

17

TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Using Critical Reflection to Develop Culturally Safe Practice

CHRISTINE MORLEY AND RATNA BEEKMAN

We live in times that are often described as uncertain and unprecedented (see, for example, Afrouz, 2021, p. 561). The global climate emergency, coinciding with the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has unfolded against the ongoing assault of neoliberalism and related growing authoritarianism, has produced new forms of inequality and injustice. Within this context, social work must be transformative if it to be useful in responding to emerging and future social problems (Morley, 2020b; Morley et al., 2020).

Transformative education involves cultivating “deep learning that confronts and challenges taken-for-granted assumptions” (Morley et al., 2020, p. 5). According to Giroux (2011, p. 3), transformative education “is essential for a democratic society and fundamental to creating the conditions for producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way.” Since most social work value statements, education standards, and codes of ethics discuss social work as having a mandate to foster “social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities” (see, for example, IFSW, 2014), transformative education is essential to help students think beyond hegemonic discourses that lead to victim blaming, justify inequality, and obscure the structural causes of oppression (Morley & O’Bree, 2021).

According to O’Sullivan et al. (2002, p. 11), “Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premise of thought, feelings, and actions” (see also Greenhill et al., 2018; Mezirow, 1991). Informed by the work of Habermas, Mezirow (2003, p. 58) asserts that transformative learning “transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change.” Cranton (2002, p. 64, cited in Jones, 2009, p. 10) provides a clear outline of this process: “At its core, transformative learning theory is elegantly simple. Through some event, which could be as traumatic as losing a job or as ordinary as an unexpected question, an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself [*sic*] to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world.”

Bass et al. (2017) argue that “self-awareness, reflection, critical reflection, reflexivity and reflective practice” are core components that facilitate transformative learning (p. 231). They see critical reflection as a higher-order skill, involving examination of values, beliefs, and assumptions that inform practice, that is essential to transformative learning and education. They suggest it is necessary to reflect both inwardly (on personal/professional beliefs) and outwardly (on broader social/political conditions) to help develop changes in perspective that enable learning to be transformative. Fook (2016) adds postmodernism, deconstruction, and critical social theory to this mix as essential ingredients for transformative learning (see also Beres, 2019, p. 281). Brookfield’s (see, for example, 2005) work, too, in synthesizing insights from a range of critical theorists (including Marx, Gramsci, Foucault, Habermas, and Marcuse), has been used to inform critically reflective pedagogies that cultivate transformative learning in social work (Morley, 2020a).

Brookfield (2005) adopts critical theories over other approaches because they explain “not just how the world is but also how it might be changed for the better” (p. 7). A better world, Brookfield posits, is one in which “adult education can contribute to building a society organized according to democratic values of fairness, justice, and compassion” (pp. 7–8). Transformative education, informed by critical theory involves “learning to recognize and challenge ideology . . . learning to uncover and counter

hegemony, learning to unmask power, learning to overcome alienation . . . learning to pursue liberation, learning to reclaim reason, and learning to practice democracy” (p. 39). Pedagogic innovations such as critical reflection, therefore, have a “transformative impetus” that enables students to engage with the “powers of critical thinking so that they can critique the interlocking systems of oppression embedded in contemporary society” (p. 353). From this perspective, transformative education is “highly directive” and “inherently political” as it focuses on emancipatory outcomes and freedom as primary goals of critical theories (p. 354).

Bay and Macfarlane (2011, p. 756) similarly observe that critical education provides a “transformative process [that] generates . . . alternative approaches [that promote] practices of freedom, autonomy and social responsibility.” Carrington and Selva (2010) similarly emphasize the important contribution that critical theories make to transforming knowledge. Fook (2004) concurs, asserting that critical reflection as a process assists with deconstructing and reconstructing ways of knowing and thinking, and that this can lead to change that enables transformative social work practice. For the process of critical reflection to be transformative, Fook (2004, p. 22) argues that individuals need to overcome “feelings of fatalism” that disrupt a sense of agency to enact change. She considers that by changing these thoughts, the process of critical reflection can liberate individuals from unhelpful constructions. Furthermore, she considers that when individuals locate their experiences within social environments, critical reflection can result in action that brings forth change within broader communities, creating transformative possibilities (Fook, 2004).

Jones (2020) identifies critical reflection and dialogue as essential features of transformative learning. Das and Anand (2014) suggest that critical reflection can transform learning to be deeper and more meaningful, enabling new insights to occur by exploring values and knowledge. However, they note that “whilst most social work educators are committed to the use of reflective processes and can identify when transformative learning occurs, the challenge is to identify and describe the processes involved” (Das & Anand, 2014, p. 111). Similarly, they note that “there is limited detailed description of processes that promote a more critical form of reflection and reflexivity for teaching and learning” (p. 110, citing Pawar et al., 2004, and Wehbi, 2009). Gardner (2021, p. 154), too, observes that “what [transformative education] actually looks like in a

practical, real world, sense” is not well articulated. She asks: “How, in other words, does this play out in the lives of students (i.e. the process of transformation) and what, if anything, is happening in the classroom that supports this change?”

