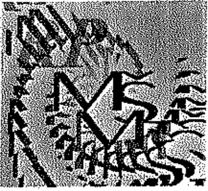


Tato kniha byla zakoupena
z Rozvojových projektů
Mgr. et Mgr. Rudolfa Dvořák

WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK?

Malcolm Payne

Consultant editor: Jo Campling

Revised Second Edition

Ústřední knihovna FSS MU Brno

4240740991

I1-920

First published in 1996 by Venture Press, 16 Kent Street, Birmingham, B5 6RD

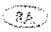
This revised second edition published in Great Britain in July 2006 by

The Policy Press
University of Bristol
Fourth Floor
Beacon House
Queen's Road
Bristol BS8 1QU
UK

Tel +44 (0)117 331 4054
Fax +44 (0)117 331 4093
e-mail tpp-info@bristol.ac.uk
www.policypress.org.uk

REVIZE 2010

I1-920
MASARYKOVA UNIVERZITA V BRNĚ
Fakulta sociálních studií
Joštova 10
602 00 BRNO



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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested.

ISBN-10 1 86134 704 9 paperback
ISBN-13 978 1 86134 704 6 paperback
ISBN-10 1 86134 705 7 hardcover
ISBN-13 978 1 86134 705 3 hardcover

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Cover design by Qube Design Associates, Bristol.
Front cover: photograph supplied by kind permission of Getty Images.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin.

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Preface and acknowledgements

The first edition of this book was written for the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and was published by their publishing company, Venture Press, in 1996. I am grateful to Sally Arkley, the BASW publisher at the time, for her interest and support in the project, and to staff at BASW and The Policy Press for their help. I am also grateful to Barbara Monroe, the Chief Executive of St Christopher's Hospice, for facilitating the work of rewriting.

Although this second edition takes a similar (social construction) approach to the issues raised by examining the nature of social work, it is completely rewritten and extensively updated, with new case studies in many chapters. Much of the development of the book has arisen because of the teaching on this topic that I have done in many countries across the world and to courses and conferences in the UK. The analysis of the discourse among three views of social work is the same, but I have updated and developed the argument and provided more extensive evidence of the sources from which the argument is drawn. The discussion of welfare regimes as a way of analysing international variation in the organisation of social work is new, and the role of social work is more clearly placed within the context of multiprofessional services and the development of social care in the British context. Chapter Four on social work values and much of the argument in the conclusion (Chapter Nine) are completely renewed, looking forward into the 21st century.

The argument of this book connects with my books *Modern Social Work Theory* (3rd edn, 2005a) and *The Origins of Social Work: Continuity and Change* (2005c), both published by Palgrave Macmillan. Collectively, they examine the nature of social work by looking at theory that prescribes practice (*Modern Social Work Theory*), historical and value origins of the current state of social work (*The Origins of Social Work*) and, in this book, debate about the nature of social work. I gratefully acknowledge that this understanding of the interaction of the works, which I now make explicit in them, arose from discussion with Steven Shardlow. Material about the three views of social work in Chapters One and Two is written to connect and be consistent with *Modern Social Work Theory*, so readers familiar with both will find a few paragraphs that start from the three views in a similar way; this book provides a much more extensive analysis. Chapter Five is based on material first published in 'Managerialism and state social work in

Britain' by my late colleague, Steve Morgan, and myself, commissioned and published by the *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, 36(1/2): 27–44. I am grateful for permission to adapt this material to the present use. I also acknowledge the influential contribution of my collaborator in various other work on international aspects of social work, Gurid Aga Askeland.

Notes on the author

Malcolm Payne is Director, Psycho-social and Spiritual Care, St Christopher's Hospice, where he is responsible for creative and complementary therapies, day care, mental health, social work and spiritual care. He has broad experience of social work, having worked in probation, social work, particularly with mentally ill people, and management in social services departments. He was Chief Executive of a large city council for voluntary service, where he worked on community development and projects to respond to unemployment, and Development and Policy Director for a national mental health organisation, where he worked on new housing and care projects across England. He has held various academic posts, and has acted as a consultant in teamwork and team development in local government, health and social care organisations. He was a member of the Wagner Committee (the Independent Review of Residential Care, 1988).

He was Head of Applied Community Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, for many years, during which he was chair for four years of the Association of Professors of Social Work and was also involved in child and mental health service advocacy projects and research. Now Emeritus Professor there, he is also Honorary Professor, Kingston University/St George's Medical School, and docent in social work at the University of Helsinki, Finland. He has been extensively involved in international social work, leading and working on projects to develop social work and social policy in Russia, China and Eastern Europe. He has lectured and presented papers all over the world on social work education, theory and practice, teamwork and palliative care. Together with the Norwegian social work academic, Gurid Aga Askeland, and others, he has published a number of articles about the impact of globalisation and postmodern ideas on social work.

His main publications among 10 books and more than 250 shorter works, published in 13 languages, are: *Modern Social Work Theory* (3rd edn, Palgrave Macmillan 2005a), *Social Work: Continuity and Change* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); *Teamwork in Multiprofessional Care* (Palgrave 2000); and *Social Work and Community Care* (Palgrave, 1995). He co-edited a widely used series of social work texts on critical social work practice with Robert Adams and Lena Dominelli. Recently, together with colleagues at St Christopher's Hospice, he has been researching and publishing about social work, welfare rights, day care and other aspects of palliative care services.

