TRANSFORMING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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5th Edition

# Social Work & Human Development

Janet Walker

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Janet Walker

SAGE | LearningMatters

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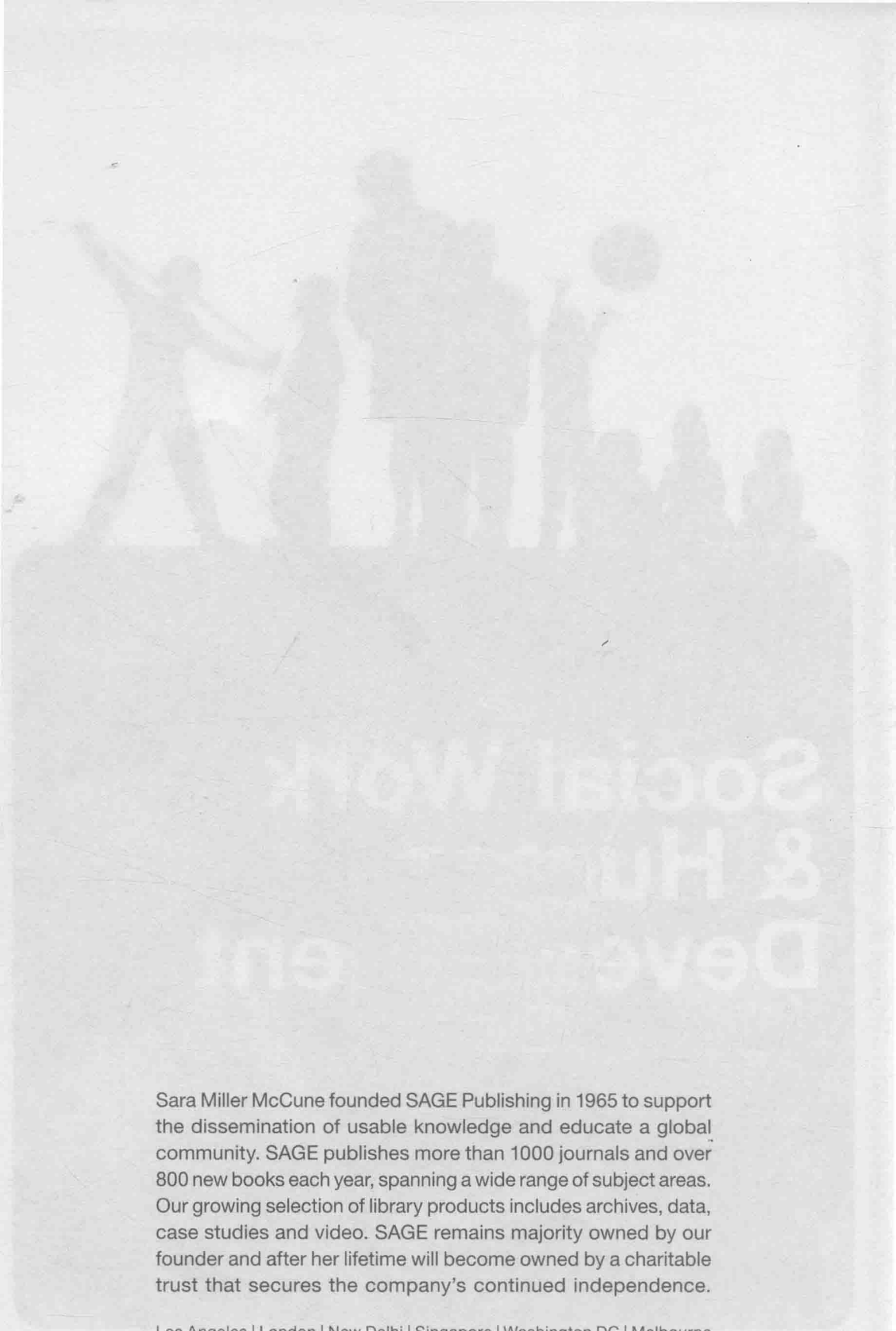
# Social Work & Human Development



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# Acknowledgement

I am indebted to my colleague and long-time friend Karin Crawford for our journey together in producing previous editions of the book. Her knowledge, skills, contribution and support has been critical to the writing of the content. I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to her; she contributed in so many ways to make this book happen.

