

From critical reflection to critical professional practice: Addressing the tensions between critical and hegemonic perspectives

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Abstract

Critical reflection processes are fundamental to critical social work practice. Nevertheless, these processes have been criticized for lacking a coherent translation to direct professional practice. Existing models of critical reflection culminate in the formulation of critical professional perspectives, leaving the translation of critical

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perspectives into direct practice underdeveloped. This gap requires attention, specifically in the contemporary context of social services that operate under the hegemony of conservative and neoliberal discourses, which impede critical rationality and practice. Therefore, a nuanced conceptualization of the process that links critical reflection and critical practice is required. This article provides such a conceptualization by describing an undergraduate social work course that used a collaborative inquiry group to explore critical participatory practices. Building on our collaborative inquiry experiences and findings, we portray a process that included critical reflection, direct critical practice, and the development of a critical professional perspective. Based on the conceptual framework of action science, our conceptualization demonstrates how the process of addressing the tension between critical and hegemonic perspectives enables professionals to create critical practice within the hegemonic field. In this way, we provide a theoretical contribution to the construction of critical reflection models and a practical contribution to professional developmental processes that promote critical professionalism.

Keywords

Action science, critical reflection, critical social work, participatory practice, collaborative inquiry

Introduction

Critical reflection is a fundamental component of critical practice in social work (Fook, 2016; Testa and Egan, 2016). Yet while an extensive body of literature addresses critical reflection methods and processes (Chiu, 2006; Fook and Gardner, 2007; Morley, 2014a), the examination of the process that links critical *reflection* and critical *practice* in the professional field remains underdeveloped (Fook and Kellehear, 2010; Tretheway et al., 2017). This gap may result in critical reflection remaining only an individual endeavour that is scarcely translated into direct practice. Furthermore, the hegemonic position of conservative and neoliberal rationalities impedes critical professionalism in the current context of social services' neoliberalisation (Ferguson, 2008; Schram, 2015), adding further challenges to the assimilation of critical practice (Newman and McNamara, 2016; Timor-Shlevin, 2021).

This article seeks to bridge the conceptual gap between critical reflection and critical practice by pointing out how the possibility of addressing the tension between critical and hegemonic discourses is linked to the evolving agency of professionals to operate with critical professionalism under hegemonic rationality. To this end, we describe a participatory inquiry group (Heron and Reason, 1997) formed to jointly explore critical participatory practices in the framework of an academic course that addressed such practices in youth social work (Timor-Shlevin

and Krumer-Nevo, 2016). The group included some of the students and the course lecturer. This exploratory process revealed the students' ability to address the tension between critical participatory rationality and the tendency of the field to rely on neoliberal and conservative rationalities, which inhibit critical practice. We analyse the process of addressing these tensions, arguing that it enables the translation of critical reflection into critical practice and thus contributes to the conceptualization of critical reflection.

Reflexivity and action science

Reflexivity is a basic requirement of social work practice and is based on the rich tradition of action science (Argyris et al., 1985; Friedman, 2001). Action science traces the processes that turn theoretical knowledge into action, focusing on the implicit components of "theories-in-use" (Putnam, 1999; 178), such as basic assumptions, perspectives, and interpretations that govern professionals' actual practice. In an attempt to bridge the gap between intended and actual practices, action science seeks to uncover professionals' tacit knowledge and test it in collaborative learning processes. These learning processes of "communities of practice" (Friedman, 2001: 160) allow professionals to better understand themselves and their practices, and thus develop better theories-in-use (Argyris and Schön, 1996). The basic tool that enables such inquiry is reflexivity, a process through which professionals examine their work in depth, evaluating the basic assumptions that underlie their emotions, thoughts, meanings, and actions (Fook and Gardner, 2007). Schön (1983) described reflexive processes as an ongoing attention to nuanced personal and relational feelings that accompanies professional conduct. In this article, we seek to explore the gap between critical professional perspectives and critical practice. Therefore, we specifically address the conceptualization of *critical reflection*.

