

Critical thinking skills for your social work degree.

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2020

HENDERSON, L. 2020. Critical thinking skills for your social work degree. *Journal of social work*, 20(5), pages 696-697. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017320939368>. © The Author(s) 2020.

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Jane Bottomley, Patricia Cartney and Steven Prymachuk, *Critical thinking skills for your social work degree*. St. Albans: Critical Publishing, 2019; 83 pp., ISBN 9781912508655, £14.99 (pbk)

Reviewed by: Lauren Henderson, Robert Gordon University, Scotland

This book is one of four key titles in a new series of study skills texts for social work students. The material contained in the book focuses on the foundations of critical thinking, reflective practice, and critical reading and writing. A link is made to the British Association of Social Workers' [BASW] Professional Capabilities Framework, highlighting this as a key professional document in relation to critical thinking, in social work education and practice. The book is aimed at all students and social workers in training, including international students. The book is intended to guide students towards an understanding of the meaning of 'critical thinking' and how to apply this to practice. Reflective practice is viewed as central to this process, with the aim of supporting students to find, what the authors refer to as, their 'own voice'.

The use of case studies and related questions within the text offer a practical and relatable means of encouraging students to consider the various sources of the information at hand, when assessing practice and any potential for misrepresentation of facts.

The use of Hegel's (1817) dialectic is well placed in illustrating the development of knowledge throughout an undergraduate's academic career. This, however, appears to be the sole 'Advanced Skills' section within the text, contrary to what is stated in the introduction. In relation to social work students at a postgraduate level, more reference might have been made to the impact of having less formal practice learning experience on a student's ability to think critically and to practice reflectively.

One strength of the text lies in the accessible writing style and overall organisation of the material, with learning outcomes made clear at the start of each chapter. The provision of tasks throughout is a sound means of encouraging students to focus on their critical analysis, understanding and reflective skills as they work their way through the book. It is positive that the basis of the tasks often directly relates to existing literature. Extending this focus to Schön's (1987) work on reflective practice, which the authors rightly refer to as 'a seminal text in education circles', may have enhanced the material.

One of the appendices offers verb forms in the English language, which may be particularly relevant to international students undertaking study in a second language.

Another strength of the title is perhaps its accessibility to both national and international readers, in that critical thinking skills are globally relevant and necessary to those involved in direct social work practice, or indeed in education.

Within the introduction, it is erroneously stated that the Health and Care Professions Council are the regulatory body for the social work profession. This presents a somewhat Anglocentric viewpoint, in that Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, in fact, each have their own regulatory bodies.

However, this book might be of particular value to students who find it challenging to develop their skills beyond mere observation and the basic analysis of observation. Students are offered the opportunity to work through the book in a systematic manner, so increasing their ability to critically analyse and understand what they are presented with. The underpinning link between reflective practice and critical thinking is explicit and successfully illustrated.