Hence, while there is a growing body of literature that suggests that critical reflection can foster transformative learning among social work students, less is known about how this occurs. With few exceptions (see Fook & Beres, 2019, the research on critical reflection as a transformative pedagogic process is largely written from the perspective of educators, with little known about students’ perspectives on engaging in transformative learning in social work. This chapter contributes to addressing these gaps by (1) exploring how Ratna (a former student of Christine) engaged in a critically reflective research project that resulted in transformative learning and (2) reflecting on Ratna’s experience of being supervised by Christine, who was trying to facilitate transformative education. Our reflections emerged in the context of Ratna’s Honors project aiming to improve culturally safe practice in social work.

CULTURAL SAFETY AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

Culturally safe practice involves working across difference and necessitates critical reflection on one’s own positionality. While we are aware of the critiques that exist about the use of the terms *safe* or *safety*, particularly in relation to creating “safe [teaching] spaces” that potentially limit the effectiveness of critical pedagogies and transformative learning (see, for example, Arao & Clemens, 2013; Gayle et al., 2013), the term (and concept) ‘*cultural safety*’ is used here intentionally, as it is widely adopted and preferred, particularly in countries like Australia and New Zealand (Curtis et al., 2019; Duthie, 2019). The preference for cultural safety lies in the fact that the concept is Indigenous developed and led and acknowledges power imbalances as a barrier to effective practice (Laverty et al., 2017). Unlike other practices, such as cultural competence, cultural safety seeks to restore power imbalances through a process of critical reflection in which the practitioner explores how their own cultural foundations may affect service delivery. Laverty et al. further explain that the practitioner

strives for a critical awareness of difference, demonstrating an understanding of decolonizing practice by acknowledging these inherent power dynamics. The practitioner actively implements this self-critical stance by allowing the recipients of care to define what safety means. Culturally safe practice, then, occurs when the recipients of a service are involved in the decision-making process of their care and support needs. Therefore, a defining and distinguishing feature of cultural safety is its positioning of the practitioner as a critically reflective agent, which enhances our understanding of our own cultural beliefs and assumptions that affect our practice. This awareness enables the development of alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing (Bennett et al., 2011). Similar to the gap in knowledge about how critical reflection results in transformative learning, Ratna's research aimed to transform social work practice by developing a framework detailing how to meaningfully embed culturally safe principles.

Ratna's research had clear transformative intent in seeking to improve practitioners' cultural safety literacy. She recognized that social workers have participated in policies and practices that have resulted in discrimination against and oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bennett, 2013). She contended that improving culturally safe practice of non-Indigenous workers would contribute toward addressing social work's colonialist history and decolonizing practice. She further elaborates the transformative aims of her research below.

RATNA

Legislation and policies have unjustly affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and health professionals (including social workers) have played an active role in causing harm (Bennett, 2013; Briskman, 2014; Sousa & Almeida, 2016). Social workers' participation in harmful practices has resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' feeling suspicious and distrustful toward social workers (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2016; Bennett, 2013; Briskman, 2014). However, because of the intergenerational disadvantages experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a disproportionate number come into contact with social work services (Green & Baldry, 2013; Mendes, 2005). These relationships remain contentious for both social work practitioners

and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This has been exacerbated by colonizing forms of social work that valorize Western knowledge systems and practices (Bennett, 2015; Green & Baldry, 2008). Social workers need to action a clearer plan for decolonizing practice and develop culturally appropriate service delivery (Walter et al., 2011) in order to contribute to improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Griffiths et al., 2016; Saggars et al., 2011).

CHRISTINE

Fook (2004) observes that critical reflection can be effective in working with Aboriginal students because they sometimes find mainstream social work curriculum to arise from a different worldview. For learning to be meaningful, Fook (2004, p. 28) suggests, “we must engage in a process of developing their own version of social work from their own sets of experiences . . . reconstructing their identities as Aboriginal social workers, [and] developing a picture of Aboriginal Social Work along the way”—a process that Fook acknowledges results in simultaneous transformation of her own framework.

CHRISTINE’S CRITICAL INCIDENT

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

I assumed Ratna might have something like Fook’s (2004) approach in mind for her research. I had known Ratna for a number of years, and she had impressed me as an undergraduate. She was very bright, conscientious, an excellent contributor to class discussion, and in my view, a student who understood the purpose and vision of critical social work. I had invited her to attend lectures on critical reflection, which Das and Anand (2014) assert can enable deconstruction through the questioning of power and dominant discourses.

