

Part 1

Becoming a Social Worker in Training



1

Social Work in the UK

Introduction

1.1	A Short History of Social Work	4
1.1.1	The Origins of Social Work	4
1.1.2	The Welfare State	5
1.1.3	Into the New Millennium	7
1.2	Surveying the Contemporary Landscape	7
1.2.1	The Organisation of Social Work	7
1.2.2	Social Workers and Educators	8
1.2.3	Service Users and Carers	10
1.3	Official Requirements for Education and Practice	12
1.4	The Nature of Professional Education	15
	Points to Remember and Questions to Ponder	17
	Further Reading and Resources	17

Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to social work in the UK. We start by considering the history of the profession, which emerged from diverse origins in the nineteenth century, and then became part of a centralised welfare state apparatus in the twentieth century. We will then survey the contemporary landscape to show that social work in the twenty-first century is embedded in diverse organisations, and core terminology around sectors, staff and service users will be clarified. In section 1.3 the official knowledge, skills and values requirements for social work will be summarised

in the text and in tables. The final section explains some of the debates which have been reshaping professional education – this will help to prepare you for your role as adult learners.

1.1 A Short History of Social Work

The history of social work in the UK is characterised by its commitment to the most vulnerable people in society and by the competing agendas for social care, social control and social change which come into play when we ask: why do people fall by the wayside and how can we help them?

1.1.1 The Origins of Social Work

Social work emerged as one of the by-products of the modern capitalist economy. The Industrial Revolution resulted in a mass migration to cities for work and ruptured many family and community bonds, so that when people became unemployed as a result of economic crises or disability they could become isolated, impoverished and homeless. Three types of responses to these predicaments can be identified, each with its own distinctive ideological bias.

First, the Poor Law refers to the institutions established by local government officials to contain those who were unable to fend for themselves in the capitalist economy. These included workhouses for able-bodied people who were homeless and jobless; alms houses for elderly and disabled people who were unable to work; houses of correction for delinquent youths; and orphanages for children (Payne, 2005a). The Poor Law was initiated in 1601 but as the numbers of vulnerable citizens grew century by century, it developed a more punitive ethos to deter people from entering the system. It reflected a conservative ideology insofar as local politicians sought to conserve the status quo whilst providing a safety net to care for and contain the socially excluded. The capitalist ideal was that of self-sufficiency whereby everyone should provide for themselves and their family, but the capitalist system required social order, and hence the containment of people who might otherwise be at liberty to disrupt this social order by vagrancy, criminality or insurrection. So the agenda for social care was allied to the agenda for social control (Mooney, 1998).

Second, a plethora of charities were established by Christian philanthropists in the late nineteenth century. They specialised in one-to-one case-work with people who had fallen by the wayside on account of problems ranging from alcohol dependence to prostitution, although this was often

supplemented by practical handouts in the form of food, blankets and other necessities of life. Most philanthropists assumed that such problems were rooted in defects in the character of individuals rather than defects in the constitution of society. Consequently, casework was governed by a conservative morality, with people being exhorted to change their lifestyles in the direction of continence and chastity (Woodroffe, 1961). But some philanthropists became critical of the wider society, leading them towards a more radical conception of social problems. For example, the NSPCC was known for its criticism of gender ideologies which vaunted male superiority. NSPCC officers uncovered domestic violence against women, physical abuse of children within families and sexual abuse of teenagers on the streets, most of which was perpetrated by men (Corby, 2005).

Third, a settlement movement developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some wealthy individuals purchased land and property in inner-city areas where they could house homeless families, and where they offered crèches for children and day centres for elderly and disabled people. This marked the beginning of community work as they recognised the value of building supportive communities around people rather than confining them to harsh institutions or offering moral tutelage alongside charitable handouts (Popple, 1995). Several of the benefactors and student volunteers were active in the socialist and feminist movements where they campaigned for social justice and gender equality (Auchmuty, 1989). Here, the agenda for social care is allied to the agenda for social change. In other words, it is not enough to provide a safety net if society continues to spawn the same problems, so radical social workers campaign for changes in social structures and cultures (Langan and Lee, 1989; Stepney and Popple, 2008).