# About the author

**Janet Walker** is Deputy Head in the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Lincoln, where she has responsibility for leading, developing and supporting teaching, learning, practice and research in health and social care and social work. She has experience of research and support for teaching and learning in England, with other European countries and worldwide, developing teaching and learning in social care and social work, including a European joint Erasmus Mundus Master programme in Advanced Development in Social Work. Prior to working in academia, Janet gained substantial experience in practice, as a social work practitioner and manager.

# Foreword

I am delighted to provide a foreword for this fifth edition of *Social Work and Human Development.* For more than a decade now, social work students have enjoyed and benefited from the ever-widening range of texts published by SAGE/Learning Matters in the *Transforming Social Work Practice* series, and this book stands as an exemplar of all that is best about this type of publication – being at the same time accessible yet never simplistic, relevant to practice yet never unacademic, contemporary yet offering the longer view of how our understanding of the human condition has been contested, constructed and variously understood.

All social work programmes have to meet the requirements of the Professional Capabilities Framework. Within the context of such change, qualifying programme providers have had to review the content of their courses to identify the core elements of the curriculum. One way of looking at these essential areas of knowledge is to think of them as 'threshold concepts' (Cousin, 2006). A threshold concept is, by definition, *transformative* (in that once understood, a threshold concept changes the way in which the student views the discipline) and also *troublesome* (in that knowledge can be troublesome when it is alien, incoherent and counterintuitive).

The attempts to apply the notion of threshold concepts to the discipline – and practice – of social work usually begin with *human growth and development*, including ideas about attachment, separation, loss and change – in short, human experience across the life course. Put another way, these threshold concepts contribute to the Aristotelian *episteme* of social work, meaning scientific or empirical knowledge based upon first principles.

Whenever another serious case review questions the competence of social workers (and other professionals) to 'do the job', the implicit allegation is that practitioners lack the capacity to benchmark the well-being or vulnerability of an individual child or young person against the 'normal' childhood experience of others (and to act as a consequence of these differences). Whilst the notion of a 'normal' childhood is necessarily difficult and contested, the idea that social workers need to understand growth and development, along with the concepts of milestones and transitions, is largely beyond doubt.

At the other end of the life course spectrum, social workers increasingly need to understand the later life course, along with the impacts of ageing, grief and loss, diminished capacity, dementia and long-term conditions.

This new and updated version of Janet Walker's text will once again enable the social work student to begin the transformative process of engaging with core threshold concepts relating to the life course and to human experience that inform effective practice across all social work service domains.

*Nigel Horner*
*Head of School of Health and Social Work*
*University of Lincoln*

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# Introduction to the fifth edition

This book is about human development across the life course, looking at how patterns of growth, stability and change impact on people's life course. It examines and applies theoretical concepts and ideas, policy and practice initiatives, and legislation and research that inform professional practice. A life course perspective is intended to support you to understand the whole of life from birth to death as a progressive and developmental path, with opportunities for growth and change across all facets. Critically it invites you to apply ideas about human development to practice situations through the use of exercises and case studies, and asks you to reflect on the implications for professional practice and your personal and professional values.

This fifth edition of *Social Work and Human Development* is written primarily for students studying for their degree in social work who are beginning to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of the requirements for professional practice. Whilst it is primarily aimed at those who are at the beginning of their studies, it will be useful for subsequent years depending on how a programme is designed, what is being studied, and especially as students move into learning in practice.

This book should appeal to people who are considering a career in social work or social care, but are not yet studying for a degree in social work. It will also assist students undertaking a range of social, health and education-related courses in further and higher education. Additionally nurses, occupational therapists and other allied professionals will be able to gain insight into human development across the life course and the role and requirements for social work, particularly to support the collaborative context of practice. Newly qualified social workers undertaking their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) (DfE, 2013a) may find that this book can assist them with their programme of assessment against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (TCSW, 2012a), supporting their reflection on the skills, knowledge and capabilities and strengthening their professional competence. It will also support social workers in meeting the *Knowledge and Skills Statements for Social Workers in Adult Services* (DH, 2015) and *Knowledge and Skills Statements for Child and Family Social Work* (DfE, 2015). Experienced and qualified social workers, especially those contributing to practice learning, or carrying out their own professional development as a requirement of their continuing registration with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC), aligned to the relevant levels of the PCF (TCSW, 2012a), will be able to use this book for consultation and revision. This will also support social workers and others contributing to practice learning – for example, to gain understanding of the expectations of the qualifying degree in social work and as a teaching aid – and those seeking to demonstrate that they meet the *Practice Educator Professional Standards for Social Work* (TCSW, 2012b).

