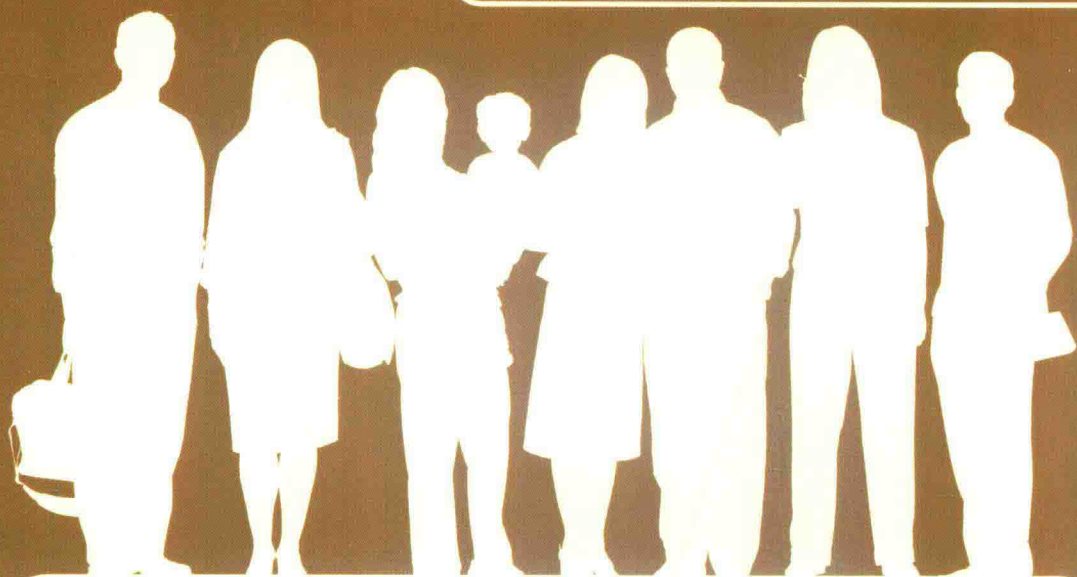


TRANSFORMING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE



4th Edition

Reflective Practice in Social Work

edited by

**Christine Knott
and Terry Scragg**

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 **SAGE**



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Reflective Practice in Social Work

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Introduction

This book is written for the student social worker and explores a range of approaches to reflective practice that will be useful across the whole of your programme of study as well as in subsequent years as you move into practice learning. Experienced and qualified social workers contributing to practice learning will also be able to use this book for consultation, teaching and revision, and to gain an insight into the expectations raised by the qualifying degree in social work. Essentially this book is designed to assist you in developing an understanding of the concept of the reflective practitioner, and in learning how, in conjunction with your practice educator and others, you can take a perspective on your own actions and experiences that have the potential for refining and reframing your practice as a result of these deliberations. Reflection is central to good social work practice, but only if action results from that reflection.

Great emphasis is now placed on developing the skills of reflection about each stage of practice. This has developed over many years in social work, and is not only important during your education to become a social worker, but is also considered key to continued professional development (CPD). As a profession that increasingly acknowledges the value of lifelong learning as a way of keeping up to date, ensuring that research informs practice and honing skills and values for practice, it is important to begin the process at the outset of your development. The importance of reflection as one component of professional development is recognised by its inclusion in the Professional Capabilities Framework and in the Health and Care Professions Council Standards of proficiency for social workers.

Book structure

As you will see below, the book starts with a broad exploration of reflective practice drawing on some of the key texts that have informed the development of the concept and some of the processes that can be adopted in reflective practice. This is then used as the basis for the following chapters that are concerned with aspects of the development of the reflective practitioner from a range of standpoints. Finally, we explore issues of the management of social work practice and interprofessional leadership in the context of reflection.

Part 1 What is reflective practice?

Chapter 1 explores what is meant by reflective practice and some of the potential outcomes from using this technique. The chapter then examines the roots of the concept of reflective practice, with the work of Schön as our starting point, and goes on to discuss its application to social work. The terminology used in reflective practice will be discussed, as will the relationship between evidence-based practice and reflective practice.

The chapter also acknowledges that some environmental conditions in organisations may make reflection more difficult, and that positive relationships and processes need to be in place for constructive reflection to take place.

Chapter 2 examines the methods used when starting the process of reflection. These methods will be familiar to most social work and other professional educators. As a social work student you will find this a key part of the process of learning and teaching on your qualifying programme. This chapter draws on methods that have been discussed in the literature and also practised in both qualifying and post-qualifying social work education. We suggest a wide range of strategies and techniques that you can test out as a way of developing the practical skills of reflection, including how to start the process of reflection and how to maintain a reflective approach as you develop your social work career.

Chapter 3 recognises that the reflective process involves the emotions. This chapter raises important questions about the role of language in both shaping and reflecting dominant discourses in practice. The importance in social work of understanding and processing emotions is then considered, illustrated with reference to child protection practice. An acknowledgement of the emotional component in practice has long been neglected but is now increasingly recognised as helping practitioners understand some of the contradictions and complexities inherent in social work practice. The concept of emotional intelligence is identified as providing a helpful framework for developing emotionally competent practice. A series of reflective tasks is included to support the development of emotional awareness and regulation, which are considered central to the development of emotional intelligence.