I had also specifically discussed Ratna’s research project with her and was struck by her excitement and enthusiasm for improving culturally

safe social work practice. The project she had outlined aligned with my interests of advancing critical practice and decolonizing social work, and I was keen to review her proposal.

CRITICAL INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

When I started reading Ratna's research proposal, I began to feel concerned. There were statements about Aboriginal social work practitioners that assumed homogeneity. She talked about "building trusting and respectful relationships with Aboriginal social work practitioners" to gain their knowledge, which sounded instrumental, contrived, and exploitative (albeit inadvertently). The proposed design to conduct face-to-face interviews seemed to have been developed without consultation with Aboriginal people, and even though the process included open-ended questions, I remained concerned about research about Aboriginal people that was owned and controlled by a non-Indigenous researcher who was going to be involved (although unconsciously) in potentially appropriating Aboriginal peoples' knowledges, which has happened too often, usually without appropriate attribution (Bennett, 2013).

I felt ungenerous for judging Ratna's first attempt so harshly and somewhat worried that my feedback would crush her enthusiasm or not be perceived as helpful. Damianakis (2020, p. 2026) notes that "student receptivity is a frequently cited barrier to successful implementation of transformative learning practices, noting that students not ready to transform will resist." I worried about this, but overwhelmingly, I felt a sense of responsibility to provide critical feedback. I recognized this was an opportunity for us both to engage in transformative education. As Duthie (2019, p. 114) suggests, "non-Indigenous social work educators . . . have a responsibility to . . . step up, embrace, and contribute to learning and teaching in the Indigenous space."

INITIAL REFLECTION

Jones (2020) suggests that the process of critically reflecting on assumptions that are usually not questioned is potentially transformative and

involves exposing learners to new perspectives. He provides an example from his own teaching in which transformative learning strategies were used to ensure that issues of culture and racism were considered critically, rather than remaining unquestioned.

The process of critical reflection often begins with a “disorientating dilemma” (Damianakis et al., 2020; Greenhill et al., 2018; Mezirow, 1990, 2012) that ultimately leads to a shift in consciousness. Students have used the term *cultural border crossing* (Damianakis et al., 2020, p. 2018) to describe new learning, both figuratively and literally, that emerged during the process of transformative learning.

Jones (2020) suggests: “Transformation becomes possible where an experience that is incongruent with our existing meaning structures leads to critical reflection upon previously taken-for-granted assumptions” (p. 491). However, “simply reflecting upon or even changing one’s meaning perspective is not sufficient for transformative learning to have taken place. Action is also required, in the sense of the enactment of the altered perspective in the social world” (p. 492). To support transformation and facilitate action, clear and open communication between teacher and students is required (Das & Anand, 2014; Parra et al., 2015). Educators’ modeling of the process of deconstruction and critical questioning is also recommended (Brookfield, 2017; Das & Anand, 2014).

I reread Ratna’s proposal with a view to inviting her to consider issues of culture, power, ethnocentrism, and privilege. I inserted questions into her proposal to prompt critical reflection, such as:

- How might this practice be considered cultural appropriation of Aboriginal knowledge to benefit non-Indigenous practitioners?
- How might expecting Aboriginal practitioners to read and comment on transcripts load them with a burden to contribute to your research?
- What’s in it [i.e., participation] for Aboriginal people?
- How might stating that “Aboriginal people have different knowledge” serve to other them and their experiences? How might you instead seek to decenter whiteness in social work?

While much adult learning is self-directed, with “fully participatory, inclusive [and democratic] conversations” being possible, Brookfield (2005, pp. 357–358) suggests that sometimes a more strongly interventionist

approach is needed, requiring the educator to adopt a leadership role to bring a critical perspective into the dialogue. This process requires brave conversations that use critical pedagogy intentionally (Jones, 2020) and that capture the tension between experimentation and risk (Brookfield, 1995, p. 42) as educators to try to understand and simultaneously challenge students' experiences in ways that create possibilities for transformative learning. In practical terms, Jones (2020, p. 497) suggests "this means being prepared to create disruptive, disorienting learning experiences, and equipping students with the skills required to then use those challenging experiences to look critically at society, but also to examine their own taken-for-granted assumptions and worldviews through critical reflection"; bell hooks similarly describes the need to confront students with the injuries of privilege and prejudice (Noble, 2020). Kumashiro talks about the need to teach through crises that are created by confrontation (Kaighin, 2020).