Critical reflection

Critical reflection builds on critical theory, which analyses social processes to expose the underlying power dynamics that construct social reality (Horkheimer, 1972). These oppressive mechanisms are usually concealed by veils of neutrality and social habits and shape the distribution of social resources such as money, status, respect, and so on (Bourdieu, 1989). Since critical social work practice fundamentally demands the reconstruction of common social constructs, one of its key elements consists of identifying these constructs in the direct encounter between social workers and service users (Gardner, 2003). Thus, *critical reflection* involves developing awareness of the personal meanings of political structural mechanisms in order to resist their underlying influence (Chiu, 2006). Foley (2002) describes the sceptical position towards hegemonic truths as a fundamental aspect of critical reflection, through which meaning-making processes that construct hegemonic perspectives are questioned in order to expose their relativity.

Brookfield (2009) highlights the significance of the conscious effort to develop critical positions through critical theory in undermining the power of hegemonic narratives to construct reality.

Reflexive attention can address personal beliefs, interpersonal dynamics, and collective perspectives and assumptions (Chiu, 2006). Thus, critical reflection provides social workers with valuable materials for the reconstruction of oppressive social constructs at different value levels. For instance, when a middle-class social worker identifies her own feelings of superiority over a service user who is a single mother living in poverty, critical reflection may allow her to identify, deconstruct, and reconstruct the commonly accepted value ladder of social status that triggers her sense of superiority. Since oppressive social constructions are often implicit, critical social work points to the value of acknowledging their existence and naming their effects on people both as a therapeutic process and for the promotion of social justice (Krumer-Nevo, 2020).

In practical terms, critical reflection processes spiral between awareness of personal and relational thoughts and feelings, the deconstruction of their hegemonic meanings, and their reconstruction in light of critical perspectives (Morley, 2014a). Fook and Gardner (2007) describe a detailed process of critical reflection in which they use critical questions to highlight the everyday contextualized meanings and costs of the hegemonic construction of reality. This method enables the reconstruction of common truths in a new, critical manner. Curtis and Morley (2019) point to the significance of acknowledging the underlying, nuanced ways in which social workers themselves contribute to the construction of the social order. Such acknowledgement may enable emancipation, exposing the nuanced hegemonic levels of operation and making it possible for social workers to develop professional perspectives that are less influenced by the hegemonic rationality. For example Morley (2014b) presented a qualitative study of critical reflection with social work practitioners and described how it is connected to perceived professionalism. She demonstrated that critical reflection was associated with changes in the social workers' perceived agency in ways that allowed them to formulate future interventions. Thus, it is apparent that critical reflection is an established and vital component of critical social work, since it allows social workers to develop critical practice that resists hegemonic constructions.

Nonetheless, research on the process of linking critical reflection and critical practice remains underdeveloped (Tretheway et al., 2017). Morley (2014b) highlights the goal of using critical reflection to develop social workers' own critical *perceptions*. Likewise, the well-known model presented by Fook and Gardner (2007) culminates in the social worker connecting critical *insights* with new *ideas* regarding practice. The construction of this model points to the achievement of critical reflection in the realm of *insights*, *ideas*, and *intended actions*. It is apparent, then, that critical reflection is often conceptualized as belonging to the sphere of perceptions and intended practices, while its translation into the sphere of practice remains ambiguous, with the result that current critical reflection models fall short in providing social workers with specific guidelines for the promotion of critical

professionalism in hegemonic fields. Furthermore, the literature points to the strained power relations between the hegemonic neoliberal and conservative rationalities and critical rationality as a central impediment to critical professionalism (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin, 2010; Timor-Shlevin, 2020), making the need to extend critical reflection models to address this challenge crucially important.

Considering the absence of a clear model of how to extend critical reflection models into professional practice, this article describes a collaborative educational process that focused on critical-participatory practice in youth social work. In what follows, we describe our experience as members of a participatory inquiry group (Heron and Reason, 1997) and provide a brief look at critical-participatory practices and social work field training in Israel.

The participatory inquiry group

This article describes a learning process that took place in 2016 during an academic course titled Critical-Participatory Practices in Youth Social Work. The lecturer hoped to incorporate an experiential practical participatory process into the course and asked the students whether we would like to take part in such a process. Following an open discussion, 15 female students chose to study the applicability of critical-participatory practices, building on their field training experience, and we set up a collaborative research group based on the *participatory inquiry* approach (Heron and Reason, 1997).

