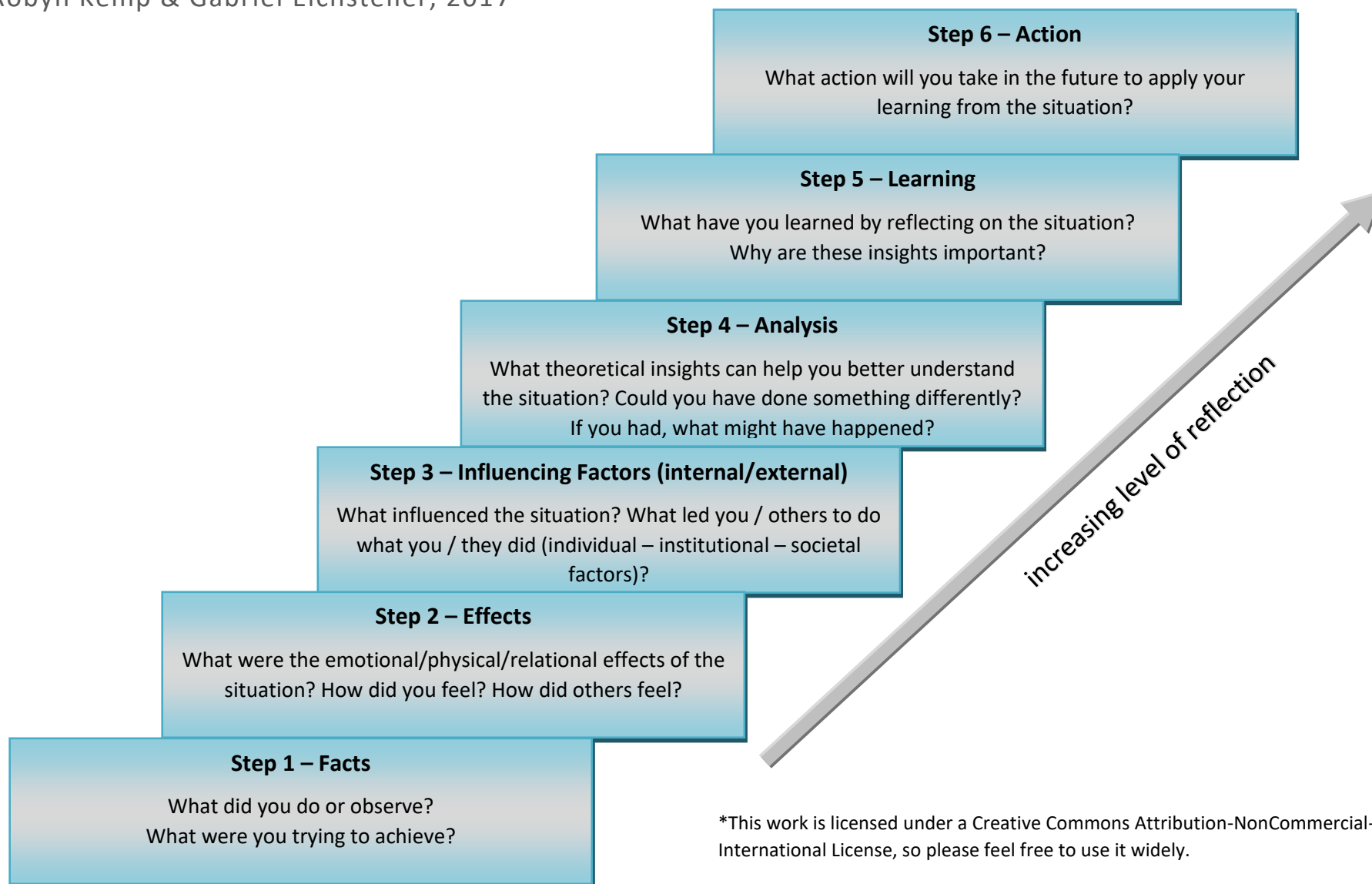


# Social Pedagogical Reflection – the FEIALA model

Robyn Kemp & Gabriel Eichsteller, 2017



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Reflection plays a critical role within social pedagogical and social work practice. It forms an essential part of the learning process, an opportunity to make greater sense of the world around us and our place in it. Reflective processes seek greater insight through questioning our initial assessments of situations and checking on everything that may be ‘in play’. Reflection enables us to apply knowledge, principles and ideas in practice (or generally in life), to analyse what impact they had, what we can learn from these analytical insights and how this might help us in the future. This means that, when properly done, reflection is a powerful and empowering process that makes us more resilient and resourceful, strengthens our ability to think and act without discrimination, and strengthens our relationships by providing us with more strategies and insights. Therefore, the time spent on engaging in a detailed and honest reflection process is worth the investment and saves a lot of time, disruption and potential distress further down the line.