"Speaking authentically" is central to facilitating this type of transformative education (Brookfield, 2017). Hence, the final comment in my feedback was along the lines of "I don't think this research can proceed without a team of Aboriginal practitioners—who would need to lead it." Like Beres (2019, p. 285), I felt a bit "vulnerable . . . about providing this feedback, as there is no guarantee students will understand or appreciate the feedback in the spirit it is offered, but I was also cognizant that this is an essential component of transformative teaching." I also concur with Duthie (2019, p. 115), who argues that "non-Indigenous academics [students and practitioners] need to take responsibility for their own learning of Indigenous history and ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing," rather than expecting Aboriginal people to educate non-Indigenous practitioners.

RATNA'S CRITICAL INCIDENT

RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK

While it was unsettling and confronting to receive this feedback, it was important to uncover dominant ways of thinking. Reading the feedback,

which initially provoked a strong emotional reaction, actually motivated me to further engage with the critical reflective process. It strengthened my commitment to find and learn new ways of thinking. By reflecting on the feedback, I was able to shift my thinking. Fortunately, like the students in Damianakis's (2020) study, I recognized that being asked the hard questions, being challenged in a supportive way, and stepping out of my comfort zone were part of the transformative learning necessary for me to advance this research.

I think it is important to mention that my supervisor supported me through this process by modeling critical reflection. I was provided with a safe, trusting, nonjudgmental environment to explore some of those inherent assumptions. I also felt that Christine had treated me respectfully and as a colleague. Das and Anand (2014) note that the minimization of power relations between academic staff and students helps to build a relationship that cultivates transformative learning. Being personally ready for change and having a safe and supportive environment and relationship with my supervisor meant that I could begin to locate unconscious biases and assumptions, reconsider dominant beliefs, and start the process of "unlearning" to develop new ways of viewing.

INITIAL REFLECTION

My initial thinking about interviewing Aboriginal social work practitioners and documenting their perspectives was grounded in dominant Western practice frameworks. My awareness of the need to change the research became a critical incident for me. As Carrington and Selva (2010) note, locating and reflecting on unknown prejudices can highlight the need to deconstruct knowledge, which provides opportunities for transformation.

My initial approach was driven by my first placement in a family intervention service. Here I observed other workers' culturally ignorant practices that were inconsistent with my values of nonjudgment and respect for all persons. There was a dichotomy between workers' being encouraged to practice within a "culturally inclusive" model and, at the same time, being required to work using Western models of practice. This resulted in tensions for workers, whereby they reverted to their default,

dominant cultural approach, which at times resulted in oppressive practices. Aboriginal families were assessed and judged from a Western perspective, with workers making comments such as “they’ve gone on sorry business or walkabout for however long, as they do”; and “how are we supposed to help them if they don’t understand our systems?” I felt personally challenged by these views and wondered how we could bolster culturally inclusive practice.

My initial response was to seek answers from Aboriginal practitioners who had been successful in integrating their cultural knowledge into practice. My intention was to gain their perspectives to guide non-Indigenous practitioners, like me, who may seek to partner in the struggle against colonization. This new understanding, I thought, would also be relevant for how we work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and families in the service user context, thereby contributing to improved culturally appropriate services.

Reflecting on this and having learned more about the true history of Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, I made two key assumptions: (1) I had a different view from white Australians and (2) coming from another country, and thereby privileging my identity, I could approach the learning from a different, non-Australian perspective. Enthusiastically, I drafted an initial proposal to justify this method of research, outlining my intentions and motivations. My supervisor feedback on this draft proposal then prompted a process of critical reflection to challenge my own dominant cultural views. To discover that my use of language was oppressive, dominant, and at times discriminatory was confronting and required deeper analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Critically reflecting on my own experiences as a social work practitioner became a focus of this research and, as such, I became the sole research participant. I used a qualitative research approach, underpinned by a critical constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), in which I examined how my experiences were shaped by social and cultural constructions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Using a critically reflective paradigm, I focused on exploring and analyzing how

I made meaning of personal experiences and how I positioned myself in the experience, exploring alternative perspectives (Fook & Gardner, 2007). To conceptualize possibilities for change, I used postmodern theories to examine my participation in discourses and my use of language (Morley, 2014b). Changing my participation in the discourses required a critical postmodernist approach, which provided the space to develop new ways of thinking about my responses to these constructs and find ways to reject dominant paradigms (Fook, 2016; Morley, 2014b; Morley & Macfarlane, 2012).

The study was premised on the idea that the new knowledge generated from critical reflection on self can have broader implications for the ways other practitioners work (Morley, 2014a, p. 70) and thus held transformative possibilities. It employed Fook's (2016, p. 128) model of deconstruction/reconstruction, with a specific focus on the critical incident technique for developing new knowledge. The main research question for the study became: How might critical reflection enhance culturally safe practice?