Participatory inquiry was introduced by Heron and Reason (1997) and is commonly considered a branch of the critical stream of collaborative action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). It is based on a group of common stakeholders who meet to explore a shared area of interest. The process of participatory inquiry takes place through cycles of experience, reflection, and co-processing that are repeated for several rounds. After the research topic is initially defined, the experience phase takes place in the field to provide group members with direct experience of the research topic and allowing them to write about it reflectively. In the process described here, the first decision we made was to write about our encounter with critical-participatory practices, which took place simultaneously at the theoretical level in the course, at the practical level in our field training, and during our collaborative inquiry process.

In the next step, the group met again to discuss the reflective material the members had collected. In this phase, the insights gained by the group on the research topic turned to the literature to refocus the research. After several rounds of experience and reflection, the group summarized the knowledge that had been created and processed it into the product of the research. The data collected with this method consist of the personal reflections and the shared discussions (Heron and Reason, 2006).

In the discussion sessions held during this process, we noted the complexity of creating participatory practices. In some cases, professionals at the various field training agencies marked participatory practices as unprofessional, while in others, the field

agencies' basic working procedures were paternalistic, revealing the unfamiliarity of participatory practices. On some occasions, the students experienced difficulties in introducing participatory practices. Discussing these experiences, we realized that we were encountering a familiar tension from the critical-participatory practice literature; on the one hand these practices are considered valuable and necessary (Timor-Shlevin and Krumer-Nevo, 2016), while on the other they are rarely accepted in the field (Alfandari, 2017). Based on the conceptualization that emerges from the literature regarding the tension between critical approaches in social work and the neoliberal and conservative discourses that dominate the field (Ferguson, 2008; Schram, 2015), we understood the difficulties we were encountering as part of the discursive tension that reflects a struggle over professionalization (Timor-Shlevin and Benjamin, 2020a, 2020b). Based on this understanding, we decided to focus our inquiry on this tension and write about our experiences of coping with it.

During the course, we held four rounds of experience, reflection, and discussion. Each participant wrote six reflections and in addition we recorded and transcribed the four group discussions. The materials collected included 90 reflective documents written by the students in addition to the transcripts of the four joint discussions. After we completed the course and our undergraduate social work degrees, the lecturer invited the group members to continue the process and analyse the materials that had been collected. Six participants from the original group decided to join, and we began the analysis phase of the project. Along the way, two participants left the group, and today we are a group of four social workers and the course lecturer.

The data analysis was conducted jointly by the group members, with each reflection analysed by at least two participants and discussed in joint meetings. We used thematic analysis to analyse the reflective materials in three phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first of these included an introduction to the reflective materials. At this point, we ensured that each participant would analyse only the reflections written by other members of the group. In the second phase, the reflections were coded into initial categories that directly described the students' experience as well as various barriers they faced when they sought to engage in critical-participatory practice. Examples of these initial codes are "confusion and apprehension in the face of partnership", "my position as a student", and "boundaries and partnership". In the third phase, these categories were analyzed to combine central themes that more broadly expressed the students' experience across a more limited number of themes. This process took place in group discussions in which we examined several possible ways of unifying themes until we reached agreement on a fundamental theme structure. Here we describe in detail the theme we called "addressing the tensions", which demonstrates both the barriers we encountered and the ways in which we processed them.

Establishing a research group within an academic course as part of our studies raised several ethical questions, the first being whether to disclose the project to the field training agencies. This project took place as an integral component of the undergraduate social worker degree, in which the field training experiences are regularly discussed in theoretical courses. Therefore, after discussing this issue with a senior researcher in

the department, we decided there was no need to inform the field agencies about the project. Nevertheless, the project was publicly discussed on three occasions with field agency members, who emphasized their positive opinion regarding the ways in which it highlighted the need to further develop critical discussion between the University and the field agencies. The second question concerned the power imbalance between the course lecturer and the students. Addressing these power relations has been an integral part of our process as a participatory inquiry group, enhancing our learning regarding the complex manner in which power plays a part in participatory practices (Heron and Reason, 2006). Another ethical issue we faced was the possibility that non-participation in the group would be detrimental to the students' course grades. Therefore, we decided that to ensure that participation would be voluntary, the course grade would be determined by a fully anonymized exam only. Participation in the research group proved to be genuinely voluntary, with 15 of 30 students choosing to take part during the course. Next, we discussed how to encourage authentic reflexive writing in light of our concern that writing unpleasant content about the course lecturer or the instructors in the field could have affected the lecturer's attitude towards the students. Considering this concern, we decided together that the lecturer would not read the reflective materials until after completing the grading process in order to allow open and honest writing. The lecturer accompanied our process in consultation with an expert in the field of qualitative action research and received assistance in reflecting and bracketing the ethical and methodological issues (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, all members of the original research group provided their written consent to participate in this research. All names used here are pseudonyms.