His work demonstrates a commitment to the value of social work in society, and a strong emphasis on interpreting social work values and ideas in a way that makes sense to and is useful to practitioners. He uses ideas about social construction in his work that permit social work practice to be flexible in responding to the values, wishes and needs of the people that social workers serve. For him, social work has to be seen and practised within an understanding of its organisational and social contexts, and must combat inequalities in society that mean that many people cannot live fulfilling and satisfying lives.

ONE

Introduction: the social work discourse

Social work makes a claim. It is this: that social improvement can be achieved by interpersonal influence and action, that social change can be harnessed to individual personal development and that carrying out these two activities together should be a profession. Social workers seek social betterment, but mostly they do it by helping individuals, families and small social groups as part of their professional work. Societies change, and people mostly have small concern for others who struggle with how that society is organised, but social work seeks to adapt social movement and change so that it is more manageable by, and more help to, individuals, particularly those who are poor and disadvantaged.

No other professional group makes this claim: doctors, teachers, nurses, psychologists and counsellors focus on their patient, student or client's concerns and interests. To them, social order and social change is the context, and they help people within that context. Politicians, economists, journalists, planners and campaigners seek beneficial social change, but do not seek to work with individuals, families and groups to connect change and the person. They expect people to respond rationally and personally to meet their needs and achieve their desires, responding to social forces. Social work's claim is unique, and many people think it is impossible to make that connection, or disagree with trying to make it.

People disagree about what social work is (Asquith et al, 2005), and they are unclear about it. Sometimes this is a cause for complaint. Social workers often find that they cannot describe what is involved in it, so the people they serve and work alongside can understand what they do. Politicians, civil servants and managers want a practical servant for their social change, which in any case they think should happen by people's own response to their laws and organisations. The people that social workers help want a result from social change that benefits them personally. So, social workers are in the middle of an interaction between the social and the personal that people find hard to understand and believe in.

This disagreement and uncertainty about the nature of social work

comes from its central claim to connect personal help, achieved by interpersonal relationships, with social improvement. Because social change cannot be wholly under control, because so many social and human currents swirl around in a constantly changing river of change, because individual human beings are infinitely various, the claim to connect all these things together requires flexibility in social work practice, when people and organisations want certainty of outcome. Yet most complex societies have found that social work or something like it arises within them. This is because groups in society that are responsible for broad social change need mechanisms for carrying out their social objectives, and because individuals find they cannot fit in with social movements. Therefore, social work plays its role. Even though it seems ambiguous, it has its uses. If this is so, people who become social workers and people who deal with them in various ways need to understand what social workers do and in what ways it might be useful.

This book argues that to do social work and to understand it in this constantly changing social world requires a particular approach to knowing and thinking about social work: a social construction approach. Instead of defining social work as one thing, one practice, one social system, I argue that social work constantly redefines itself as it is influenced by others, by social need and social change, and by its own internal discourse about its nature. There are continuities in social work: particular elements that operate together in a constantly changing balance to meet its central claim. To understand social work, we must explore and analyse: we must understand the continuities and analyse the social contexts that construct how they are played out in particular social or interpersonal situations.

One way of looking at this issue is to say that social work is what social workers do. This is an extreme form of the idea of social construction, that human beings 'construct' social phenomena like social work by their interactions; when they interact differently, the phenomena change. This view says that if you do social work in one way, and say: 'This is social work', so it is, in that situation. If someone claims to be doing it another way in another situation, then that is social work too. This draws attention to how any social situation offers an opportunity to be flexible and to achieve change. Human beings often have freedom to be different, and have power to construct situations in different ways. It also draws attention to 'claims-making', where what people say they are doing or even what they do 'makes a claim' about a social situation.

However, this extreme social construction view does not fit with

what many people perceive as reality. In ordinary social interactions, there is a shared agreement about reasonable and appropriate ways to behave, and there are statements of these agreements such as dictionaries, textbooks and management guidelines to help us be clear. A less extreme view of social construction sees construction as the processes by which people arrive at these shared views and they become established as the norm in particular societies. This approach comes from the work of the originators of the idea of social construction, Berger and Luckmann (1971).

This does not mean that agreed views never change. They change from situation to situation and from time to time. I can remember when, as a young man in 1966, I took the decision that was to lead me into social work. I remember gazing at the notice about the new course in social work in the darkened, pine-clad corridor of one of our new universities thinking through what I wanted to do. I decided to go for it, in that corridor. It was the start of a pathway into and through a career in social work. Through my experiences on that pathway, I have formed conceptions of myself as a social worker. Everyone arrives, similarly, at their own view: of themselves within their occupation and of the occupation they follow.

Our occupational self-concept is not entirely personal, however. When I started out in the social services world, I acquired some ready-made concepts of what social work was about from the people who introduced me to their work. My social work degree provided an intellectual and academic basis for understanding the nature of social work and of my contribution to it. Both of these have been refined and developed by experience and learning throughout my career. So, my view of social work reflects and reacts to shared conceptions. These have come from social workers and others directly involved in the social services, and broader conceptions reflected in the news and media.

My view of social work is different now, decades later, as I work with doctors, nurses, chaplains, physiotherapists and other healthcare professionals in palliative care. When I chose to go on a social work course, the first modern hospice caring for dying people, St Christopher's, where I currently work, was only just being built: it opened in 1967. So, I work in a health and social care specialty that did not exist when I started out, and my view of social work is, of course, affected by my colleagues' understanding of their own work and mine. The time in history and the social environment in which I talk about social work now is different, and so, of course, social work is different.