1.1.2 The Welfare State

In the early twentieth century, social work became a recognisable profession with its own training programmes, and several specialist branches flourished within the profession (Payne, 2005a). In the mid-twentieth century, social services became one arm of the welfare state which was set up within the wider project of reconstructing the nation after the Second World War (Lewis, 1998). Initially, it was assumed that the need for social work would be minimal as a result of new institutions and policies designed to provide education, health care, employment and social security for all. In fact, the need for social services continued to grow so that by the 1970s there was a large bureaucratic apparatus to deal with social problems – Social Services Departments in England and Wales; Social Work Departments in Scotland; and Health and Social Services Boards in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, demand for services continued to be greater than supply. Why was this?

At least three answers can be offered. First, the capitalist economy itself generates massive inequalities of income, wealth and life chances along with spiralling forms of social exclusion, so that at any one time a significant proportion of the population may need additional support (Pierson, 2002). Second, modernity is characterised by perpetual change which brings as many difficulties as it resolves. For example, improvements in health and medicine have brought about increased longevity, but many elderly people living with chronic disease or disability now require long-term specialist care (Bernard and Scharf, 2007). Third, evolution in human psychology tends to lag behind evolution in technology, so that age-old problems such as child abuse can be reproduced across all classes even when material conditions improve (Miller, 1987).

In the late twentieth century, social work was challenged on all fronts. Some were welcome challenges, notably the movement to deinstitutionalise mentally ill and mentally handicapped people and to rehabilitate them within supervised community settings (cf. Goffman, 1961; Jay Committee, 1979). Some challenges were greeted with ambivalence. In child care, the pendulum swung between prevention and protection as child abuse tragedies unfolded (Parton, 1991) and in adult care, social workers became care managers charged with securing the best value-for-money services within new welfare markets (Payne, 1995). But resource cutbacks compromised the chances of effectively implementing any reforms; instead a new managerialism developed to pressurise staff into delivering 'more for less' (Audit Commission, 1995). Economic cutbacks can reflect a lack of political commitment to social work and social problems; New Right governments objected to the 'nanny state' and preached the virtues of self-sufficiency (Clarke et al., 1987). It is not surprising that during this period social work underwent a further radicalisation in its fight for truth, justice and even its own survival as a social profession. This is encapsulated in its adherence to anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1997, 2002) and its engagement with critical social movements (Humphrey, 2002). Social workers spend most of their working lives with citizens who are structurally and culturally excluded from mainstream society which makes them critical of the political economy as well as ideologies rooted in individualism. The profession also attracts people from subordinated groups, including disabled people, black and minority ethnic people, lesbians and gay men, who have suffered discrimination. So for many social workers anti-oppressive practice reflects their personal experiences and political convictions as well as their professional values.

1.1.3 Into the New Millennium

The New Labour governments which took us into the new millennium were supportive of social work in principle but sought to modernise it in practice; politicians invested money into the profession and into a range of organisations charged with developing and monitoring ‘best practice’ (cf. DH, 1998; Humphrey, 2003). Social work has been the subject of a wide-ranging review as key stakeholders try to work out the balance between prevention and intervention and to ensure that adequate staff and services are in place to meet the needs of future generations (Scottish Executive, 2006; Blewett et al., 2007; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). One of the most important ideological shifts pertains to the recognition of service users and their user-led organisations as key stakeholders in the future development of social work – as Peter Beresford points out, without this, anti-oppressive practice is more of a rhetorical word than a living reality (Beresford, 2000, 2007).

Beyond this, the effects of globalisation have filtered through to social work in the UK. Students from overseas may come to UK universities to study social work and there are international exchanges so that some students may undertake placements in other countries (Dominelli and Bernard, 2003). Qualified social workers may migrate to other countries for work, although they usually need additional training to learn the language and the law (Healy, 2001). It is clear from research into international social work that although there is a family resemblance between the forms taken by social work, there is also variation in the ways it has been constructed (cf. Payne, 2005a; Lawrence et al., 2009). For example, in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America, social work is still closely linked to indigenous religious and spiritual traditions, but in the UK it has become part of a secular and scientific modernity. Students and practitioners need to be mindful of such matters, given that the UK is home to many minority ethnic communities as well as asylum seekers and refugees from across the globe.

1.2 Surveying the Contemporary Landscape

Familiarity with the organisation of social work is essential for students on placement, and familiarity with core terminology will equip students to think, talk and write about social work more clearly.