In developing this edition I have sought to maintain the principal of human growth and development as encompassing the whole life course, and that an understanding of human growth and development is a central element of social work education and practice. The emphasis is on integrating contemporary practice with theoretical concepts of life course development, highlighting the importance of diversity. Further, through using a life course perspective the intention has been to seek to emphasise the way in which our lives are shaped by the social, political, cultural and economic environment. Each chapter has been revised to ensure it links to current developments and the context of practice and experiences. Diagrams, activities, case studies and research information have been reviewed and added to. Reading sections at the ends of chapters have been developed to include recent materials.

## Requirements for social work education

Social work education in the United Kingdom ensures that students develop the knowledge, skills, values, ethics and processes for professional practice, with qualified social workers educated to at least honours degree level. Social work is a profession that is practised all over the world, operating in complex, demanding and uncertain human environments – with its international definition seeking to encapsulate the principles of social work:

> *The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.*
>
> (Point in time definition endorsed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), 2013)

This definition seeks to encapsulate social work's concern for the needs, interests and well-being of people, groups and communities to define together the outcomes they seek and the preferred methods to achieve this. Social workers will intervene in a wide variety of human situations; they are more likely to undertake their practice with people who are vulnerable and at risk, who are struggling in some way to participate fully in society. Whilst the practice of social work seeks to be supportive, empowering and enabling, there is also the need to ensure the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable and at risk individuals. The central focus is on the needs, interests and well-being of the child, adult or family. Part of this involves maintaining a view of the person in their environment, through an understanding of the physical, psychological and cultural dimensions of their well-being. This needs to take into account the importance and impact of their family, neighbourhood and community relationships, as well as the wider political and social environments, which may have contributed to the person's marginalisation.



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Social workers need to be highly knowledgeable and skilled to work competently and effectively. They have to draw on a wide range of theoretical approaches with different people in different contexts, assessing needs, planning and intervening within their social context, constructively challenging individual, institutional and structural discrimination. They should work in partnership with people who use services and carers, seeking to empower and emancipate individuals. Effective collaboration with other professionals is an essential component of good social work practice. It is critical that social work students develop a rigorous grounding in, and understanding of, theories and models for social work. Such knowledge helps social workers to assess what they must do, when they must do it, how they must do it, and then to justify the decisions that have been made, all the while recognising that social work is a complex activity in which each situation is unique, with no absolute 'rights' or 'wrongs' of practice in place.

This book aims to contribute to the intentions of the Social Work Task Force (2009) and Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) (2012) to improve the quality and consistency of the social work degree, further supported by the Munro Review (2011), which emphasised the importance of investing in the next generation of social workers to improve the quality of practice. The book aims to meet the standards and expectations set out by professional regulatory bodies, specifically the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), The (former) College of Social Work (TCSW) and the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC).

It will meet subject skills in the Quality Assurance Agency (2016) academic benchmarks for social work. The *Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Work* as an applied academic subject at honours level sets out expectations concerning the subject knowledge, understanding and skills of an honours graduate in social work, as well as the teaching, learning and assessment methods employed in their education and the standards expected of them at the point of graduation. This includes understanding the nature of social work and developing a knowledge and understanding of: social work services, service users and carers; the service delivery context; values and ethics; and social work theory and the nature of social work practice. In addition social work graduates should acquire and integrate in problem solving, communication, working with others, personal and professional development, and technological and numerical skills. One of the main themes of the Subject Benchmarks is '*the centrality of the development of knowledge and skills for social work in relation to assessment and intervention, at all stages of the life course*' (QAA, 2016, p. 4).

The HCPC, as part of its provision, has developed standards of proficiency for social work in England. Its *Standards of Proficiency* (HCPC, 2017) are the threshold standards for safe and effective practice within the profession, setting out what a social worker in England must know, understand and be able to do following the completion of their social work degree. Alongside the standards of proficiency, the HCPC also sets separate standards for conduct, performance and ethics and for continuing professional development. Social workers in England must meet the HCPC's standards to stay on the Register. The HCPC uses these standards to decide whether or not a social worker is fit to practise.

