

# PCF 6: Critical Reflection & Analysis



**By end of last placement - this is what is expected:**

**Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making.**

Social workers critically reflect on their practice, **use analysis, apply professional judgement and reasoned discernment. We identify, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence. We continuously evaluate our impact and benefit to service users.** We use supervision and other support to reflect on our work and sustain our practice and wellbeing. We apply our critical reflective skills to the context and conditions under which we practise. Our reflection enables us to challenge ourselves and others, and maintain our professional curiosity, creativity and self-awareness.



## PCF 6 - By end of last placement - this is what is expected - continued

- Apply imagination, creativity and curiosity to practice
- Inform decision-making through the identification and gathering of information from multiple sources, actively seeking new sources
- With support, rigorously question and evaluate the reliability and validity of information from different sources
- Demonstrate a capacity for logical, systematic, critical and reflective reasoning and apply the theories and techniques of reflective practice
- Know how to formulate, test, evaluate, and review hypotheses in response to information available at the time and apply in practice
- Begin to formulate and make explicit, evidence-informed judgements and justifiable decisions.



## 5) Confident Analysis and Decision making

Create a culture of focused thinking which consistently explores a wide range of contexts (including family and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances). Generate multiple hypotheses which make sense of the complexity in which children and families are living. Help practitioners to make decisions based on observations and analyses, taking account of the wishes and feelings of children and families. Ensure that practitioners are ambitious for children and families and that the long-term and life-long consequences of decisions are fully considered at all stages of planning and review, and in consultation with children and families. Build relevant relationships with children and families and professionals to test current hypotheses and dominant perspectives. Ensure that children and young people's expectations are met where possible and any disappointment sensitively acknowledged and sufficiently addressed. Establish recording processes, provide the full analysis underpinning decisions, making sure the rationale for why and how decisions have been made is comprehensive and well expressed.

# Why is Analysis Important?



*“It is the quality of ‘thinking’ that dictates the quality of practice and, ultimately, the effectiveness of any support provided to children and their families”*

(Brown and Turney 2014 - in RIP 2017)

- Social work involves dealing with complexity and uncertainty
- Whilst not *knowing* best action, social workers need to make well-reasoned judgements
- They need to analyse sometimes limited, disparate or misleading information
- Social workers need to understand the long-term implications of decisions
- They need to be prepared to revise judgements in the face of new information

(Munro 1996)

## Why is Analysis Important? continued.



Drawing on Wilkins and Boahen (2013) the benefits of good Critical Analysis are:

- It saves time (thinking analytically from the outset will influence what information is sought etc)
- It leads to more open and transparent decision making- 'Defensible Decisions'
- It leads to better understanding of the situation
- It can lead to better focus on outcomes
- As a result it can lead to choosing the best course of action to reach the outcome



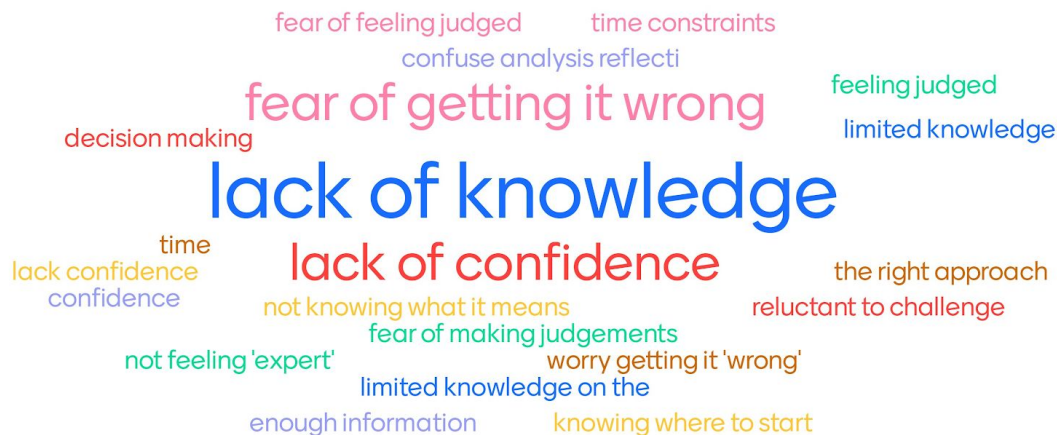
# Barriers to Analysis



- Time
- Experience / knowledge
- Fear of getting it wrong
- Ability
- Fear of being judged
- Confidence
- Frame of mind
- Values