'Social work' in the language

Yet the words 'social work' are the same, and they offer an occupational identity, which forms a bridge between then and now. The dictionary definition of them in the Oxford English Dictionary was not substantially changed between 1926 when it was first published and 1987, the latest edition. That identity is, however, different, because the words mean something slightly different. For a while, I was a probation and aftercare officer. The word 'aftercare' had recently been added to the job title, as government policy and legislation incorporated prison aftercare into the probation service. It was later removed, as the aftercare role of probation officers became taken for granted. Later, I worked in the 'social services'; more recently I am seen as part of 'social care', or 'health and social care'. My current job title includes the words 'psycho-social care'. These word changes recognise changing identities, even though there have also been continuities in my occupational identity. Table 1.1 defines these terms and some others that occur throughout this book, to explain briefly what I mean by them, but there are alternative views of them and shifts in meaning all the time, so, like all definitions, they are useful for finding a way through this book, rather than being absolutes.

Social construction ideas give an important place to language, because human beings interact using words, so the words they use have an important place in identifying social constructions. Shifts in words often indicate shifts in meaning. Even though words may mean similar

Table 1.1: Terms referring to social work and related services

Term	Meanings
Personal social services	A British term, used in the Seebohm Report (1968), to refer to local government social work and personal welfare services, and to distinguish this provision from the social services. Usually abbreviated to 'social services' in everyday usage
Social assistance	A European term used, particularly in Germany, to distinguish the welfare and problem-solving aspects of social care from its educational and personal growth aspects
Social care 1	Social work practice in residential, day care and other group care settings (eg the Social Care Association)
Social care 2	Practice and training for practice focused on care for people, often in group care settings, as distinct from therapeutic social work designed to enhance personal growth and self-understanding

continued.../

Table 1.1: contd.../

Term	Meanings
Social care 3	A British term referring to services, including social work, provided in the field of social welfare, in analogy particularly with the term 'healthcare'. By focusing on the range of services, it emphasises that providing effective services is a crucial aspect of social work, and that social work is part of social care
Social pedagogy	A European term, deriving particularly from German philosophy, used to describe social work, particularly in group settings and in work with young people, that uses educational, artistic, creative and cultural approaches to enhance personal and social fulfilment
Social security	Services to provide income and other financial help that help people to feel secure from extreme poverty
Social services	A broad term, used in the study of social policy and in political debate. It refers to state provision designed to enhance social solidarity and stability, and is usually taken to include education, healthcare, housing, the personal social services and social security. This usage is easy to confuse with the everyday usage of 'social services' to refer to the local government personal social services
Social welfare	Services, usually provided by the state, designed to promote well-being in interpersonal, family, social and community relationships that enhance solidarity and mutuality in society
Social work	A service and practice using social and psychological sciences in interpersonal interactions with people, especially from deprived social groups and experiencing practical and emotional difficulties in social relationships. Social work balances three objectives: maintaining social order and providing social welfare services effectively, helping people attain personal fulfilment and power over their lives and stimulating social change
Welfare 1	The good fortune, health and happiness of people, families and groups
Welfare 2	Services, usually provided by the state, designed to promote welfare, particularly basic physical or material well-being
Welfare 3	Welfare services that provide welfare benefits
Welfare benefits/ rights	Welfare benefits are practical assistance, primarily financial, given, usually by the state, in accordance with rules to assist individuals or families in dealing with events that threaten their welfare; welfare rights exist where individuals or families are entitled by law or regulation to benefits

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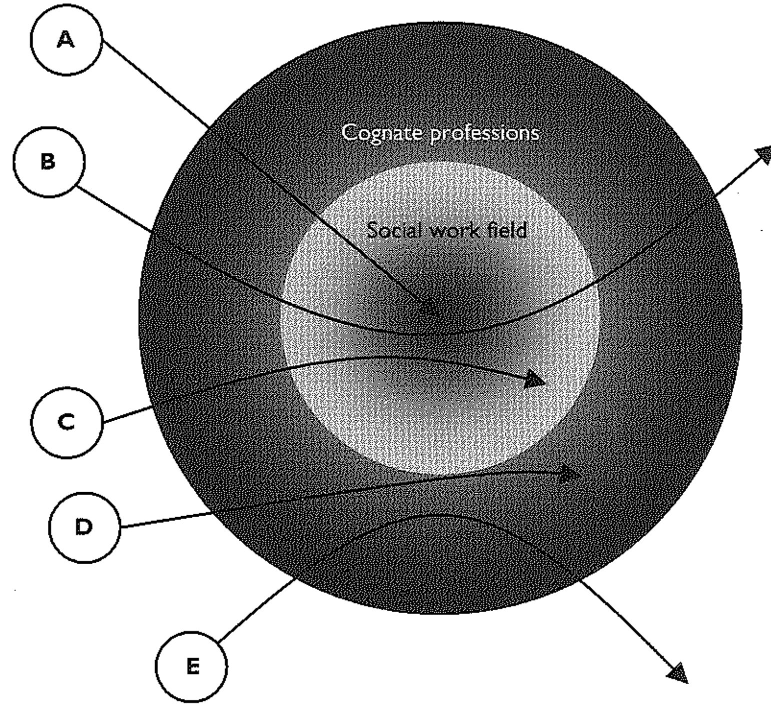
things, a different word usually implies something slightly different. Sometimes we use words to emphasise that we are trying to make a difference. For example, at one time people who are now known as having 'learning disabilities' were termed in law 'idiots' or 'imbeciles'. These came to be stigmatising terms, so the term 'mentally handicapped' was in use when I became a social worker, deriving from the Mental Health Act 1959. This in turn became stigmatising, so people moved to 'learning disabilities' as a less negative term during the 1980s. This term emphasises that it is possible for changes in language to be used to try to change attitudes; here, this is done by emphasising the ambiguities in the word 'disability' and the wide application of the term 'learning'. The problem is that as people come to understand that a stigmatised condition is being concealed by the new title, the ambiguity disappears, and the new term is again stigmatised; this is what happened with 'mentally handicapped'. Ambiguity and uncertainty, therefore, are sometimes useful parts of our world. Often, we are asked to be clear and to avoid ambiguity, but if there are different ways of looking at someone or something, then what we say should reflect it.