After identifying a critical incident, the first step in the critical reflection process involves a process of deconstruction, questioning the implicit assumptions that underpin practice, with the aim of exposing how we hold onto dominant discourses (Morley, 2016, p. 28). I then embarked on a process of reconstruction to develop alternative ways of thinking (Fook, 2016). This process enabled me to find alternative ways of knowing, thinking, and doing, thereby creating and gaining new knowledge and rejecting universal knowledge as the norm (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Developing new knowledge from reflecting on my critical incident allowed me to make changes to my thinking and my approach to practice. This addressed the aim of this research by contributing to improving practice approaches toward cultural safety.

DECONSTRUCTION

Initial deconstruction of my narrative revealed little consideration for cultural diversity or power. Through critical reflection, prompted and guided by my supervisor, I became aware of several implicit assumptions made based on ethnocentric and hegemonic discourses. For example, I recognized that I had positioned myself as the expert in designing a

research project about Aboriginal practitioners, without culturally appropriate consultation. Thus, even though my approach stemmed from genuine curiosity, by projecting my views onto others, I risked objectifying Aboriginal people (Hollinsworth, 2006; Land, 2015). I realized how my approach to the research was embedded within dominant discourses (Fook, 2016). My narrative was shaped by assumptions that doing research with Aboriginal practitioners as a non-Indigenous worker would be a positive step toward integrating practice and working together.

Positioning myself as “coming from another country” legitimized my intentions to learn (as a non-Australian) about Aboriginal culture and enabled me to construct myself as different from white Australians. Seeing myself as different (from the racists and colonizers) enabled me to reinforce my perception of myself as nonracist. I also assumed that Aboriginal practitioners would want to partner with me to share their cultural knowledge with non-Indigenous people for the “greater good” of social work practice. This reproduces the invisible position of privilege and power that often remains unchallenged (Fredericks, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 1999). Justifying my research by assuming that Aboriginal practitioners preferred to share knowledge with someone from another country, rather than with white Australians, permitted me to privilege my learning and access to cultural knowledge, even if used for the benefit of my practice and the practice of other non-Indigenous social work practitioners (Briskman, 2014, p. 73).

The aim of this research was to enhance my own and other non-Indigenous practitioners’ knowledge; consequently, I did not consider the benefits (or detriments) for Aboriginal people. I assumed that Aboriginal practitioners would be happy to educate non-Indigenous practitioners, thereby placing the responsibility for the cultural education of non-Indigenous people on Aboriginal people (Green et al., 2013). These identified assumptions were based on my genuine belief, at that time, that I could contribute to creating a more culturally inclusive social work environment by incorporating new knowledge from an Aboriginal perspective (Green et al., 2016).

Critical reflection reveals this assumption as flawed since Indigenous people are the most (over)researched population worldwide and historically (Fredericks, 2008). Research is often done *to* Indigenous peoples, which has resulted in their objectification, with questionable benefit for

them (Briskman, 2014; Yu, 2011). The homogenizing of Aboriginal people and presenting of their culture as one voice creates a false perception and ignores their diversity (Cowlshaw, 2014, p. 65; Paradies et al., 2008). I essentialized Aboriginal people as having “the right way,” which I wanted to know about, so that I could replicate it and “do” culturally safe practice—thereby contradicting the principles of culturally safe practice.

My failure to recognize how research should respond to the interests and needs of Indigenous peoples and local communities (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2017; Yu, 2011) was of great concern to me. Deconstruction of the incident has highlighted how my initial approach to the research proposal was limited and has forced me to rethink the ways in which I seek to gain cultural knowledge.

RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstruction enabled me to reinterpret my narrative, change my thinking, and develop alternative views (Fook, 2016; Morley & O'Connor, 2016). I put aside my initial work and started again. Interrogating the colonizing approach I had unwittingly adopted challenged the invisible discourses that were deeply rooted in my initial approach. Highlighting my position as a non-Indigenous researcher and its assumed power, control, and privilege made me question how my role could undermine and suppress Aboriginal people (Fredericks, 2008). Through this learning, and by challenging my position of dominance, I recommitted to anti-colonizing practice. This included ensuring that I did not unintentionally appropriate knowledge from Aboriginal people (Fredericks, 2008) and emphasizing that research involving Aboriginal people should aim to bolster their interests (Briskman, 2014, p. 218; Butler & Butler, 2015, p. 8). Developing my aptitude for cultural safety by problematizing the role of non-Indigenous researchers was transformative, pointing to new approaches and understandings in social work practice.