In Israel, a bachelor's degree grants a professional license to practice social work. A key element of undergraduate social work studies consists of *field training*, which constitutes about one third of all degree requirements and in which students must receive a passing grade. *Critical-participatory practice* is an established tradition in social work and is based on critical rationality that challenges classical hierarchical relationships between social workers and service users (Van Bijleveld et al., 2015). Nevertheless, since one of the basic tenets of critical-participatory practice is challenging hegemonic power relations, the professional participatory stance is still weakly positioned in the field of social services (Timor-Shlevin and Benjamin, 2020a), as became evident in our direct experiences in the field training. Thus, the main questions that drove our participatory inquiry were the following: (1) *How do social work students experience the tension between critical-participatory practices and the professional perspective of field training?* and (2) *How does the reflective process enable students to address and process these tensions?*

Addressing the tensions between critical and hegemonic perspectives

The reflective materials clearly illustrated the theme of hegemonic barriers to critical-participatory practices, while another central theme consisted of the creative

manner in which the students addressed and processed these tensions in order to promote critical practice. In this section, we describe how addressing and processing these barriers consisted of four milestones that can be viewed as elements of an evolving spiral process. We termed these milestones *removal of doubt*, *critical perspectives*, *agency and action in a complex space*, and *the emergence of critical professionalism*.

Removal of doubt

This milestone consisted of the personal and professional confusion that arose when students encountered the tensions between the critical and hegemonic professional discourses. For example, the common conservative construction of therapeutic relations as hierarchical is considered by many scholars to inhibit participatory practices (Timor-Shlevin and Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Thus, when students attempted to introduce participatory practice into the conservative field, the inherent tension between the common paternalistic professional position and students' participatory ideas raised doubts in students that prevented them from engaging in participatory practice. Consider the following case from Tamar's third reflection, which presents personal and professional questions that may arise when doubt is created:

One of the teenagers I worked with told me once that he was tired of talking and asked if we could play ping-pong outside. I agreed, and from that day on, we played ping-pong. He had hardly spoken to anyone until then, but now he began to create new relationships with other kids in his house. He was happier and more engaged and confident. The social worker asked me if the ping-pong sessions were what he *really* needed. I told her that we had made the decision together and he was flourishing. I understood that what she was really asking was "is it professional?" Then I began to wonder what makes conversations while playing ping-pong less professional. Is "professional" only what is defined as such, for example a conversation in a closed room, conducted in a conservative, acceptable way? These questions made me doubt myself. What if I had chosen to play ping-pong with him as an easy way to be with him? Perhaps I was denying him the professional assistance he deserved. And perhaps the ping-pong conversations were more convenient for me and not genuinely participatory. After considering these points, I shared some of these thoughts with him, and we decided to meet in the therapy room one week and at the ping-pong table the next for the duration of the therapy. These decisions again made me wonder about participatory practices. Are they therapeutic? What was my professional responsibility in this participatory process, and how much responsibility could I take upon myself? Was sharing responsibility professional? To what degree should responsibility be shared?

In this case, we can see how the encounter with conservative questions evokes doubts regarding Tamar's motives and professional responsibility. It is also evident

that she experienced difficulties on two fronts: first, the power relations between her and the teenager with whom she was working, and second, the suspicious attitude of her supervisor, who was in a stronger power position. This process raised tough questions regarding her own motives, conduct, and professional notions of participatory practice.

Learning processes should take place in spaces in which it is safe to raise questions and express doubts. In our case, we considered the professional questions raised at the stage of *removal of doubt* to enable the development of two fundamental themes: first, the acknowledgment of the hegemonic opposition to participatory practice, and second, the specific professional qualities of participatory practice. The next milestone in the process consisted of the critical exploration of the questions raised by the doubts that arose in the previous step.