This use of language to construct something, and making changes to language to change behaviour and attitudes is a characteristic of a set of social construction ideas. The argument is that if we can understand concepts as being constructed by shared agreement, we can try to develop agreement to make a change.

Social work as pathways and networks

I owe to N. M. Tsang the idea that we can see social work (and any other occupation) as the place where a convergence of pathways forms a nexus of ideas. There people interact more closely and see themselves as 'together' in their work. They have been incorporated and socialised into social work. Each of them will have converged on that point; some will stay there; others will diverge towards other interests. They become more specialised, diverse or may modify their conception of social work or reject it altogether. Tsang drew a diagram that I have adapted (see Figure 1.1) to show this description of social work as a profession. The pale circle in the middle of the diagram represents a conventional boundary for social work, and the darkening patch in the middle represents an area of the field that many people would recognise as strongly 'social work'. They might define people within the boundary as social workers. They might be less sure of people just outside the boundary. The further a person has to travel to enter this

Figure 1.1: Pathways to and through social work



boundary, the less sure we would be of calling them a social worker. The circle defines what most people would think of as social workers; outside the circle, they might have more doubts.

The person who followed the path shown as A moved more or less to the centre of social work and stayed there, say, providing community care services in adult social services departments in local government. B moved through social work and ended up in an occupation related to it, perhaps as a clinical psychologist. The path of person C through social work moves from outside any relevant occupation, through a related job into the centre of social work and then away again to something, still in social work but a bit more peripheral, perhaps as a counsellor in a youth centre. D came into youth work, came close to social work as they worked with young offenders, but stayed in youth work, and now has less to do with social work. E was perhaps a teacher, who became involved in school counselling for a while, having a lot to do with child and family social workers and moved away again when they were promoted to head of department and had different duties.

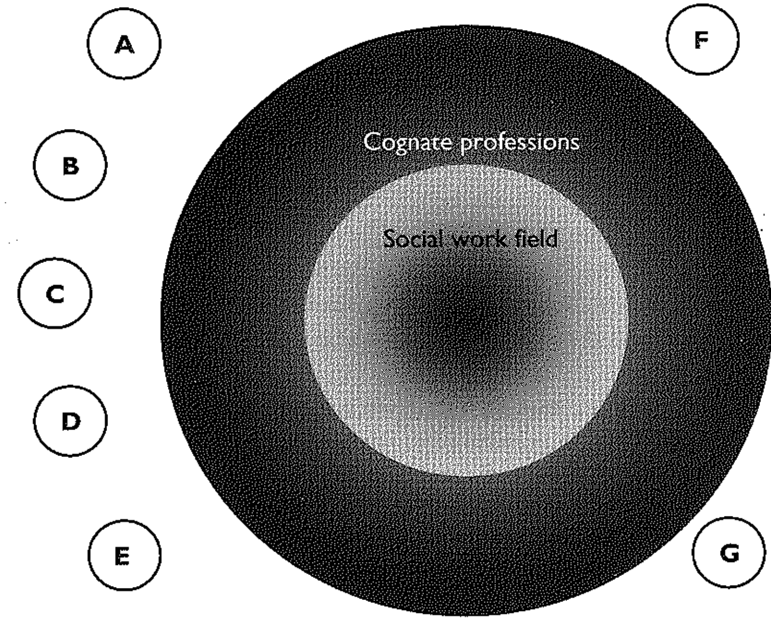
Within social work, there are specialisms, a more complex identity. Some of these are wholly within social work, for example adoption social workers. Others are part of a multiprofessional specialty. Forensic social workers in the UK, for example, work in secure hospital or residential care units with people who have committed serious offences because of a severe mental illness; in the US, forensic social work refers to social workers who work in courts. The multiprofessional team of these specialists in Britain includes psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, clinical psychologists, sometimes a range of other professions and also managers, clerical and administrative staff and people providing catering and living services to patients. Forensic social workers would regard themselves as part of social work, and also as part of forensic mental health. Similarly, hospice social workers are part of the multiprofessional speciality of palliative care, alongside nurses, doctors and spiritual care workers.

Figure 1.2 is a blank form of Figure 1.1 with two more people added. It offers an opportunity to analyse social workers' pathways; a team could do it together. There are seven blank lists for seven workers. The starting point of each worker might be the point at which they first thought of being a social worker. Perhaps you can identify it, as I can, picturing that university corridor. Perhaps, however, when you look back, you can identify some experiences that contributed to your progress towards being a social worker. Even before that corridor, I now think that my experiences of being an assistant youth leader as a teenager was an early indication of what would interest and motivate me. Then note down the major points in your life that form your pathway into social work. It might include particular experiences, or jobs, or organisations or people you came into contact with. When you each have your lists, the most valuable part of this exercise is to discuss with others how each should be plotted. Is that youth work experience in social work? Or on the borders? Or outside the box or circle? Experiences we have in our lives and interactions with others on our personal pathways intersect with other people's pathways and influence each other. By discussing this, you can enter into discussion about where the boundaries lie: you are becoming engaged in the discourse about the nature of social work.