Within social pedagogy and social work, reflection is not limited to better understanding how and why something might have gone wrong or less well than anticipated, for instance why we might have got in an argument with a foster child or why a parent slammed the door in our face on our outreach visit. Reflecting on situations that went well can be just as important, because the reflection can provide clues and insights that are equally useful, for instance in what situations we have deep and meaningful conversations with that foster child or are welcomed into the flat by the parent mentioned above. Also, in order to maintain our sense of competence, we need to balance our perceptions of what we are doing well with the areas we need to develop. These clues can help us find solutions in situations that might otherwise escalate, perhaps by being more aware of how our own behaviour can change the trajectory of an

interaction or recognising early warning signs that the other person is struggling. Importantly, reflecting on successful practice – on the ‘sparkling moments’ – can help create balance and a sense that we’re making progress and that there are reasons to celebrate. Some of these sparkling moments might be small and seem insignificant at a cursory glance, and it is through reflection that we can recognise their power and importance, to value a smile that might otherwise have gone unnoticed and to unearth why that smile might matter. In this sense, a thorough reflection process is essential in determining what perspective we take when it comes to our practice.

Adapted from various resources on reflective processes, we have developed the FEIALA model over the last 9 years of educating practitioners on ThemPra’s social pedagogy courses. The FEIALA model lends itself to a variety of practice contexts and situations, and depending on the complexity and time available for reflection, the model can be either a quick and useful or detailed and thorough guide to structuring reflections. It can be used very flexibly for a range of different purposes too, for instance a brief reflection at the end of a day, a specific aspect in a situation worth examining in more detail, or a more critical in-depth reflection that enables us to critically revisit our own perspectives, values and how we live these in our interactions. The model can be applied both individually and within groups, both with colleagues and with the people we support in everyday practice. Below, we outline some key questions to explore at each step and offer two practice examples to highlight how FEIALA can be applied. The first example illustrates a reflection on an issue experienced by a children’s social worker, and the second example picks up on one of the actions implemented by the social worker as a result of her reflection process. We hope that it demonstrates the ongoing value and usefulness of the FEIALA model.

### Reflective questions

#### FACTS

*Describe what happened, focussing only on the facts, being careful not to confuse observations with interpretations:*

- *What happened?*
- *What did you do or observe?*
- *What were you trying to achieve?*

#### EFFECTS

*Think about before, during and after the event and what was going on for you and, where relevant, for other people involved.*

- *How did you feel? How did others feel?*
- *Physical effects: what did you notice about how your body reacted?*
- *Emotional effects: what emotions did you feel, dig deeper than the surface emotions as appropriate*
- *Relational effects: how did the situation impact on your relationship?*

### Practice example 1

#### FACTS

Jimmy's mum came to the service to complain that her son was not being cared for properly by the foster carers. She shouted that she is worried that he is not getting enough to eat and that he spends too much time alone in his room. She said that I didn't seem to care about him because I missed my last meeting with him. She said she was too angry to speak to me so my manager spoke to her and she left his office without even looking at me. She appeared to be a little drunk or under the influence of something. My manager said he will speak to me tomorrow about it.

#### EFFECTS

Physically, I felt sick when she showed up my hands were clammy and I felt my blood drain from my face, then it whooshed up again. I now feel sick at the prospect of meeting with my manager.

Emotionally, I felt ashamed and then angry, and then ashamed again. I worry that I have done things badly and felt a bit humiliated by my manager taking over. I think I felt she was being rude.