The book will meet the PCF for Social Work (TCSW, 2012b); the Appendix provides an overview of the Framework. The PCF provides a comprehensive framework of what should be expected of students at every stage of their education and training from entry to final qualification, and for continuing professional development following qualification. It aims to provide a holistic approach to identifying and assessing learning needs and outcomes, and to enable students to understand how they can meet and demonstrate these outcomes. The PFC has nine domains (or areas) within it. For each of these there is a main statement and an elaboration. Then at each level within the PCF, detailed capabilities have been developed explaining how social workers should expect to evidence that area in practice. The nine capabilities should be seen as interdependent, not separate. The first four levels relate to student social workers. These represent the 'level' of capability a social work student should be demonstrating at different points in their social work training:

1. *Professionalism* – Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development.
2. *Values and ethics* – Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice.
3. *Diversity* – Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice.
4. *Rights, justice and economic well-being* – Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic well-being.
5. *Knowledge* – Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.
6. *Critical reflection and analysis* – Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making.
7. *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.
8. *Contexts and organisations* – Engage with, inform and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within own organisational frameworks and contribute to the development of services and organisations. Operate effectively within multi-agency and interprofessional settings.
9. *Professional leadership* – Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management.

By the completion of qualifying programmes, newly qualified social workers should have demonstrated the knowledge, skills and values to work with a range of user groups, the ability to undertake a range of tasks at a foundation level and the capacity to work

with more complex situations; they should be able to work more autonomously, whilst recognising that the final decision will still rest with their supervisor; they will seek appropriate support and supervision.

The former College of Social Work, in collaboration with social work educators, has developed curriculum guides for social work. This book draws on these guides, in particular the curriculum guide for 'Human growth and development' (Boylan and Ray, 2012).

In essence, this book will focus on developing your knowledge and understanding of human development throughout the life course and its importance and relevance to social work practice. An action-orientated approach helps to facilitate an evaluation, review and reflection of your learning and practice. Case studies, which focus on different aspects of the human life course, will be used throughout to enhance this process and illustrate key learning points. Additionally, theory and research summaries are provided to underpin this developing knowledge with theories, models and evidence.

## Book structure

Understanding the way in which individuals develop before birth, as babies, children and adolescents through to young, middle and older adulthood towards death, is fundamental to social work practice. Social workers work with people across the life course. Having an understanding of such knowledge supports them in assessing and planning to meet individual needs. It allows them to be sensitive and appropriate in their communication with people and in the services they offer and provide. It is important that social workers have an understanding of human development to work effectively with other disciplines and demonstrate a professional literacy commensurate with their status. This book will demonstrate how theories of human life course development inform social work practice in key areas.

Throughout it you will examine how an understanding of the theories of human life course development is necessary to establish effective partnerships with people who use social work services, with other professionals, and when using the law to protect and enhance service-users' rights. The importance of taking a biographical approach, listening to the narrative stories of individuals and their constructions of their own lives, is highlighted. This is underpinned by recognising the importance of diversity and difference. Links will be made to the skills needed at various stages of development, including communication and working with other professionals. Additionally, other key elements of the prescribed curriculum, such as the knowledge of child development and legal intervention to protect, will be incorporated. Throughout the chapters you will be encouraged to examine your own views and perspectives and to interrogate the origins of these.

The book takes a case-study approach throughout, with case studies being used to illustrate and draw out key points, to aid and reinforce learning. You will also be provided with

summaries of relevant contemporary research, suggestions for further reading and current government guidance and policy documents, all of which will give evidence for and support best practice. The emphasis in this book concerns your achieving the requirements of the curriculum and developing knowledge that will assist you in meeting the Professional Capability Standards (TCSW, 2012a) for social work.

The seven main chapters cover human development through the life course. In the first chapter you will be introduced to the reasons why knowledge and understanding of human development throughout the life course are important to social work practice. The chapter starts by outlining the importance of recognising the impact that personal values and your own life events can have upon practice. You will also consider the concept of life events and transitions. The chapter makes the links between practice and inquiries into social and health care that have come into the public domain. By introducing you to a range of theoretical approaches to human development and the significance of knowledge from other disciplines, it creates the links to the specific practice-focused chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 develops the introduction to theoretical models for understanding development across the life course. This chapter will outline the theoretical approaches commonly used by social workers and other professionals when working with people in a variety of settings, across the whole life course. The connections, similarities and differences between the theories are examined and you will compare and contrast models and apply these to practice situations. The chapter will suggest that no single theory alone can explain the complexity of human life course development. Having introduced a range of perspectives and developmental theories in this chapter, those that follow will focus on specific phases in the human life course. These practice-focused chapters will build on this introduction to theories, examining particular approaches and their usefulness to social work practice with individuals at certain age points along the developmental spectrum of their lives.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on human development and social work practice with children. They are intended to support you in developing your understanding and ability to critique theories that explain human development taking a cognitive approach, and theories taking a biological and physical perspective. In particular they explore physical, social and emotional development, including developing themes in relation to the critical issues of attachment, vulnerability and resilience. This will introduce issues in relation to child protection and related issues of legal intervention. The chapters examine the role of the family and adults, especially parents and carers, in supporting the development of children. They demonstrate how an understanding of development needs to be placed in the context of patterns of interactions – the ecological approach.