1.2.1 The Organisation of Social Work

In the UK, social workers and social care workers are employed in two broad types of settings known as ‘the statutory sector’ and ‘the independent

sector'. The statutory sector refers to organisations which have been established by statute (i.e. by Act of Parliament) to deliver services to citizens, and it includes central government, local government, the legal system, health care and education. Devolution in the UK during the 1990s – whereby each of the four countries of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland acquired its own distinct government – means that there is increasing scope for intercountry variation in the organisation of social services. In Northern Ireland, there is an integration of health and social work in Health and Social Care Trusts which cater for adults and children and operate independently of the local government apparatus. Elsewhere, statutory social work is largely based in local government, although some social workers in the statutory sector are employed in multi-professional teams outside of local government – for example, in courts or hospitals. Local government in Scotland is the home to Social Work Departments which deal with children, adults and offenders; Welsh local authorities also combine adult and child care services. There is an institutional segregation between statutory services for children and adults in England. Child care social work is based in Children's Services Authorities which combine education and social work, whilst multi-professional practice more generally has been consolidated by the establishment of Children's Trusts and Local Safeguarding Children Boards (DfES, 2004; HM Government, 2007a, 2010). Adult care social work is based in another branch of local government and is undergoing reforms with a view to creating a new National Care Service and a more robust adult protection apparatus (HM Government, 2007b, 2009a; DH, 2009).

The independent sector consists of voluntary agencies and private businesses. Voluntary agencies are registered charities ranging from nationwide institutions such as Mind and Age UK to local projects devoted to meeting the specialist needs of people who may fall through the gaps of statutory services, such as women suffering domestic violence and minority ethnic families. Private businesses are run on a for-profit basis, and most are large-scale operations supplying domiciliary care services and residential care homes to elderly and disabled people (Harris and Rochester, 2001). It should be noted that the statutory and independent sectors are increasingly interdependent since the statutory sector contracts out significant amounts of work to the independent sector, which then becomes more dependent upon this funding stream for its own financial viability.

1.2.2 Social Workers and Educators

The terms 'social work' and 'social care work' are sometimes used interchangeably, but it is important that students understand the difference

between them. Social care is a general term which covers all the personal and social services provided to people in need, whilst social work is the specialist professional element of social care which has distinct statutory functions attached to it, including functions of social control in relation to people who may pose risks to themselves or others. Social care workers may have a variety of vocational qualifications secured through on-the-job training, but they are not qualified as social workers; they tend to work in residential, day care and domiciliary settings where they provide hands-on personal care, but they will not be charged with decision-making responsibilities around care planning. The term 'social worker' is a protected title under the law and it is a criminal offence for anyone who does not possess a social work degree and who is not registered as a qualified social worker to appropriate this title. Social workers are licensed to practise social work in terms of carrying out statutory roles, and they can expect to take on supervisory responsibilities vis-à-vis social care workers.

It is strange but true that qualified social workers who are employed to undertake social work tasks do not necessarily have the term 'social worker' in their actual job title. In England social workers in community care teams typically occupy the position of care managers, whilst those in Youth Offending Teams have the official title of youth justice workers. This reflects the multi-professional world of welfare insofar as an increasing number of posts are open to any professional who can offer the requisite skills and knowledge, so that occupational therapists are eligible to apply for care management posts and probation officers can occupy youth justice posts. Nevertheless, there are many posts which are reserved for qualified social workers, particularly in statutory child care teams, on account of the specialist legal functions attached to social work. Official job titles can also vary across the UK – in Scotland most social workers do have the official job title of 'social worker'.

Social work education is a general term which covers both the university-based curriculum and the community-based practicum. University educators may be called lecturers, academic tutors or supervisors – every student is allocated their own personal supervisor as soon as they register on a programme – and when you embark upon placements you will encounter another array of terms. Practice education encompasses within it both practice teaching and practice learning, and your practice teacher may also be called a supervisor, a practice learning assessor or a practice educator. Students become familiar with this linguistic kaleidoscope quite quickly, but it is helpful if you are aware of subtle and significant differences in the meanings of these terms. 'Practice teacher' has been the most prevalent term to date in social work education and this is reflected in this textbook. The term 'supervisor' is the most prevalent term in social care

and social work organisations insofar as all social workers, social care workers, other staff and students will have regular supervision from their line manager. In the case of students, they have supervision from their practice teacher, and they may also have supervision from a line manager in the agency if the practice teacher is not based in the agency.