Positioning myself as a non-Indigenous researcher, I realized the need to learn more about my own positionality and how this affects my practice. Reflecting on my own Dutch cultural background (not just ethnicity, but social class, gender, sexuality, age, ability status, and other forms of

difference) enabled me to value diversity and reject homogenizing views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Rejecting binary thinking and questioning dominant views allowed me to explore different perspectives, which made me rethink the responsibility to gain cultural knowledge. By taking responsibility for educating myself about the impacts of racism and colonization on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as their diverse histories and knowledge, I let go of expecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to act as educators of non-Indigenous people (Duthie, 2019; Green et al., 2016; Hendrick & Young, 2018). Reconsidering my position as a white, non-Indigenous social worker provided new insights into how I might be able to help, support, and assist in research, while simultaneously recognizing that collaboration needs to be led and defined by Aboriginal people and needs to be of benefit to them (Bennett, 2015; Briskman, 2014). This approach is consistent with cultural safety, which identifies decolonizing methods of research as ways to improve practice and better respond to cultural diversity (Ramsden, 2002). It became clear that taking a critically reflective approach to the research, thereby improving and changing non-Indigenous practice, might benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by creating more culturally safe spaces.

OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSION

Throughout this journey I kept a journal, and through a process of critical reflection, I questioned and examined my own positionality and implicit assumptions, linking these with my values of becoming a critical and culturally safe practitioner. As with the students in Damianakis et al.'s (2020) study, my own experience of transformative learning “involved conflict, deeply felt emotions and tensions (ie: disorienting dilemmas),” yet by the end of the research process, the “growth” was “positive” and “felt justified” (p. 2025). The transformative research process allowed space to unpack and reflect on the culture, positionality, dominant social constructs, and hegemonic assumptions embedded within my social biography, challenge dominant views and unconscious biases, and look for alternative approaches to create and develop new knowledge and ways of thinking about how to embody culturally safe practice.

Ultimately, the critical reflective process highlighted the dominant ways of thinking in my initial account, which, if left uncovered and unchallenged, could contribute to the continuation of domination and power inequalities (Bender et al., 2010; Fook, 2002, p. 41). Critical reflection provided me with significant opportunities for transformative learning by developing practices more aligned with my espoused values (Fook, 2016).

By offering practical strategies to generate new understanding, my intention is to contribute to existing social work knowledge around critical reflection and cultural safety, particularly from the perspective of a learner engaged in this process. I hope I have demonstrated how engaging in critical reflection can enhance one's understanding of self and work toward becoming a culturally safe practitioner—and person.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to provide an example of how critical reflection can foster transformation and, in particular, how it might be used to foster culturally safe practice. Ratna has articulated her own transformative process for becoming a culturally safe social work practitioner that can be instructive for other non-Indigenous practitioners who are committed to becoming allies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the struggle for justice against ongoing racism and colonization. Transformative education enabled Ratna to develop and embody culturally safe practices that are committed to acting in solidarity (as a non-Indigenous person) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Her research makes an important contribution to improving culturally safe practices and outlines a critically reflective approach to decolonizing social work.

Consistent with Mezirow, we have argued that intentional transformative educational practice has the potential to create students and practitioners who “are more open, inclusive and critically aware.” Ultimately, we concur with Jones (2020, p. 497) that a “critically transformative approach to social work education might help to create the foundation for future social work practice which is oriented toward the progressive and emancipatory.” This is particularly important within contemporary contexts that are increasingly divided, complex, and uncertain.

REFERENCES

- Afrouz, R. (2021). Approaching uncertainty in social work education, a lesson from COVID-19 pandemic. *Qualitative Social Work*, 20(1–2), 561–567. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020981078>.
- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces. In L. Landreman (Ed.), *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators* (pp. 135–150). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Australian Association of Social Workers. (2016). *Preparing for culturally responsive and inclusive social work practice in Australia: Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*. <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/7006>.
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2017). *Guidelines for ethical research in Australian Indigenous studies (GERAIS)*. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>.
- Bass, J., Fenwick, J., & Sidebotham, M. (2017). Development of a model of holistic reflection to facilitate transformative learning in student midwives. *Women and Birth*, 30, 227–235. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2017.02.010>.
- Bay, U., & Macfarlane, S. (2011). Teaching critical reflection: A tool for transformative learning in social work. *Social Work Education*, 30(7), 745–758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2010.516429>.
- Bender, K., Negi, N., & Fowler, D. (2010). Exploring the relationship between self-awareness and student commitment and understanding of culturally responsive social work practice. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 19(1), 34–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313200903531990>.
- Bennett, B. (2013). The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history for social work students and graduates. In B. Bennett, S. Green, S. Gilbert, & D. Bessarab (Eds.), *Our voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work* (pp. 1–25). South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bennett, B. (2015). Stop deploying your white privilege on me! Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with the Australian Association of Social Workers. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2013.840325>.
- Beres, L. (2019). Valuing critical reflection and narratives in professional practice wisdom. In J. Higgs (Ed.), *Practice wisdom: Values and interpretations* (pp. 277–288). Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Sense.
- Béres, L., & Fook, J. (2019). *Learning critical reflection: Experiences of the transformative learning process*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Briskman, L. (2014). *Social work with Indigenous communities: A human rights approach* (2nd ed). Alexandria, Australia: Federation Press.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory for adult learning and teaching*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Butler, W. B., & Butler, N. (2015). From fear and division to true reconciliation. In C. Fejo-King & J. Poona (Eds.), *Reconciliation and Australian social work: Past and current experiences informing future practice* (pp. 7–32). Torrens, Australia: Magpie Goose.