# What are the barriers to analytical thinking for students/social workers?



# Skills that underpin critical analysis



Skills that students can work on, which will help them with analysis (Wilkins and Boahen 2013) :

- Time management and planning - time to be able to think clearly
- Critical understanding - what information do you have / not have
- Reflection
- Critical and logical thinking - see next slide
- Research-mindedness - finding more than one reference - looking for articles to disconfirm
- Communication - empathetic communication (2 way) / clear written communication
- Hypothesizing - Aware of hypothesis, and what information you need based on this

# Analysis and Critical Thinking



## Modes of Thinking ( Brown & Turney 2014 in RIP 2017)

- **Analysis:** To break something down into parts and explore the relationship between those parts
- **Hypothesising** : Involves trying out different interpretations or giving different meanings to information
- **Critical Thinking:** Weighing up different options, interpretations and sources of information and being explicit about why one might be chosen over another
- **Intuition:** draws on life experience, practice knowledge and research

# Analysis v. Intuition



What is important here is not the ‘truth’ of the intuition but rather that the practitioner ask, ‘What makes me think that?’ and then pursue their hunch further, testing it so a decision can be made about its validity or otherwise.

# Characteristics of an analytical practitioner



- Curiosity
- Open-mindedness
- The ability to manage uncertainty
- Creativity
- Sense making
- The ability to hypothesise
- Self-awareness
- Observation Skills
- The ability to synthesise and evaluate information from a range of sources
- Being able to question one's own assumptions as well as those of others
- The ability to present one's thoughts clearly, both verbally and in writing



# Models/Tools to enable analysis



The following models can help develop the skills and characteristics that students need to become analytical practitioners

- SHARE
- 5 Anchor principles
- De Bonos Hats
- Wonnacott's Discrepancy Matrix
- Analyse your professional judgement checklist
- Cultural Review
- How robust is your social history checklist
- Supported Decision Tool

## Tool 1: Research in Practice 5 Anchor Principles (1)



These open-ended questions based on the Research in Practice Anchor Principles promote **clear and analytical thinking** and/or assessments from supervisees and the **development of clear plans** for children and families.

This tool aims to support practitioners to:

- Explore the **purpose** of their intervention
- **Analyse the information** they hold
- **Develop hypotheses** that can assist case planning and decision-making
- Define **clear outcomes** and **ways of measuring** whether these have been achieved.

This tool can be used in its entirety or as a reminder of the kinds of questions to explore in either one-to-one or group supervision.



# Tool 1: Research in Practice 5 Anchor Principles (2)



## 1. What is the supervision or assessment for?

ENCOURAGE THE PRACTITIONER TO: Reflect prior to action.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What does the practitioner hope to achieve from the supervision or assessment?
- What might the family and child be hoping for or worried about?
- What might the organisation be hoping for or worried about?
- How might the practitioner feel about doing direct work or carrying out an assessment?
- How might the child feel during direct work or about being assessed?
- Is there a different way to achieve an understanding of the situation?
- Is all the information collected useful and relevant?
- What skills and support might the practitioner need to engage in direct work or carry out the assessment?

## 2. What is the story?

ENCOURAGE THE PRACTITIONER TO: Explore what is known so far.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the facts?
- Are there any grey areas or unknowns?
- Has the practitioner thought about how their own past experience may be colouring the story?
- Can the practitioner tell the story from the viewpoint of another professional? Or the child? Or the family members?
- How does the story make the practitioner feel?
- How has the practitioner used the story to make sense of the child's lived life?
- What tools has the practitioner used to help focus and explore the story?