The terminology associated with practice education underwent a significant shift when the new degree programmes were established across the UK from 2003 onwards. In the new official language students became 'social workers in training', practice teachers became 'practice learning assessors' and placements became 'practice learning opportunities'. Essentially, the government was keen to emphasise students' responsibilities as adult learners, practice teachers' responsibilities for assessing competence and managers' responsibilities to provide a learning environment for professionals-in-the-making rather than to treat students as a ready source of cheap labour for over-stretched organisations (Humphrey, 2006). Whatever the merits of these principles, the new terminology was quite cumbersome. On the one hand, a set of acronyms arose to enable people to say and write one word rather than three or four, i.e. SWIT, PLA and PLO. On the other hand, the traditional language of students, practice teachers and placements continued to be used alongside the new language. The reforms to social work education in England from 2010 onwards will entrain another linguistic shift, albeit a much simpler one which entails reverting to the terms 'student' and 'placement' whilst ushering in the new term of 'practice educator' (SWTE, 2009). But for the foreseeable future there is likely to be a coexistence of diverse terms.

1.2.3 Service Users and Carers

Other terms which can also cause confusion for students are the terms applied to the people we work with, who may be called 'citizens', 'clients', 'consumers', 'customers', 'service users' or 'carers'. The welfare state was designed to cater to the needs of all citizens, but social workers only work with a fraction of citizens, usually the marginalised citizens who require specialist care or control, and who may include non-citizens such as asylum seekers. For most of the twentieth century, social workers referred to the people on their caseloads as 'clients', but this term came under criticism since it suggested that there could be a certain dependency or inferiority attached to being a client of social work (cf. Howe, 1993; Clarke, 1997). It is noteworthy that this criticism was specific to social work (i.e. it was not applied to clients in the private sector) and that it was specific to the UK (i.e. 'client' is the most prevalent term in international social work). In the 1980s, the

New Right government championed the terms ‘consumers’ and ‘customers’ as part of their quest to increase choice in the marketplace of health and social care, but this term was also controversial insofar as many of the people seen by social workers have few resources and therefore few choices in their lives, and some will be involuntary clients detained under mental health or criminal justice law (Clarke, 1997). By the 1990s, ‘service users’ became the most prevalent term in policy documents, although it does not command universal consensus. It is not only that there has been an unfortunate tendency to abbreviate this to ‘user’ which has more negative connotations, but also that there are some people who believe that they need services only to be refused them, and there are other people who regard themselves as ‘survivors’ of the system rather than users of the service. This is indeed why service users created their own self-organised groups linked to critical social movements to campaign for welfare reforms (cf. Rogers and Pilgrim, 1991; Beresford and Campbell, 1994). A distinct carers’ movement also emerged, claiming that carers needed services and recognition in their own right, giving birth to the popular phrase ‘service users and carers’ (Blythway and Johnson, 1998). By the twenty-first century, service user groups along with government regulators were referring to service users as ‘experts by experience’ who should contribute to social work education, research and policy making (Levin, 2004). This linguistic shift has not resolved all the conundrums since experience in itself is not always converted into expertise, and since the expertise of some people who come to the attention of social workers (notably child sex offenders) is of dubious value (McLaughlin, 2009).

There are two main lessons here for students. The first is that we need to be careful in our use of language since terms can harbour more or less accuracy and adequacy, and terms have their own history which can entrain a set of positive or negative associations for different audiences. You are free to draw upon the range of linguistic terms in speech and writing, but you should select the most appropriate term for each context. The second lesson is that this reconstruction of language reflects both the embeddedness of the profession in a political arena and its ongoing reconstruction. Many stakeholders want to have their say on social work – politicians, practitioners, service users and carers, journalists and researchers – and the perspectives of these stakeholders can shift over time, as can the balance of power between them. Policy and practice is then reconstructed in line with the prevailing conception of what social work is all about, where social workers have gone wrong in the past, and what priorities they should have in the future. In practical terms, this means that the ways in which we do social work at the start of our careers may be quite different to the ways in which we do

social work at the end of our careers, so you need to be prepared for lifelong learning. In academic terms, it means that social constructionism is the most appropriate theoretical approach to make sense of social work in society (cf. Symonds and Kelly, 1998; Burr, 2003; Garrett, 2003).