Part 2 Developing the reflective practitioner

Chapter 4 focuses on reflection that leads to challenging self-limiting beliefs and promotes action through the use of an approach underpinned by cognitive behaviour therapy. This theory is explained by the use of case studies and their application for social work students as well as work with service users and carers. A number of approaches are considered such as writing reflectively, analysis of self-talk and belief systems, and the use of the ABC technique to challenge self-defeating thoughts. The aim of the chapter is to enable you to develop ideas about how you can reflect in a purposeful manner, which will enable you to problem-solve and develop personal confidence and professional competence.

Chapter 5 highlights the potential pitfalls when applying reflective practice to work with carers. The evolving professional conception of 'the carer' is examined and contrasted with the lived experience of people providing care. Case material is included from research with families where there is a member with Huntington's disease. The chapter goes on to reflect on the participation of service users and carers in social work and the challenging perspective they may bring. An exploration of knowledge, experience and power in understanding and interpretation is included as well as how to use the reflective process to consider other position perspectives and realities.

Social work often involves statutory work with *involuntary* service users, who can be hostile and aggressive. Chapter 6 examines the important role reflective practice can play in these situations as a means of avoiding the risk of social workers reacting in ways that can, albeit unintentionally, actually work to increase the danger for service users and social workers. The process is explained through the concept of professional dangerousness; the chapter provides some useful exercises and concludes with some practical suggestions on how professional dangerousness might be minimised.

Chapter 7 discusses gender in social work, and how the men and women in social work can be both shaped by socialisation and influenced by others' expectation of gender roles and what are seen as appropriate behaviours for male and female social workers. The chapter explores theories about masculinity and femininity, and some of the tensions you may experience when examining gender differences and attempting to apply them in your practice. The chapter provides you with a range of opportunities to explore gender issues from a personal perspective, in the context of the social work settings and practice situations, and through the use of exercises, case studies and research findings.

Chapter 8 considers reflective practice on placement with a range of suggestions to assist your development as a social worker, with the beneficial outcome of improving your skills in working with service users and carers as well as challenging your assumptions and preconceptions. The chapter has been written to be mainly of relevance to students, although it will also be of interest to practice educators and social workers involved in post-qualifying training and who are completing the ASYE (assessed and supported year in employment).

Part 3 Maintaining reflective practice

Chapter 9 introduces you to the world of management, particularly the work of the front-line manager and some of the tensions inherent in management roles in social work. The case is made in this chapter for managers maintaining a reflective approach to their practice and encouraging a similar approach to the work with the social workers they manage. The second part of this chapter explores how you can actively manage your relationship with your line manager in the context of practice learning so that you can both benefit from the relationship. Lastly, this chapter introduces you to a range of techniques that can be used when reflecting on and about practice.

Finally, Chapter 10 discusses how increasingly social work will be practised in an inter-professional context in complex new organisational structures, with leadership in these new structures essential. This chapter explores the application of a reflective tool to support interprofessional leadership. It builds on previous chapters and themes in relation to the overall concept, critically analysing the use of reflective models in the social care arena. It challenges you to explore how critical evaluation of your own thought and feeling processes, knowledge and experience can support leadership, prevent professional introspection and bring fresh approaches to problem-solving and change in the interprofessional context.

Learning features

This book is interactive and you are encouraged to work through the book as an active participant, taking responsibility for your learning, in order to increase your knowledge, understanding and ability to apply this learning to practice. You will be expected to reflect creatively on how immediate learning needs can be met in the area of assessment, planning, intervention and review and how your professional learning can be developed in your future career. Case studies throughout the book will help you to examine theories and models of reflective practice. We have devised activities that require you to reflect on experiences, situations and events and help you to review and summarise learning undertaken. In this way your knowledge will become deeply embedded as part of your development. When you come to practice learning in an agency, the work and reflection undertaken here will help you to improve and hone your skills and knowledge. This book will introduce knowledge and learning activities for you as a student social worker concerning the central processes relating to issues of reflective practice in all areas of the discipline. Suggestions for further reading are made at the end of each chapter.

This book has been carefully mapped to the new Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers in England and will help you to develop the appropriate standards at the right level. These standards are:

- **Professionalism**

Identify and behave as a professional social worker committed to professional development.

- **Values and ethics**

Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice.

- **Diversity**

Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice.

- **Rights, justice and economic wellbeing**

Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing.

- **Knowledge**

Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.

- **Critical reflection and analysis**

Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making.

- **Intervention and skills**

Use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse.

- **Contexts and organisations**

Engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within your own organisational frameworks and contribute to the development of services and organisations. Operate effectively within multi-agency and interprofessional settings.

- **Professional leadership**

Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management.

References to these standards will be made throughout the text and you will find a diagram of the Professional Capability Framework in Appendix 1 on page 178.

Part 1

**What is reflective
practice?**