Discourse

The idea of discourse helps with definition and developing understanding through 'pathways'. Discourse theory proposes that social work is not one thing, but consists of a body of social actions and

Figure 1.2: Pathways analysis format



Person	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
First thoughts of social work							
First relevant experiences							
Decision to move into social work							
Pre-qualification experiences							
Qualifying training							
First experience post-qualification							
Later experience and decision points							
Later experience and decision points							

debates formed by people rubbing up against one another, acting together in concert or opposition and sharing or disputing their ideas about what they are doing and thinking. Their rubbing up against each other, a discourse, is the nature of the thing itself. Thus, the discourse 'social work' is formed by the actions, understandings, thoughts and arguments of the people involved in it; it is not separate from the people involved. Their thinking and actions, as they argue through what to do about a case, constructs what social work is, and because they are a collective, their pathways and shared experiences will have influenced their thinking and action.

If we accept that social work is contested and ambiguous, the best way to understand it is to rise above the different points of view and look instead at the areas that are contested; this tells us what their 'discourse' is about. Social workers often find themselves doing this in their work. For example, if the children in a family are arguing about which one of them is most helpful to their parents, a worker might look beyond this to see why they need to compete for their parents' approval in this way. Examining the discourse about social work tries to do the same thing. Many writers, for example, argue for one or the other of two forms of social work: social change and individual problem solving. They see them as competing for the most important role in social work, and they try to promote practice that focuses on one or the other.

To find the discourse, we lift ourselves up above the level of the debate to ask what the nature of the debate is about, to the 'metalevel'. In this case, people are really trying to emphasise one or other aspect of social work's claim, the social or the interpersonal. But the fact that we are constantly arguing about it and the issue never gets resolved suggests that 'you can't have one without the other', as the song has it. When we rise above a dispute like this, we often find that the metalevel is not the simplicity of an 'either-or' but the complexity of an 'also-and'. The dispute arises because of strong commitment to making sure one view or the other is included, and sometimes also because of the difficulty of putting the two elements together in practice. This is true of social work's claim; since it is tough to achieve, we are constantly in battle about the right approach.

Howarth (2000) identifies three main historical elements to the idea of discourse:

1. The idea of investigating 'language in use' and 'talk in context' as part of linguistics, particularly social linguistics.
2. Its extension by phenomenological sociologists, ethnomethodologists and post-structuralists, in particular Foucault (1972), to investigate wider social practices which at least in Foucault's later work include how discourses shaped by social practices in turn shape social institutions.
3. Its extension in investigations such as Fairclough's (1992: 12) 'critical discourse analysis' to non-discursive practices in a wider range of social relations.

The first approach focuses on and limits itself purely to linguistic practices. For example, in most conversations, people take turns to communicate and there are complex social rules about taking turns in

conversations. People learn these rules as part of growing up in a society. Sometimes if we meet people from a minority ethnic group or in another country, we find that they have slightly different rules, and we find ourselves clashing, interrupting or thinking the other person is rude. Social workers learn about these communication rules as part of using talk to influence their clients. Ideas of rhetoric examine how we can use language to persuade others, in court reports and assessments, for example. Returning to the different views of social work, people who use language that talks about problems, individuals, and needs are likely to be of the view that competition is natural, while people who talk about inequality, oppression and division are likely to focus on radical change.

Foucault's approach, and others like it, still emphasise the importance of texts and talk, but go beyond this to examine the social relations created by discourses, particularly those concerned with power. In any social situation, if you examine how people behave towards one another, you can often see who is powerful or submissive. You can also examine patterns of behaviour in social institutions such as social work agencies or prisons to see patterns of social power. These patterns and the institutions that they are a part of reinforce social expectations and exert control over people to fit in with influential ideas in society. Thus, for example, social work, in helping people deal with problems in family relationships, reinforces powerful ideas about how people should relate to one another in families. The fact that it is necessary to help families resolve some of their difficulties through social work and other professional interventions also emphasises how important families are in social relations. You can see what these powerful ideas in society (the discourse about the family) are by seeing what social workers and other similar professions enforce. So, pursuing the example about social work, the problem-solving view favours using families to maintain the present social order. A radical change view, alternatively, suggests that families often oppress people within them, for example, children and women, by violence.

Critical discourse analysis takes these ideas further by using them to look at the social impact of all sorts of activities, and this includes social work practice. Fairclough (1992: 91) makes the point that:

> ... discursive practices ... incorporate significations which contribute to sustaining or restructuring power relations. Relations of power may in principle be affected by discursive practices of any type, even scientific and theoretical.

By 'discursive practices' he means activities such as social work practice that create and disclose discourses. These discourses are the sometimes obvious, sometimes hidden, power relationships between people as they interact. Relationships always represent particular ideologies about how society should be. 'Significations' are words or practices that represent important ideologies, for example appeals to the importance of the family or a kind of social work that sustains traditional family structures, or, on the other hand, they accept that families may include relationships between gay and lesbian couples or single-parent families.