1.3 Official Requirements for Education and Practice

Social work in the UK underwent a major transformation at the start of the twenty-first century so that there is now a prescribed curriculum for students, an official set of roles to be discharged by trainees and practitioners and a mandatory code of practice, along with regulatory bodies which inspect the standards of social work education and practice on a regular basis (Humphrey, 2006). In 2003–04, a variety of new degree programmes were rolled out across the UK, i.e. undergraduate students may embark upon a BA (Bachelor of Arts) or BSc (Bachelor of Science) in Social Work whilst post-graduate students can study the equivalent programmes at Master's level. The Department of Health (2002a) specified at the outset that academic and practical learning should be of equal weight in these programmes, and the importance of practical skills training has been reinforced in the aftermath of child protection inquiries in England (Laming, 2009).

Table 1.1 illustrates the knowledge base of social work covered in the curriculum at universities. At first sight, it will appear daunting, since student social workers have to draw upon several disciplines when other students may only be studying one discipline for the entirety of their degree. But social work is necessarily multi-disciplinary, as are other caring professions such as nursing and medicine. The main academic disciplines underpinning social work are law, policy, sociology and psychology, but remember that you do not need to know any of these disciplines inside-out; your task is to select relevant aspects and apply them to social work, and there are textbooks specifically designed for this (e.g. Nicolson et al., 2006; Llewellyn et al., 2008; Brammer, 2010). There are also professional knowledges around interventions, ethics, organisations and research; some of these are specific to social work, whilst others borrow from other caring professions.

The official job description for social workers is contained in the six Key Roles which make up the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. A summary of these Key Roles is provided in Table 1.2, although students in Scotland will find that these Key Roles appear in a different numerical order (SSSC, 2003). The Key Roles revolve around assessments, interventions, partnership working, risk management, agency accountability and professional competence. Each Key Role is subdivided into Units of Practice, and during placements in the community students have to

TABLE 1A *The Knowledge Base of Social Work*

Social workers need to draw from the following sets of knowledges:

- 1 Law – civil laws governing service provision, statutory interventions, human rights and data protection; criminal laws around harm and harassment.
- 2 Policy – social care, health, education, criminal justice, housing and welfare benefits are all relevant areas of social policy.
- 3 Sociology – social structures generating inequality and poverty; plus cultures in communities which may contribute to empowerment or oppression.
- 4 Psychology – human development across the lifespan including disabilities; plus identities and relationships formed in families and communities.
- 5 Interventions – models of the social work process and methods of working with individuals and groups in order to carry out the Key Roles.
- 6 Ethics – Codes of Practice as prescribed by regulatory bodies, supplemented by the core concepts of moral philosophy such as ‘rights’ and ‘duties’.
- 7 Organisations – internal processes within organisations around management; plus interagency working and the costing and commissioning of services.
- 8 Research – basic understanding of the diverse methods used by researchers, as well as key research findings, as the foundation for evidence-based practice.

Sources: TOPSS (2002); CCW (2003a); NISCC (2003a); SSSC (2003)

TABLE 1B *National Occupational Standards for Social Work*

Key Role 1 – Assessments. Work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities (‘I-F-C-G-C’) to assess their needs and circumstances.

Unit 1: Prepare for social work contact.

Unit 2: Work with I-F-C-G-C to help them make informed decisions.

Unit 3: Assess needs and options in order to recommend a course of action.

Key Role 2 – Interventions. Plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities and other professionals.

Unit 4: Respond to crisis situations.

Unit 5: Interact with I-F-C-G-C to achieve change and improve life chances.

Unit 6: Implement and evaluate plans with service users, carers and other professionals.

Unit 7: Support the development of networks to meet assessed needs.

Unit 8: Work with groups to promote individual growth and independence.

Unit 9: Address behaviour which presents risks.

Key Role 3 – Partnership Working. Support people to represent their needs, views and circumstances.

Unit 10: Advocate with and on behalf of individuals, families, carers and groups.

Unit 11: Participate in decision-making forums with other professionals.