- Carrington, S., & Selva, G. (2010). Critical social theory and transformative learning: Evidence in pre-service teachers' service-learning reflection logs. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(1), 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360903421384>.
- Cowlishaw, G. (2014). Racial positioning, privilege and public debate. In A. Moreton-Robinson (Ed.), *Whitening race: Essays in social and cultural criticism* (pp. 59–74). Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies.
- Cranton, P. (2002). Teaching for transformation. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 93, 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.50>.
- Curtis, E., Jones, R., Tipene-Leach, D., Walker, C., Loring, B., Paine, S. J., & Reid, P. (2019). Why cultural safety rather than cultural competency is required to achieve health equity: A literature review and recommended definition. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 18(174). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-019-1082-3>.
- Damianakis, T., Barrett, B., Archer-Kuhn, B., Samson, P. L., Matin, S., & Ahern, C. (2020). Transformative learning in graduate education: Masters of social work students' experiences of personal and professional learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(9), 2011–2029. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1650735>.
- Das, D., & Anand, J. C. (2014). Strategies for critical reflection in international contexts for social work students. *International Social Work*, 57(2), 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872812443693>.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Duthie, D., (2019). Embedding Indigenous knowledges and cultural safety in social work curricula. *Australian Social Work*, 72(1), 113–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2018.1534978>.
- Fook, J. (2002). *Social work: Critical theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Fook, J. (2004). Critical reflection and transformative possibilities. In L. Davies & P. Leonard (Eds.), *Social work in a corporate era: Practices of power and resistance* (pp. 16–30). London: Routledge.
- Fook, J. (2016). *Social work: A critical approach to practice* (3rd ed). London: Sage.
- Fook, J., & Gardner, F. (2007). *Practising critical reflection: A handbook*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Fredericks, B. (2008). Making an impact researching with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 5(1), pp. 24–33. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/224906/>.
- Gardner, P. (2021). Contemplative pedagogy: Fostering transformation learning in a critical service-learning course. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 44(2), 152–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920952086>.
- Gayle, B. M., Cortez, D., & Preiss, R. W. (2013). Safe spaces, difficult dialogues, and critical thinking. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsoetl.2013.070205>.
- Giroux, H. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York: Continuum.
- Green, S., & Baldry, E. (2008). Building Indigenous Australian social work. *Australian Social Work*, 61(4), 389–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03124070802430718>.