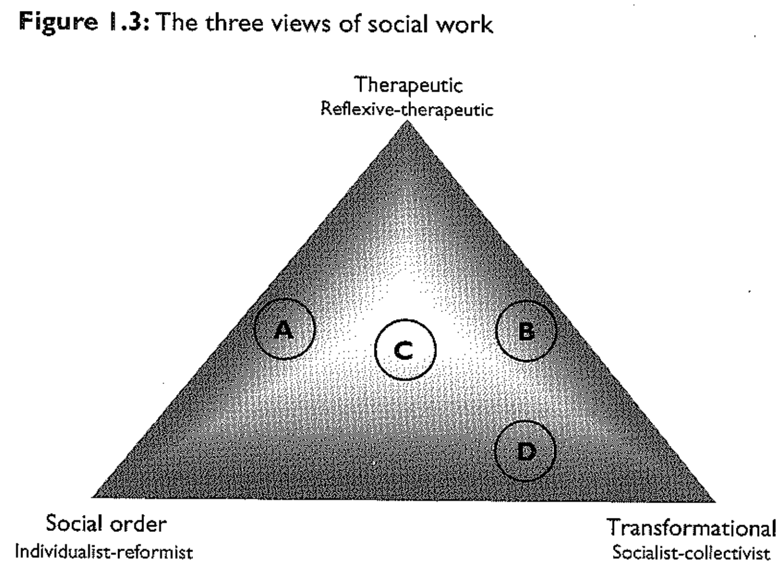
All these types of discourse analysis connect together, because looking at language in written texts and in practice in an organised way through research into the use of language in texts and in practice can reveal power relations and the ideas that lie behind them. In this book, I look at written texts about social work as a technique for revealing the ideas about social work that lie behind everyday statements. I use professional documents, textbooks, articles, internet searches and government and official statements. I also look at social work practices, by examining examples of practice or organisation.

Social work's three-way discourse

The argument in this book is that social work is a three-way discourse; every bit of practice, all practice ideas, all social work agency organisation and all welfare policy is a rubbing up of three views of social work against each other. I argue that this discourse plays out the struggle about the claim: these three views are different ways of dealing with the claim. Figure 1.3 shows them at the corners of a triangle; the triangle represents the discourse between them, a field of debate that covers all social work. When I first described these three views, in the first edition of this book, I used complex names for them, but more recently, people have used simpler terms, so in this edition, I concentrate on the simpler terms, and give the complex names in this figure for reference. The important differences between these views of social work connect with different political views about how welfare should be provided.

Therapeutic views. These see social work as seeking the best possible well-being for individuals, groups and communities in society, by promoting and facilitating growth and self-fulfilment. A constant spiral of interaction between workers and clients modifies clients' ideas and allows workers to influence them; in the same way, clients affect workers' understandings of their world as they gain experience of it. This process

Figure 1.3: The three views of social work



of mutual influence is called reflexiveness. Because it is reflexive in this way, social work responds to the social concerns that workers find and gain understanding of as they practise, and feeds back into society knowledge about these problems and how society might tackle them. Through this process of mutual interaction with social workers, clients gain power over their own feelings and way of life. Such personal power enables them to overcome or rise above suffering and disadvantage, so they experience the work to help them gain this power as therapeutic. I originally called this kind of social work 'reflexive-therapeutic'. This view expresses in social work the social democratic political philosophy that economic and social development should go hand-in-hand to achieve individual and social improvement.

This view is basic to many ideas of the nature of social work, but two other views modify and dispute it.

Transformational views. These views (for example, Pease and Fook, 1999) argue that we must transform societies for the benefit of the poorest and most oppressed. Social work aims to develop cooperation and mutual support in society so that the most oppressed and disadvantaged people can gain power over their own lives. It facilitates this by empowering people to take part in a process of learning and cooperation, which creates institutions that all can own and participate in. Elites accumulate and perpetuate power and resources in society

for their own benefit. By doing so, they create the oppression and disadvantage that social work tries to supplant with more egalitarian relationships in society. Transformational views imply that disadvantaged and oppressed people will never gain personal or social empowerment unless society makes these transformations. Value statements about social work, such as codes of ethics, represent this objective by proposing social justice as an important value of all social work. This view expresses the socialist political philosophy that planned economies and social provision promotes equality and social justice, and I originally called it 'socialist-collectivist'.

Social order views. These see social work as an aspect of welfare services to individuals in societies. It meets individuals' needs and improves services of which it is a part, so that social work and the services can operate more effectively. Dominelli (2002) calls these maintenance approaches, reflecting the term used by Davies (1994); I originally called them 'individualist-reformist'. They see social work as maintaining the social order and social fabric of society, and maintaining people during any period of difficulties that they may be experiencing, so that they can recover stability again. This view expresses the liberal or rational economic political philosophy, that personal freedom in economic markets, supported by the rule of law, is the best way of organising societies.

Each view says something about the activities and purposes of social work in welfare provision in any society, and so they are each different implementations of social work's claim. Therapeutic social work says: 'Help everyone to self-fulfilment and society will be a better place'. Social order social work says: 'Solve people's problems in society, by providing help or services, and they will fit in with general social expectations better; promoting social change to stop the problems arising will produce all-round improvements'. Transformational social work says: 'Identify and work out how social relations cause people's problems, and make social changes so that the problems do not arise'.

Each view criticises or seeks to modify the others. For example, seeking personal and social fulfilment, as in therapeutic views, is impossible to transformers because the interests of elites obstruct many possibilities for oppressed peoples, unless we achieve significant social change. They argue that merely accepting the social order, as therapeutic and social order views do, supports and enhances the interests of elites. To the transformer, therefore, the alternative views involve practice that will obstruct the opportunities of oppressed people who should be the main beneficiaries of social work. To take another example, social order views say that trying to change societies to make them more equal or create personal and social fulfilment through individual and community growth are unrealistic in everyday practice, and inconsistent with the natural organisation of societies in competitive markets. This is because most practical objectives of social work activity refer to small-scale individual change, which cannot lead to major social and personal changes. Also, stakeholders in the social services that finance and give social approval to social work activities mainly want a better fit between society and individuals. They do not seek major changes. That is why social order views prefer their approach.