Critical perspectives

This milestone consisted of the critical examination of the students themselves, participatory practice, the hegemonic professional discourse, the power relations present in field training, and society as a whole. Let us consider the following excerpt from Dana's second reflection:

Today's lesson left me with a strong sense of doubt—can participatory practice really be therapeutic for adolescents? Am I capable of engaging in it? Or is it only wishful thinking on my part? On the one hand, I think we should listen to the teenagers we work with and believe that there is no point in forcing them to engage in processes they don't want to engage in. Their voices are the most important thing in the process. On the other hand, I have some hesitation in the face of actual participatory practice. After all, sometimes teenagers don't know what they want to change, or how to do it, and sometimes they expect us to tell them, to show the way. Should I abandon participation in such cases? And besides that, I find myself talking a lot about this participatory "discourse", about how we build therapeutic encounters with no power relations, but do I really act in this way? **No.** Many times I make decisions alone and not with them. Sometimes this is due to a lack of time to ask their opinions, sometimes other team members don't agree with the participatory approach, and sometimes I think they're not ready to express their opinion on certain things, which is quite paternalistic, but ... at other times it's just because I want to do things my own way.

The student described the difference she experienced between the conservative discourse, which provides clarity, order, and professional boundaries, and the participatory discourse, which is more fluid and complex and requires her to conduct a constant, intense dialogue with teenagers about the therapeutic process itself. This critical perspective allows her to make room for complexity. She understands that at times conservative practice is appropriate and recognizes that the conservative discourse may enable limited participatory practice in order to

maintain a paternalistic position. Such an understanding can be confusing and exhausting when we want to identify with a clear professional position.

The next case, from Efrat's fifth reflection, presents another level of a critical perspective:

I was attending a planning, intervention, and evaluation committee¹ meeting held to discuss a young girl I work with, and some of the other social workers were talking about how young I was and saying that maybe this was too complicated a case for a student to be dealing with. Immediately I felt what it was like when power relations are weighted against you and realized that the same power that was directed at this young girl was now directed at me. After I processed these feelings, I talked to my supervisor about them. I was trying to explain my feelings of being diminished and disempowered, but she took everything I said and used it against me, as if I didn't understand anything. After this conversation, I thought a lot about the power we have as "experts" to disempower others, to damage people's self-confidence. I think that what happened was paternalistic at two levels: first, towards this young girl, because her voice was silenced at that committee meeting, and second, towards me, because my opinion and ability to say anything in favour of that girl were also diminished.

Unlike the early stages of our process, where confusion and doubt were evident, here we can see how Efrat conducted a more mature critical examination of what took place, identifying the underlying forces that operated around her and finding ways to address them by talking about the situation with her supervisor. Although this conversation was not successful, her choice to discuss the issue presented a new option of addressing some of the forces that inhibit critical participatory practices and operating against them. Her choice to speak with the supervisor brings us to the next milestone: agency and action.

Agency and action in a complex space

This milestone consists of critical operations that resist the hegemonic construction of professionalism, as the next case, from Tamar's sixth reflection, demonstrates:

I remember a situation in which I joined one of the teenagers while he was carrying out his kitchen duties. It felt very natural . . . However, the response of the other youth workers was surprising. They didn't understand why I had done it, and now, as I think about it, I guess that in joining this guy as he did his kitchen duties, I had shattered their firm conception of the power relations between staff and youth, which was apparently fundamental to their practice. Later, in a conversation with one of the youth workers, I asked her about her surprise, and we talked about authority and how she thought that a distanced position would give her greater authority. I said that in my view closeness enabled authority more than distance did. I felt that I had managed to translate participatory theory into participatory practice not only with the teenagers, but also within the space of the agency, with other staff members. It felt very

good to be able to turn the staff's opposition into a conversation in which this youth worker and I acknowledged the complexities of authority and participatory practice and processed them together.