# Tool 1: Research in Practice 5 Anchor Principles (3)



## 3. What does the story mean?

ENCOURAGE THE PRACTITIONER TO: Analyse the story, using research, practice wisdom and the family's expertise.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What hypotheses have been developed? What else could it be?
- What does the practitioner know about stories like this?
- What tools could help the practitioner test the meaning?
- Does the practitioner understand the resilience the child brings to their story?
- What is the impact of the story on the child?
- Imagine the child is in this room – what would they say about the meaning being made of their life?
- Are there any meanings the practitioner may have missed because of their own story (think about gender, ethnicity and religion, for example)?
- Does the practitioner understand what and who is helping the child grow well, and what or who is holding the child back?

## 4. What needs to happen?

ENCOURAGE THE PRACTITIONER TO: Explore options for direct work and support: (a) from the point of view of the practitioner; and (b) from the point of view of the child.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What does the practitioner think will be the best outcome and why?
- What does the practitioner think will be the worst outcome and why?
- What would the child say about that?
- What would the family say about that?
- How will this be helpful to the child's current situation?
- What would have to happen for this child in order for the practitioner to stop being involved with the child and family?
- Does everyone involved agree about what needs to happen for the child?
- Is the family clear about what has to happen next?
- Is the child/young person clear about what has to happen next?

# Tool 1: Research in Practice 5 Anchor Principles (4)



## 5. How will we know we are making progress?

ENCOURAGE THE PRACTITIONER TO: Reflect on action. Think about the practitioner's role in doing meaningful work with the child and family.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How does the practitioner feel about progress?
- What would the child/family say?
- What did the practitioner hope would have happened by now?
- What is different?
- How does the practitioner know they are being helpful?
- How is the child's lived life different this week?
- What is the practitioner still worried about?
- What is the family still worried about?
- What is the child still worried about?
- Does the practitioner know what will happen for the child if there is no progress?
- Does the practitioner have a plan to challenge the other professionals and family involved in helping this child, if there is no change for the child?
- Has the hypothesis been disproved?
- Did the practitioner intervene based on the wrong need?
- Was the right meaning given to the story?

## Tool 2: Wonnacott's Discrepancy Matrix (1)



This tool encourages practitioners to reflect on [what is known](#) about a case and [what is unknown](#) or not yet known – a vital aspect of working with uncertainty. It supports the practitioner to tease out the information they hold into four types: **evidence**, **ambiguous**, **assumption**, and **missing**.

This tool aims to help the practitioner think critically about the information upon which they're basing their decision-making.

This tool can be used as a standalone activity or in combination with other critical thinking and analysis tools, such as De Bono's Six Hats (the white hat), which ask participants to critique the information they hold about a case.

### Step One: Telling the story

The case-holding practitioner tells their story briefly. The supervisor or group members then begin to support the practitioner to sort the information they have been told into each of the boxes. Questions such as:

- How do you know that...?
- What other evidence do you have that this is true?
- How often have you felt like that even though you have no evidence it is true?
- When do you feel that most strongly? Why?
- If you had this piece of information what might it make you do differently?

## Tool 2: Wonnacott's Discrepancy Matrix (2)



### Step Two: Sorting information

The information is sorted into the four areas as the practitioner answers the questions.

1. **What do I know?** For something to go into the 'evidence' category, it needs to be proven and verified (in other words, come from more than one source as a fact). Evidence also includes knowledge about legal frameworks and roles and responsibilities under the Children Act, as well as research. This category provides the strongest factual evidence for analysis and decision-making.
2. **What is ambiguous?** This relates to information that is not properly understood, is only hearsay or has more than one meaning dependant on context, or is hinted at by others but not clarified or owned.
3. **What I think I know** This allows the practitioner to explore their own practice wisdom and also their own prejudices to see how this is informing the case. Emotion and values can also be explored in this area and the self-aware practitioner can explore how they are responding and reacting to risk.
4. **What is missing?** These are the requests for information coming from the people listening to the story (supervisors, peers, other agency staff) that prompt the practitioner to acknowledge there are gaps in the information. The gaps then have to be examined to see if the lack of information might have a bearing on the decision-making in the case; if so, it needs to be explored.