However, these different views also have affinities. For example, both therapeutic and transformational views are centrally about change and development. Also, therapeutic and social order views are about individual rather than social change. Generally, therefore, most conceptions of social work include elements of each of these views. Alternatively, they sometimes acknowledge the validity of elements of the others. For example, transformational views criticise unthinking acceptance of the present social order, which is often taken for granted in social order and therapeutic views. Nevertheless, most people who take this view of social work accept helping individuals to fulfil their potential within present social systems. They often see this as a stepping-stone to a changed society by promoting a series of small changes aiming towards bigger ones.

So these different views fit together or compete with each other in social work practice. Looking at Figure 1.3, if you or your agency were positioned at A (very common especially for beginning social workers), your main focus might be providing services in a therapeutic, helping relationship, as a care manager (in managed care) or in child protection. You might do very little in the way of seeking to change the world, and by being part of an official or service system, you are accepting the pattern of welfare services as it is. However, in your individual work, what you do may well be guided by eventual change objectives. For example, if you believe that relationships between men and women should be more equal, your work in families will probably reflect your views. Position B might represent someone working in a refuge for women suffering domestic violence. Much of their work is helping therapeutically, but the very basis of their agency is changing attitudes towards women in society, and you might do some campaigning work as part of your helping role. Position C is equally balanced; some change, some service provision; some therapeutic helping. My present job is like that: to promote community

development so that communities become more resilient about and respond better to people who are dying or bereaved, but I also provide help for individuals and I am responsible for liaison with other services so that our service system becomes more effective. Position D is mainly transformational but partly maintenance. This reflects the reality that seeking social change is not, in the social services, completely revolutionary, but will also seek to make the service system more effective. Many community workers, for example, are seeking quite major change in the lives of the people they serve by achieving better cooperation and sharing, but they may act by helping local groups make their area safe from crime, by providing welfare rights advocacy or by organising self-help playgroups in the school holidays.

You can assess your position in social work by trying out the exercise in Figure 1.4.

First, you complete the three scales at the top. You circle one figure on each line; the 0 means your job is equally balanced between these two points of view, whereas a 3 would mean that your job is very strongly oriented towards one view or the other. When you have completed the scales, you can plot your position on each of the three sides of the discourse triangle; 0 will be in the middle of the triangle side, and 1 or 2 a proportional step towards the relevant corner; a 3 will be at the corner. Now connect up the three points you have identified. Often this will form a triangle, perhaps a fairly flat triangle. Your job is positioned in social work discourse at the fattest part of the triangle. If you have a straight line, your position is one third along the line away from the strongest point. Figure 1.5a–c gives some examples drawn from exercises I have done with different social workers.

By copying Figure 1.4, you can get people who know you or your supervisor to make their own assessment of your territory, and you can plan; for example, you can go on to identify the position you would like to be in. By carrying out these exercises, you are again involving yourself in the discourse around the nature of the social work that you have constructed for yourself. It is also possible to do this for agencies and their policies, or the welfare regimes of different countries and the priorities that social work has in that country.

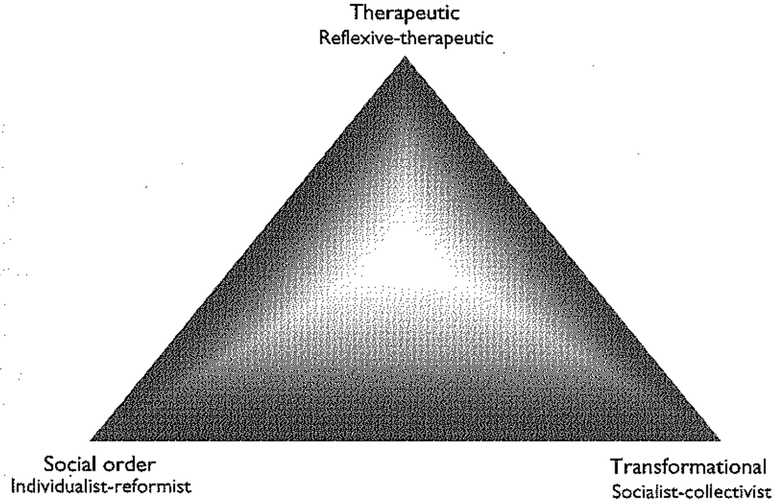
This process of engaging in the discourse about your own role can help to clarify the range of objectives in your work and contributions that you make. Figure 1.5 offers some examples, which are composites of people from different areas of social work that I have discussed this with. A palliative care social worker (Figure 1.5a), for example, might start out by seeing themselves as primarily doing therapeutic work

Figure 1.4: Views of social work scale

Consider the balance between each pair of views of social work, as explained in the text, within your present practice. If it is equally balanced between the pair, circle 0; if your practice is strongly biased towards the left-hand view, circle 3; indicate less strong biases by circling 1 or 2. You can only circle one number for each pair.

Therapeutic	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	Social order
Therapeutic	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	Transformational
Social order	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	Transformational

When you have finished, transfer the scores to the triangle. Start with the first scale on the left side of this triangle (social order to therapeutic). If you circled 0, mark the midpoint of the side; each corner represents a 3: 'therapeutic' at the top or 'social order' on the far left. If you circled 2, put a mark about a third of the way from the corner to the midpoint; if you circled 1 put a mark about two thirds of the way to the midpoint. Repeat for the other two scales: scale 2 on the right, scale 3 along the bottom. Connect the marks to create a triangle that represents the territory of your view of your practice.