- Green, S., & Baldry, E. (2013). Indigenous social work education in Australia. In B. Bennett, S. Green, S. Gilbert, & D. Bessarab (Eds.), *Our voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work* (pp. 166–180). South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Green, S., Bennett, B., & Betteridge, S. (2016). Cultural responsiveness and social work—a discussion. *Social Alternatives*, 35(4), 66–72.
- Green, S., Bennett, B., Collins, A., Gowans, B., Hennessey K., & Smith K. (2013). Walking the journey: The student experience. In B. Bennett, S. Green, S. Gilbert, & D. Bessarab (Eds.), *Our voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work* (pp. 207–229). South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Greenhill, J., Richards, J. N., Mahoney, S., Campbell, N., & Walters, L. (2018). Transformative learning in medical education: Context matters, a South Australian longitudinal study. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 16(1), 58–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344617715710>.
- Griffiths, K., Coleman, C., Lee, V., & Madden, R. (2016). How colonisation determines social justice and Indigenous health: A review of the literature. *Journal of Population Research*, 33(1), 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12546-016-9164-1>.
- Hendrick, A., & Young, S. (2018). Teaching about decoloniality: The experience of non-Indigenous social work educators. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 62(3–4), 306–318. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12285>.
- Hollinsworth, D. (2006). *Race and racism in Australia* (3rd ed.). South Melbourne, Australia: Social Science Press.
- International Federation of Social Workers. (2014, July). *Global definitions of social work*. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>.
- Jones, P. (2009). Teaching for change in social work: A discipline-based argument for the use of transformative approaches to teaching and learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 7(1), 8–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344609338053>.
- Jones, P. (2020). Critical transformative learning and social work education. In C. Morley, P. Ablett, C. Noble, & C. Cowden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical pedagogies for social work* (pp. 489–500). London: Routledge.
- Kaighin, J. (2020). Embedding the queer and embracing the crisis: Kevin Jumashiro's anti-oppressive pedagogies for queering social work education and practice. In C. Morley, P. Ablett, C. Noble, & S. Cowden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical pedagogies for social work* (pp. 333–344). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Land, C. (2015). *Decolonizing solidarity: Dilemmas and directions for supporters of indigenous struggles*. London: Zed.
- Lavery, M., McDermott, D., & Calma, T. (2017). Embedding cultural safety in Australia's main health care standards. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 207(1), 15–16. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja17.00328>. <https://www.mja.com.au/system/files/2017-06/10.5694mja17.00328.pdf>.
- Mendes, P. (2005). The history of social work in Australia: A critical literature review. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), 121–131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1447-0748.2005.00197.x>.
- Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: a guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adults learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(1), 58–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344603252172>.
- Mezirow, J. (2012). Learning to think like and adult: Core concepts of transformative learning theory. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice*. (pp. 73–95). New York: Wiley.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (1999). Unmasking whiteness: A Gooris Jondal's look at some Duggai business. In B. McKay (Ed.), *Unmasking whiteness: Race relations and reconciliation* (pp. 28–37). Brisbane, Australia: Griffith University.
- Morley, C. (2014a). *Practising critical reflection to develop emancipatory change: Challenging the legal response to sexual assault*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Morley, C. (2014b). Using critical reflection to research possibilities for change. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(6), 1419–1435. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcto04>.
- Morley, C. (2016). Critical reflection and critical social work. In B. Pease, S. Goldingay, N. Hosken, & S. Nipperess (Eds.), *Doing critical social work: Transformative practices for social justice* (pp. 25–38). Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Morley C. (2020a). The contribution of Stephen Brookfield's scholarship to teaching critical reflection in social work. In C. Morley, P. Ablett, C. Noble, & S. Cowden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical pedagogies for social work* (pp. 523–535). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Morley C. (2020b, February 24). *Reactivating social work practice as an emancipatory project: The role of critical theory, pedagogy and reflection*. International keynote for University of British Columbia Ninetieth Anniversary, Vancouver.
- Morley, C., Ablett, P., & Noble, C. (2020). Introduction: The imperative of critical pedagogies for social work. In C. Morley, P. Ablett, C. Noble, & S. Cowden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical pedagogies for social work* (pp. 1–16). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Morley, C., & Macfarlane, S. (2012). The nexus between feminism and postmodernism: Still a central concern for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 687–705. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr107>.
- Morley, C., & O'Bree, C. (2021). Critical reflection: An imperative skill for social work practice in neoliberal organisations? *Social Sciences*, 10(3), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10030097>.
- Morley, C., & O'Connor, D. (2016). Contesting field education in social work: Using critical reflection to enhance student learning for critical practice. In I. Taylor, M. Bogo, M. Lefevre, & B. Teater (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of social work education* (pp. 220–231). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Noble, C. (2020). Bell hooks trilogy: Pedagogy for social work supervision. In C. Morley, P. Ablett, C. Noble, & S. Cowden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical pedagogies for social work* (pp. 501–511). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- O'Sullivan, E., Morrel, A., & O'Connor, M.A. (2002). *Expanding the boundaries of the transformative learning: Essays on theory and praxis*. Londong: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paradies, Y., Harris, R., & Anderson, I. (2008). *The impact of racism on Indigenous health in Australia and Aotearoa: Towards a research agenda*. Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health.

- Parra, M. O., Gutierrez, R., & Aldana, M. F. (2015). Engaging in critically reflective teaching: From theory to practice in pursuit of transformative learning. *Reflective Practice*, 16(1), 16–30. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2014.944141>.
- Pawar, M., Hanna, G., & Sheridan, R. (2004). International social work practicum in India. *Australian Social Work*, 57(3), 223–236. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1447-0748.2004.00150.x>.
- Ramsden, I. M. (2002). Cultural safety and nursing education in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu. (doctoral dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand). https://www.nzno.org.nz/Portals/0/Files/Documents/Services/Library/2002%20RAMSDEN%20I%20Cultural%20Safety_Full.pdf.
- Saggers, S., Walter, M., & Gray, D. (2011). Culture, history and health. In R. Thackrah & K. Scott (Eds.), *Indigenous Australian health and cultures: An introduction for health professionals* (pp. 1–21). Sydney: Pearson Australia.
- Sousa, P., & Almeida, J. L. (2016). Culturally sensitive social work: Promoting cultural competence. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(3–4), 537–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1126559>.
- Walter, M., Taylor, S., & Habibis, D. (2011). How white is social work in Australia? *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2010.510892>.
- Wehbi, S. (2009). Deconstructing motivations: challenging international social work placement. *International Social Work*, 52(1), 48–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872808097750>.
- Yu, P. (2011). *The power of data in Aboriginal hands*. Paper presented at the conference Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. Canberra: Australian National University.