In Chapter 3 you will explore life course development knowledge in social work practice with infants, young children and their families. This chapter will set out knowledge in respect of early child development. You will examine pre-natal, peri-natal and neo-natal periods of life development and consider the relative importance of hereditary factors and environmental

factors in determining an individual's development. This chapter will specifically develop your understanding and ability to critique theories that explain human development taking a cognitive approach, and theories taking a biological or physical perspective.

Chapter 4 looks at using life course development knowledge in social work practice with older children and their families. The chapter will specifically develop your understanding and ability to critique theories that explain human development taking a systemic approach.

In Chapter 5 you will look at life course development knowledge in social work practice in respect of young people in their teenage or adolescent years. The chapter will explore issues related to the transition to adulthood and the particular significance that this may have for young people with disabilities. You will develop your understanding and ability to critique theories that explain human development taking a behavioural and social learning approach.

In Chapter 6 life course development knowledge in social work practice with people in early and middle adulthood is examined. You will focus on developing your understanding of human life course development and the significance of transitions in adult life. Drawing on situations related to adults experiencing physical disability, adults with learning difficulties and adults who have caring responsibilities, the chapter will consider how transitions present opportunities for growth and development or, conversely, potential crisis points. This chapter will specifically develop your understanding and ability to critique theories that explain life course development in stages or phases. This chapter and Chapter 7 have been developed to enable you to frame your learning in the context of current social work practice with adults and older people. Most significantly, you will read about the focus of policy and practice in services for adults and how knowledge of human life course development supports your practice within this policy context.

Chapter 7 examines ways in which an understanding of the theories of human development is necessary for effective social work practice with older people and their families. It considers older age in terms of opportunities for growth and development and addresses issues related to ageing, older age and how it is constructed in our society. An exploration of the significance of transitions in later life will enable you to consider effective ageing and end-of-life issues. This chapter will further develop your understanding and ability to critique theories that explain life course development in stages or phases.

Chapter 8 offers concluding remarks and signposts. At this stage you will be invited to review the learning outcomes set at the outset and encouraged to review your progress by charting and monitoring your learning, taking developmental needs and reflections forward to other books within the series.

## Learning features

This book is interactive. 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 your immediate learning needs can be met in the area of understanding human development and how your professional learning can be developed in your future career.

Case studies throughout the book will help you examine theories and models for social work practice. Activities have been devised that require you to reflect on experiences, situations and events and will help you review and summarise the learning undertaken. In this way your knowledge will become deeply embedded as part of your development. When you come to practise learning in an agency, the work and reflection undertaken here will help you improve and hone your skills and knowledge.

This book will introduce knowledge and learning activities for you as a student social worker to demonstrate how theories of human life course development inform social work practice in key areas.

## Professional development and reflective practice

This book places great emphasis on developing skills of reflection and analysis about, in and on practice. Reflective practice is a critical skill for social work practice that will allow you to constantly examine and improve your practice skills in the ever-changing complexity of practice situations. Critical reflection is an approach to analysing practice and experiences to identify the conscious and unconscious assumptions embedded in personal and professional practice.

### Some definitions

*We reflect in order to learn or we learn as a result of reflecting.* (Moon, 2004, p. 186)

*The goal of reflective learning is a transformation of perspective (Mezirow, 1991), a significant shift in perspective that allows professionals not only to critically review their practice, but which also helps them to work in a more responsive, creative, and ultimately more effective manner.* (Redmond, 2004, p. 1)

*Reflective practice involves the ability to be aware of the 'theory' or assumptions involved in professional practice, in order to close the gap between what is espoused and what is enacted, in an effort to improve both.* (Schön, 1991)

For Schön (1983/1987) professional knowledge involves both rules ('technical rationality') and professional action ('reflection in action'). Reflective practice therefore involves the ability to be aware of the 'theory' or assumptions involved in professional practice in order to close the gap between what is espoused and what is enacted, in an effort to improve both. A reflective approach encompasses a recognition of the intuitive, the artistic and the creative



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