You can repeat the exercise by getting your supervisor or a colleague who knows your work to work out their view of your practice. You can also work out what your ideal combination might be. Comparing these with your present analysis can help you to see how you might want to change your practice.

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with their patients, in fact, almost as a straight line from the therapeutic corner to the mid-point of the opposite side, between social order and transformation. However, they often arrange services for their patients and their families, and might persuade patients not to commit suicide because of their illness. Providing or organising services is clearly a social order activity: it is about maintaining the fabric of society through the provision of social services. The question then arises: how far is therapeutic work on patients' family relationships also a service? One might see it more as helping people achieve happiness by fulfilling the potential of their relationships and preventing difficulties in bereavement, but others might see it as an element in a package of caring services that also includes, for example, practical help at home and with physical needs. Persuading people not to commit suicide might be a therapeutic process, enabling people to come to terms with their impending death and to use their time to achieve other social objectives. However, it might also help to maintain a social convention against suicide. A palliative care social worker's actions also connect with ethical objectives to value the experience of dying and to avoid preventable early death. Thus, they are also part of the hospice movement's mission to change attitudes to death in society.

Our own social work territory does not remain the same. Every case and every social work action contain elements of all three views, which interact and sometimes conflict with each other. We can look at each situation, and at each action we take to adjust the emphasis of our work. Social workers in an Asian youth project (Figure 1.5b) might see themselves as being on the side of mainly Muslim young people who feel marginalised and disadvantaged in a large public housing estate. Therefore, they might see a large element of transformation in their work: to change the practice of other agencies and social attitudes among the white people on the estate. Most of the work with the young people themselves might be therapeutic. However, in discussion with such workers, they talked about helping several young women to decide whether they would agree to take part in arranged marriages proposed by their parents, and also about a young man who decided that he would ask his parents to do so. In this way, they contributed to social order, by helping young people and their families adjust their wishes to social structures, helping the social structures to change to fit new circumstances. While this did not fit with their own political views, as social workers dealing with troubled individuals, they had to remain open to the alternatives that they were considering. So, some of the work was more therapeutic or social order influenced than much of the community work activity.

Figure 1.5: Examples of views analyses

Figure 1.5a: Palliative care social worker

Figure 1.5b: Asian youth project social worker

Figure 1.5c: Youth offending team social worker

Views analysis also enables us to look at agencies and welfare systems. The youth offending team social workers (Figure 1.5c) were committed to therapeutic help for the young offenders they worked with. They were active in working to change the criminal justice system to recognise the social pressures on young offenders and avoid punitive approaches to their needs. Their agency, where they cooperated with police officers and others in the criminal justice system, limited the range of possibilities for flexible practice, compared with a community youth agency that might enable a worker to have an impact on the same issues with the same people; the triangle was quite restricted. However, working in the agency meant that they gained access to young people and helped them in the youth offending system in a way that was not possible in the voluntary sector.

All these workers faced directly some of the challenges of social work's claim to bring together social change and individual help. They came to their own construction of practice, sometimes unwittingly incorporating these three elements. However, views analysis shows us the process of social construction for individuals, in agencies, in particular cases, and in particular social work actions in response to the struggle to meet the claim. It can also apply to welfare systems. Some welfare systems focus more on therapeutic work, less on transformation. Sometimes, policies affect welfare systems to create a period of transformation.

Political aims in welfare, views of social work and social work practice thus link in complex ways, and are constantly interacting to create the particular discourse that social work is at any one time. Views analysis is a way of examining that discourse, either as we practice, or as we analyse how the agencies and welfare systems that surround us deal with the problem of the claim.

The plan of this book

This book aims to examine elements within current discourses about social work. The claim to combine social and personal improvement in an interpersonal professional practice is difficult to work out in practice within the social work profession. Chapter Two explores the identity social work tries to create for itself, and that is created by public policy and perception, by using evidence from official and professional definitions of social work and the related concept of social care. The discussion points up how the three views are constantly present in both contemporary social work debate and throughout its history. Chapters Three and Four focus on how social work practice, values and ethics incorporate elements of the discourse, and attempt to deal with the difficulties of social work's claim, through the discourse on the three views within interpersonal activity in practice. Chapters Five to Eight discuss how social work interacts with the forces surrounding it by considering successively social work management and agency, the use of power and authority in society, the role and character of social work as a profession including its education and research, and the interaction of social work with current issues about globalisation and postmodernism. Chapter Nine brings together these different strands of the construction of social work as a profession, and discusses how in everyday practice social workers can work towards achieving social work's claim in the context of today's society and its social movements and policies.

Conclusion: the claim and the perspectives

Social work's claim, unique among similar professions, is to combine in a professional role both social transformation and also individual improvement through interpersonal relationships. Because the social world is constantly in flux and individual humanity is infinitely variable, the only valid approach to understanding social work is to examine its social construction. However, a completely relative social construction, premised on constant variation in response to social and human contexts, does not reflect the world that most people experience. There are many continuities in social work, which is constructed in a shared language of concepts about its nature, contained in a discourse among three views of it: therapeutic, social order and transformational views. Social workers construct their own social work practice by following pathways towards, through, and sometimes away from, a nexus of ideas and debate that is the centre of social work. Thus, any particular social work act, any case, any social work role, any agency, any welfare system reflects a constantly changing balance among these three views about how to meet the claim. However, the three views are consistently present.