### Practice example 2

#### FACTS

In supervision with my manager we agreed that I could spend a few hours of quality time working on my relationships with Jimmy, his mum and carers. I called mum and thanked her for raising her concerns and told her I wanted to improve our relationship and the relationship she has with Jimmy's carers. After an initial coldness, she warmed up and we agreed to take Jimmy on a picnic with his carers in half term. When I visited Jimmy, we went for a walk and he told me what he liked about his carers and what he wanted to change. We planned our picnic and I found out that he likes to bake, as his mum used to bake a lot. He said he's worried about his mum, and he misses her a lot. He gave me a hug when I left, the first and I hope not the last.

#### EFFECTS

I was nervous (butterflies in my stomach) before calling mum, and that dissipated once I had thanked her and expressed my wish for a better relationship with her as well as Jimmy.

When Jimmy hugged me before I left, I felt touched and joy at his ability to forgive and show warmth and affection. I saw it as an indicator that he had enjoyed our time together.

I felt some anger when thinking about the little support that mum has had from mental health and social services. I think mum feels that I am more alongside her now.

The carers expressed surprise when I talked about a picnic.

## INFLUENCES

*Think about the different factors that seem to have influenced the situation. What led you / others to do what you / they did? These could be:*

- *Individual factors - internal (e.g. hunger, own prejudices) and external (e.g. pressure from manager, theoretical perspective);*
- *Institutional/organisational factors;*
- *Wider contextual factors, such as societal, political, or economic aspects influencing the situation.*

## ANALYSIS

*Read over what you have written so far to digest it. Use appropriate theories, research and dialogue to better understand the situation, others and yourself in the situation.*

- *What theoretical insights can help you better understand the situation?*
- *Could you have done something differently?*
- *If you had, what might have happened?*

## INFLUENCES

My workload. I had to cancel my meeting with Jimmy because of a colleague's urgent case, she is off sick and senior managers are worried about her cases. I felt more pressure to deal with her cases than my own, although Jimmy is just as important. I feel I'm under incredible scrutiny.

I thought that Jimmy was doing fine with his carers – they told me so.

Jimmy's mum appeared a little drunk - there was a part of me that dismissed her.

I'm often complimented on my ability to stay calm and manage complex things.

Acknowledging there are problems with the placement will bring more work for me.

## ANALYSIS

I had assumed that the information from the carers was enough. I hadn't ever asked Jimmy's mum about how well she thinks he's being cared for. Jimmy told me he was fine last time I saw him but we were in the carers' house and maybe he didn't feel comfortable telling me otherwise. I assumed she was drunk. Reading back through the file I realize she's on heavy anti-depressants that can make her speech slurred. I also haven't told my manager that I'm struggling to keep up with the demands of my own workload, let alone someone else's. I am concerned that people will think I'm not as

## INFLUENCES

I consciously used nonviolent communication to help plan how I would talk with Jimmy, his mum and his carers. I also made an effort to check my assumptions and interpretations.

My manager told me that he didn't have unreasonable expectations of my competence and that he wanted me to tell him if things were getting too much

I wonder about whether Jimmy hugged me spontaneously as a result of feeling closer to me, or because that was a strategy that worked when his mum was at her least well. He coped with a great deal of his mum's disorder and told his carers that he would hug his mum when she was depressed.

## ANALYSIS

Being given the OK to share my concerns about my workload was significant in shifting my sense of isolation and fear of letting myself and others down.

Nonviolent communication is a helpful method for me, although it's not easy; it helps me to stay in the professional and personal while being aware of my private feelings and keeping them in check.

On my walk with Jimmy he opened up more than ever before. Walking and talking seems easier than sitting and talking, and not just for Jimmy, for me too.

competent as they thought I was if I speak up about not coping very well.

3Ps - Private feelings influenced my immediate reactions to Jimmy's mum's accusations. I was too concerned with disagreeing rather than being professional and listening to her concerns without judgment. I realize that my personal P hasn't been working on a relationship with her.

Relationships – Have I done enough to get alongside Jimmy and his mum? His isn't a very complicated case so did I downgrade his and his mum's need for my time?

Jimmy is 10 and has been caring for his mum when she's been ill for as long as he can remember. I wonder how this translates into his ability to express his own feelings, as mum occupied a lot of the emotional space. I am interested to find out how much of his emotional expression is placatory. He witnessed his father's violence when he was very young and, although he may not remember it, this and how he experienced his mother's depression could have had an effect that is quite hidden now. If he thinks that he must placate adults, this will not be helpful for his development, especially when he gets to adolescence. Carers say that he seems to push difficult feelings down and to isolate himself when his feelings are difficult, like after a visit from his mum, or after a problem at school.