Key Role 4 – Risk Management. Assess and manage risks to individuals, families, carers, groups and communities as well as self and colleagues.

Unit 12: Assess, minimise and manage risks to I-F-C-G-C.

Unit 13: Assess, minimise and manage risks to self and colleagues.

(Continued)

TABLE 1B (Continued)

Key Role 5 – Agency Accountability. Manage and be accountable for your own social work practice within the organisation, with supervision and support.

Unit 14: Manage and be accountable for your own work.

Unit 15: Contribute to the management of resources and services.

Unit 16: Manage, present and share records and reports.

Unit 17: Work within multi-professional and multi-agency systems.

Key Role 6 – Professional Competence. Demonstrate professional competence in social work practice.

Unit 18: Research, evaluate and utilise current knowledge of best practice.

Unit 19: Work within agreed standards of social work practice.

Unit 20: Manage complex ethical issues, dilemmas and conflicts.

Unit 21: Contribute to the promotion of best social work practice.

Sources: TOPSS (2002); CCW (2003a); NISCC (2003a); SSSC (2003)

demonstrate competence in each of the 21 Units in order to pass the Key Roles. This may sound a tall order, especially when we realise that these Key Roles apply to qualified practitioners and managers as much as students, but students are only required to master these Key Roles in the sense of achieving the basic competence of a newly qualified social worker, and you have the rest of your careers to consolidate this mastery.

Students are obliged to register with the relevant regulatory body, i.e. General Social Care Council in England (GSCC), Care Council for Wales (CCW), Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) or Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Registration in turn requires compliance with the Code of Practice for Social Care Workers which has six positive standards as outlined in Table 1C. The Code makes it clear that we should promote independence where possible, whilst being prepared to intervene to protect people from harm where necessary. It is worth reading the small print which makes reference to a number of prohibited behaviours such as embarking upon personal relationships with service users – this can result in deregistration (GSCC, 2002a). It is a generic code of conduct which applies to all social care workers as well as student social workers, qualified social workers and social work managers. It is supplemented by a Code of Practice for Employers who have to ensure that their policies and procedures nurture the kind of environment in which staff can operate effectively (GSCC, 2002b).

Readers should expect further changes to social work education, particularly in England where a National Reform Programme has been established as a result of recommendations from the Social Work Task Force. This ten-year programme is charged with delivering improvements in

TABLE 1C *Code of Practice for Social Care Workers*

Social workers, students and social care workers must adhere to these standards:

- 1 Protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers.
 - 2 Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.
 - 3 Promote the independence of service users whilst protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm.
 - 4 Respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.
 - 5 Uphold public trust and confidence in social care services.
 - 6 Be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.
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Sources: GSCC (2002a); NISCC (2002); CCW (2003b); SSSC (2005)

academic and practice education, and overseeing changes in several areas ranging from the selection of students to the support and assessment of new graduates (SWTF, 2009).

1.4 The Nature of Professional Education

During the past quarter-century, there has been a revolution in our understanding of professional education which has reshaped teaching and learning, and familiarity with the three core debates will help students to engage more effectively with their professional programmes. The first debate is an educational one which can be dubbed ‘pedagogy versus andragogy’. Traditionally, education was deemed to be ‘pedagogy’, a term applied to the guidance of children, with the implication that pupils arrived in classrooms as ‘empty vessels’ to be filled up with knowledge transmitted by their teachers. Malcolm Knowles (1990) argued that this was inappropriate in relation to adult learners who chose to enter higher education in order to fulfil their own life goals and who bring vast amounts of prior life experience with them, and he coined the term ‘andragogy’ for adult teaching and learning. Although the most common term for social work education is ‘professional pedagogy’, this refers to ‘the education of adults for professional life’ and it is rooted in the principles of modern andragogy rather than those of traditional pedagogy. It is now widely accepted that educators must engage with the experiences and conceptions which adult learners bring from previous socialisation and education, since otherwise they can disengage from the curriculum whenever it

appears to be irrelevant to them or in conflict with their previous world views (Rogers, 2002). By the same token, it is incumbent upon students to sift through their own life experiences and belief systems so that they can interrogate the knowledge they already hold within them, building upon the strongest foundations and discarding some of the shaky materials.