What is special about this case is the student's ability to identify the barriers to participatory practice—e.g., the youth worker's distress over her closeness to the teenagers and changes in formal power relations—and talk about them. From the conservative perspective, proximity that goes beyond the commonly accepted standards of authoritarian relationships is a threat to professionalism (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin, 2010). The ability to identify and name these barriers allowed the student to use the critical reflective view of herself to create a space for challenging thinking about participatory practice. In the next case, Netanela managed to engage in critical practice that contradicted power relations in another way, as the following excerpt from her fifth reflection reveals:

In a group of young women that I facilitated, Iris mentioned that it was difficult to be a Caucasian Jew² at school. Other girls joined in and described the local power structure, explaining why they needed to maintain a threatening image so no one would "mess with them". I asked her if I would have belonged to the mainstream group or a marginal one if I had been a student at their school. They said I would certainly have been in the mainstream group. I asked what characterized those in the mainstream and after a brief discussion they concluded that it might be related to money. We started talking about my situation versus theirs. We are nearly the same age, but I had almost completed my social work degree and was facilitating this program, while they were struggling every day to complete their high school matriculation, be accepted into training programs, support themselves, overcome a lack of confidence and still enter the labour market, deal with job interviews and various tests, and so on. I told them that my parents had paid for my degree studies while I struggled not to feel too guilty. We laughed a little about me being a rich snob. I asked them why they thought I was telling them about this. I think I was also asking myself this question. They all stared at me and looked very curious. I told them that the main reason I was telling them this was because I wanted them to know they were not unsuccessful, incompetent, or at fault. They often felt extreme guilt about where they were in their lives. I said that unfortunately, our starting position in life has a great deal of significance in terms of where we are currently. We talked about their parents' immigration to Israel, life in the periphery, and the meaning of growing up in a marginalized group. About the difficulty of making a living. We talked about how money is not everything in life, but how the ability to pay for your child's academic education does make life easier. I explained that I did not say this to brag or to show that I was superior to them. I also faced difficulties in life, different from theirs. But it was important to me that they knew they were not at fault. That they were no less successful. They agreed with me and elaborated on their experience of guilt about their current positions in life. They empowered each other and themselves. I saw that the conversation was meaningful to them. I felt they appreciated that I spoke with

them as equals and had the courage to talk about what stood out in our encounter even though it was not pleasant.

In this case, Netanela walked boldly into the territory of the social power structure that was manifested in her group encounter with marginalized young woman. Considering the common tendency to ignore such issues in professional encounters, she and the young women were surprised at her ability to acknowledge their distinct social positions and discuss the emotions evoked by the gaps between them. This case demonstrates the student's ability to creatively open this issue for discussion and shared processing. The next milestone in this process was the development of a broader view of the field, which now consisted of a deeper understanding of ourselves and a critical view of the tense struggle between hegemonic and critical perspectives.

The emergence of critical professionalism

This milestone is characterized by the formulation of a more stable and critical professional perspective. Let us consider the next excerpt from Ruth's fifth reflection:

Initially, I was angry that the managers at the training centre feared that if we engaged in participatory practices, they would lose their authority or positions of power. I still feel this way, but now I think that more generally, it is a huge challenge to translate critical-participatory theory into practice at the field level. Participatory practice is most needed in places and contexts where we have issues of power relations, but it is difficult to achieve. I think that talking about authority and professionalism could reduce the anxious responses to participatory practice. We should make clear that participatory practice is not about abandoning professionalism; giving young people a role in the decision-making process does not indicate a lack of professionalism. It indicates a more nuanced and complex level of professionalism.

This excerpt reveals the process through which the student went, moving between a threatening experience that raised self-doubt through the ability to examine herself and the field and engage in professional practice aimed at overcoming hegemonic obstacles. The reflective space created by the research group provided a safe place in which to address the tensions between the critical and hegemonic perspectives. In turn, this process enabled the formation of critical professional positions that contextually addressed the hegemonic field. We understand the process of addressing the hegemonic-critical tension as a spiral one, i.e., not a linear one that culminates in the development of a critical professional perspective. That is, further hegemonic barriers will arise and be subjected to additional levels of doubt, critical perspectives, practical engagement, and professional construction. In the final section of this article, we use our findings to discuss the conceptualization of the process of linking critical reflection and critical practice.