## Tool 2: Wonnacott's Discrepancy Matrix (3)



### Step Three: Reflections

Once the exercise is complete the practitioner is then asked:

- What has changed about what you know?
- What do you still need to know?
- What does this mean for the child/family?
- What do you want to do next?

|                    |                                  |  |  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
|                    |                                  | Strong evidence                          |  |
| Strongly held view | What do I know? (evidence)       | What is ambiguous?                       |  |
|                    | What I think I know (assumption) | What is missing (what action is needed)? |  |
|                    |                                  | Weak or no evidence                      |  |
|                    |                                  | Unclear or no view                       |  |

## Tool 3: Analyse your professional judgements



- What was my role?
- What was the goal of the decision and intervention?
- What was the issue (risk) on which I had to form a judgement?
- What information about the client, family and situation was most significant in shaping my judgement?
- How did the decision appear from the perspective of the client problem solving?
- What assumptions influenced my judgement?
- What alternative options were considered?
- What alternative causal explanations were considered?
- What justified the decision?
- What professional knowledge informed my judgement?
- What research or theory underpinned this knowledge?
- What additional information or knowledge would I have liked to have had?
- What emotions and challenges were there in this decision situation?
- What skills did I use?
- How could my judgement have been improved?
- What learning from this might inform my judgements in future?

These points are detailed by Taylor, and can support analysis in decision making.

*(Brian Taylor 2017, p. 108, Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work)*

## Tool 4: How robust is your social history (C&F)



A robust social history will aid your ability to critically analyse a situation. Below can help you explore how robust your social history may be, and how to plan to improve this. (Wilkins & Boahen 2013, *Critical Analysis Skills for Social Workers* p.108)

- Think about a child or family you have worked with where you have been frustrated by - or lack an understanding of - why the parent behaves in the way they do or why they cannot parent differently
- Briefly describe the situation to your colleague and see how far you can explain any of the following:
  - the parent's early experiences of relationships and of being cared for
  - the parent's current views of themselves, their partner and / or their own parents
  - their parenting behaviour
  - their child's daily experiences of being cared for
- If you find that you cannot tell your colleague much about these issues, think about how you might find out and whether it would help inform your assessments.

Now think about how you might gather this information:

- Would you ask the parent questions - if so, what questions?
- Would you ask the child questions - if so, what questions?
- Would you aim to observe the parent and child together - if so, what would you be looking for?
- Would you want information from other professionals or family members - if so, who and what questions would you ask them.



# Tool 5: Supported Decision Tool (DOH) 2007



Independence, choice and risk: a guide to best practice in supported decision making







## Supported decision tool

- |      |  |      |  |
|------|--|------|--|
| 1.   | What is important to you in your life?                                 | 14.  | What do staff/organisation need to change?   |
| 2.   | What is working well?  | 15.* | What could family/carers do?   |
| 3.*  | What isn't working so well?  | 16.  | Who is important to you?   |
| 4.   | What could make it better?   | 17.* | What do people important to you think?   |
| 5.*  | What things are difficult for you?                                     | 18.  | Are there any differences of opinion between you and the people you said are important to you? |
| 6.   | Describe how they affect you living your life                          | 19.* | What would help to resolve this?   |
| 7.*  | What would make things better for you?                                 | 20.  | Who might be able to help?   |
| 8.   | What is stopping you from doing what you want to do?                   | 21.  | What could we do (practitioner) to support you?  |
| 9.*  | Do you think there are any risks ?                                     |      |  |
| 10.  | Could things be done in a different way, which might reduce the risks? |      | Agreed next steps – who will do what   |
| 11.* | Would you do things differently?                                       |      | How would you like your care plan to be changed to meet your outcomes?                         |
| 12.  | Is the risk present wherever you live?                                 |      | Record of any disagreements between people involved  |
| 13.  | What do you need to do?  |      | Date agreed to review how you are managing   |
|      |  |      | Signature  |