The second debate is a professional one which revolves around 'science versus art'. Traditionally, the professions were taught in universities on the assumption that students had to acquire scientific knowledge from experts before applying this in practice settings, so their practice teachers would simply be checking that they had applied the correct theory or research in tandem with the correct organisational rules when dealing with any given situation. Donald Schön (1987) overturned this scientific paradigm by pointing out that grassroots problems are always characterised by complexity and uncertainty so that it is rare for a particular theory or piece of research to provide a clear-cut answer to any given problem. He showed that professionals often need to develop new hypotheses to make sense of the predicament of any given individual or family, and to improvise or innovate in order to find the best-fitting solution to a unique problem. This ushers in an artistic paradigm of professional education and practice which is reflected in the recognition that skills training is just as important as acquiring new knowledge (Trevithick, 2005). It also implies that students and practitioners need to draw upon diverse skill and knowledge sources, including those derived from prior life experience which may be stored in the body-mind as intuitive or cultural ways of knowing, or as practical or kinaesthetic ways of doing (Higgs and Titchen, 2001). Ideally, 'practice wisdom' emerges from the synthesis of such diverse ways of knowing and doing.

The third debate is a political one which could be formulated as the question: 'whose side are you on?' In modern welfare states, most caring professionals are employed by a branch of the state to undertake work on terms and conditions specified by the government, and whilst it is imperative that social workers remain law-abiding citizens, it is also necessary for them to become critically reflective practitioners in relation to government policies and employing organisations. The most extreme scenario occurred in Nazi Germany when social workers, teachers and doctors followed the policies of the National Socialist government without question, helping to send Jews, gypsies and disabled people to concentration camps and gas chambers (Bauman, 1989). Although such extreme abuses are unknown in the UK, violations of human rights sanctioned by the government are not unknown, as testified by the plight of asylum

seekers (Hayes and Humphries, 2004), and developing the capacity for critical reflection is central to social work education (QAA, 2008). So even if we are employed by the state, we still need to be on the side of our service users and carers, and this is the meaning of enabling and empowering practice. It is also one of the reasons why the involvement of service users and carers in the education of student social workers is so vital (Levin, 2004).

In short, this revolution means that educators need to respect what students bring to classrooms and placements, just as students need to respect the life experience of service users and carers, so that we all learn to become active contributors to our own development rather than passive recipients of whatever is handed out to us by authority figures.

Points to Remember and Questions to Ponder

- The history of social work in section 1.1 showed that it is a socially constructed response to social problems, and therefore varies across cultures and historical eras, although it will also be influenced by the identities and politics of social workers themselves. How might your own identity, politics, class and country of origin affect your approach to social work?
- Section 1.2 showed how language, policy and practice continue to be reconstructed. How do you feel about working in such complex, contentious and changing territories?
- The tables presented in section 1.3 summarised the official requirements for education and practice and will need to be revisited on a regular basis.
- This chapter also covered debates in professional education. How might you learn and be taught differently as adults in higher education compared to your time in compulsory schooling? Why is it important for service users and carers to contribute to your training?

Further Reading and Resources

For a detailed account of the development of social work in the UK and other countries, see: Payne, M. (2005) *The Origins of Social Work: Continuity and Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan.

The Heatherbank Museum of Social Work is based at the Glasgow Caledonian University. If you are unable to visit in person, there is an informative website: www.lib.gcal.ac.uk/heatherbank/index.html

Up-to-date information on social work degree programmes can be found on the websites of regulatory councils. The National Occupational Standards and Codes of Practice are virtually identical across the UK, but there are a few noteworthy intercountry variations:

www.gsc.org.uk The General Social Care Council (GSCC) based in London regulates social work education in England.

www.ccwales.org.uk The Care Council for Wales (CCW) based in Cardiff regulates social work education in Wales. The promotion of the Welsh language post-devolution means that some programmes and practice settings are bilingual.

www.sssc.uk.com The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) based in Dundee regulates social work education in Scotland. Its curriculum and practicum include a specific requirement that all students should demonstrate 'key capabilities in child care and protection'.

www.niscc.info The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) based in Belfast regulates social work education in Northern Ireland. Social work degree programmes here also provide the training for probation officers and education welfare officers.

Social Work Education is the key journal for articles on social work education in the UK.