Discussion

Existing models of critical reflection culminate in the development of critical–professional perspectives, but lack a component that facilitates the promotion of professional practice that adopts these perspectives (Tretheway et al., 2017). Our aim in this article was to expand critical reflection models to address the challenge of promoting critical practice in hegemonic fields. The process we describe here reveals critical practice as an integral part of the spiral process of critical reflection. First, it seems that in addition to their emphasis on personal perspectives, which require deconstruction, our processes of critical reflection revealed the nuanced tensions between critical and hegemonic perspectives, which require specific attention and processing. Second, our process highlights the ways in which the ability to *address these tensions* makes it possible to invent, experiment with, and experience critical practice in the field. We contend that in order to translate critical professional perspectives into feasible critical practice, practitioners require shared spaces in which to process hegemonic–critical tensions (Testa and Egan, 2016). Through *processing*, we engage in the conceptual deconstruction and reconstruction of hegemonic perspectives (Saar-Heiman, 2019) and receive the group support that makes it possible to imagine new critical practices and experiment with them. Our experience of participatory inquiry enabled another component of processing—the experience of critical participatory practice shared by the lecturer and the students. We experienced, on the one hand, the tension between the imbalanced power relations between lecturer and students and, on the other, the critical–participatory commitment to challenge these power relations (Timor-Shlevin and Krumer-Nevo, 2016). The need to address this complex tension in a practical manner provided us with direct experience of some feasible ways in which to develop critical practice in hegemonic contexts. Thus, our first contribution lies in elaborating on the role of a shared space in which to address hegemonic–critical tensions as a fundamental component of critical reflection models that enable the translation of critical reflection into critical practice in hegemonic fields.

At the theoretical level, we found that the theoretical framework of action science (Argyris and Schön, 1996) offered a novel articulation of critical reflection processes, which integrate reflection with practice in a non-linear manner. After the first step of removal of doubt, which highlights the nuanced tensions between hegemonic and critical perspectives, and the second step of addressing these tensions to make it possible to process them, the third step involves granting social workers the agency to practice critical professionalism in the field while taking hegemonic–critical tensions into account. Following their experiences of critical practice, the professional perspective of the students in our study began to emerge. Since the current field of social services is still based on conservative and neoliberal positions, further hegemonic–critical tensions will arise in the students’ coming encounters in the field, leading to additional cycles of tension-processing and the development of new ways in which to engage in

critical practice and further cultivate practitioners' professional perspectives. Thus, critical reflection, the possibility of producing critical practice in the field, and the formulation of a professional perspective all influence and are influenced by each other. Action science focuses on revealing implicit processes that govern professional action in order to examine their relevance and invite practitioners to take responsibility for their theories-in-use (Argyris, 1995). This article highlights the ways in which the discursive tensions between hegemonic and critical perspectives implicitly inhibit critical participatory practice at the field level. In order to reveal these underlying tensions, a collaborative "community of practice" is needed to process and reconstruct them (Friedman, 2001: 160) to grant professionals the agency to engage in critical practice and enable the emergence of a critical-professional perspective.

Our proposed conceptualization of the connection between critical reflection and critical practice broadens existing models of critical reflection to include the translation of critical perspectives into critical practice as a fundamental element of critical reflection processes. While existing models separate reflectivity, the development of a professional position, and the emergence of professional practice, we claim that the relationship between reflection and action is non-linear. We describe these components as part of the same process in which the formulation of a professional position and the operation of critical practice follow and reinforce each other. This evolving-spiral conceptualization of critical reflection processes sheds new light on the challenges social workers face in promoting critical professionalism in their daily practice. Thus, our contribution makes it possible to acknowledge some of the hegemonic obstacles to critical professionalism in social services dominated by hegemonic discourses. In addition, it offers a conceptual roadmap to addressing these challenges within safe shared spaces for critical reflection, which in turn may enable the sustainable development of critical practice. We are hopeful that these understandings will connect the field of critical reflection more firmly to the actual challenges faced by social workers when they encounter critical rationality and seek to translate it into critical professional practice. We believe that this contribution reveals critical reflection as a practical and useful tool for the development of sustainable critical social work.

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Notes

1. The planning, intervention, and evaluation committees are the main authorities, alongside the courts, involved in child protection decision making in Israel (IMSSSA, 2014).
2. The Caucasian Jews immigrated to Israel from the Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union, where they were called 'Mountain Jews' (Krumer-Nevo and Malka, 2012).

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