Common third – we looked at a map of the surrounding area and found a park that none of us had been to before. We all agreed to bring something we had made for the picnic. Planning an activity that none of us had done before (we have never been to this park before although have had picnics) brought out loads of information (e.g. Jimmy said he likes to bake, which the carers were delighted about, we shared our food likes and dislikes), and Jimmy had the brilliant idea to ask all the people in his life to give him a recipe.

If I hadn't invested this time I might still be working with some resistance rather than the openness and hopefulness I now sense. I might never have understood that Jimmy's general compliance might actually be a negative effect.

## LEARNING

*Clearly identify the learning you've drawn from your reflection and why this might be important.*

- *What have you learned from reflecting on the situation?*
- *Why are these insights important?*

## LEARNING

I initially thought Jimmy's mum's concerns were not real. I assumed she was drunk and dismissed her – I even thought she might be making it up to make herself feel better about not being able to look after Jimmy herself. She pointed out my poor practice – that isn't easy for me, and probably wasn't easy for her either. I needed to empathise with her more, rather than be in and respond from my private feelings. Keeping my worries about my workload to myself serves no-one. My manager isn't a bad person, there are good people in my team, and they'll all probably support me if I let them.

She has every right to question the quality of care.

Jimmy has a right to participate and I have a responsibility to form a better relationship with him so that I can enable him to participate more actively.

The carers are lovely people but maybe they don't quite know how to handle Jimmy – I need to support them too.

Our service is under immense pressure – just about coping is seen as a marvellous thing by senior managers.

My relationships with Jimmy, his mum, his carers and the SSW are not as strong as they could be – they are my responsibility.

## LEARNING

When I resist being defensive and plan how I communicate I have better relationships and a better environment for my relationships to grow. I need to plan to spend quality time with my clients, including their birth families, and need to do this with my manager – not assuming that he doesn't get the importance of this.

Not doing the usual stuff, e.g. walking and talking rather than sitting together in a quiet room, seems to bring out much more, and helped to redefine our relationship.

Reflecting opened up a line of inquiry that I had not really considered before. It's been so easy for me to see compliance as a positive and not to look deeper. It also helped me to see Jimmy in the context of his whole childhood, not just now he's in care.



### **ACTION**

*Identify what you will do with your learning and how it will affect your actions in the future.*

- *What action will you take in the future to apply your learning from the situation?*
- *When will you review how your learning has transferred into practice?*
- *Who will you share your learning with?*

### **ACTION**

I will see my manager first thing tomorrow and be open to his critical feedback – I want to learn from this, not defend myself. I will call Jimmy's mum and try to make amends with her. I will emphasise that she was right to call me up on this and thank her for her feedback. I will make more time for Jimmy, I'll take him somewhere he would enjoy next time and not clock watch as I did last time.

I will ask for support from my manager and my team and see whether we can do better in supporting each other – what can I do for them too?

I will call the carers' SSW and ask her how things are going and ask about what and how often Jimmy's eating, and about 'spending too much time alone in his room'. Maybe they'd like some ideas about connecting with him. Maybe Jimmy and his mum would like to spend time doing something together with me, and the carers too. Perhaps we could think of a common third.

### **ACTION**

I will develop my understanding and use of nonviolent communication

I will ask how-can-I-best-support-you? type questions of all my clients, assume less, query more.

I will present this as a positive case at our team meeting next week, so we aren't always reflecting on when things go badly and can learn from sharing positive experiences too.

I will send Jimmy, his mum and his carers a card to say that my relationship with them is important to me and that I value their feedback and advice. I want them to know that I am holding them in my mind even when I don't see them.

I will thank my manager for his understanding and support and seek to address the workload issues collaboratively with my team.

Below we have included this template so that you can use it to guide your own reflections. You can also download an electronic version of it at <http://www.thempira.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social-Pedagogical-Reflection-The-FEIALA-Model-template.docx>

Please let us know how you get on with the FEIALA model and share any ideas for further improvement.

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## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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