## Tool 6: De Bono's decision-making hats



**Aim:** To help supervisees understand how different thinking styles affect decision making.

|                        |   |   |
|------------------------|---|---|
| White hat: Analytical  |  | Focus on what is known and test out the evidence. Look at the information that you have, analyse past trends, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and try to either fill them or take account of them.                       |
| Yellow hat: Empowering |  | Think positively and optimistically. Advocate for self-determination and challenge obstacles to rights and freedoms. Yellow hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.  |
| Black hat: Procedural  |  | Consider the law, policy and procedures you need to follow. Try to see what legislation is guiding this practice and where one piece of legislation may supersede another.  |
| Red hat: Intuitive     |  | Use personal experience, intuition (gut instinct), emotion and empathy to understand how people are affected for example how others could react emotionally. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.                  |
| Blue hat: Resilient    |  | You weigh up risks, consider possible problems and identify contingencies. When facing difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking. |
| Green hat: Creative    |  | This is where you develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas. Look for alternative explanations and solutions.  |

Source: Adapted from Research in Practice for Adults (2013) based on De Bono (1985)

De Bono E (1985) *Six thinking Hats: An essential approach to business management*. New York: Little, Brown, & Company

Research in Practice for Adults (2013) *How to Run a Journal Club*. Dartington: Research in Practice for Adults

Your SHARE becomes  
**SHARED** when you make a  
defensible decision.

## Tool 7: SHARE (Maclean 2018)



| Component  | Questions you might consider   |
|------------|--|
| See        | What have you seen? What haven't you seen?<br>What might you have lost sight of? What is your vision in terms of this situation?   |
| Hear       | What have you heard? From who? What haven't you heard? Whose voice is the most influential?<br>Why? Have you heard from all the stakeholders?  |
| Action     | What have you done? What impact has it had? What have others done? What impact has that had?<br>What hasn't been done? What impact has that had?                                       |
| Reading    | What have you read? Previous case notes? Other professional reports? Research?<br>Legislation? Theory?   |
| Evaluation | How are you evaluating all of this? What is important? What isn't? How do you feel? What impact<br>does that have? What worked well? What hasn't? What are the facts? How do you know? |
| Decision   | What decision have you reached? Why? How do you need to take this forward?   |

## Tool 8: Cultural Review



A cultural review involves answering questions with regards to a particular service user. It is important to be as honest about your own views and prejudices as possible. Without a significant level of honesty, a cultural review is not very useful. (McCracken 1988, Dalzell & Sawyer 2001 cited in Wilkins & Boahen 2013). To undertake a cultural review, answer the following questions with regards to someone you are working with:

1. What do we know about the individuals and families with this particular cultural background or life experience?
2. Where does my knowledge come from?
3. What prejudices may I hold (positive or negative)?
4. What do I know/expect about people of this (these) age(s), their lives and needs?
5. What might surprise me about this family and why would it be a surprise?
6. How might this family/the parents/child/siblings/community perceive me?
7. How might my assessment and my agency be perceived?
8. What impact might the assessment have on the family's lives and on their perception of their lives?
9. What agency norms and practices do I take with me on an assessment (for example, awareness of risk thresholds, of 'good enough' parenting, resource restrictions)?

The value of using this tool is in alerting practitioners to the narratives they have constructed around a particular culture, family or service user. It can also ensure we are focusing on answering the right questions.



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# References and Bibliography



Maclean, S (2016) *Reflective Practice Cards* Lichfield: Kirwin Maclean Associates  
Research in Practice (2017)

Wilkins & Boahen (2013) *Critical Analysis Skills for Social Workers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press