Developing Knowledge & Skills for Child & Family Social Work

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Professionalism

(Continued)

5.15 Communication skills
5.17 Skills in personal and professional development

See Appendix 2 for a detailed description of these standards.

Introduction

In this first chapter we will begin to, in relation to social work, explore the meaning of profession, professional and professionalism. Such exploration is essential because as you set out on your journey undertaking the social work degree, and to becoming a social worker, it is important that you gain an understanding of what is expected of you. However, what does professionalism mean? How do we 'become' professional? How do we practice professionally? These questions will be explored through activities along with exploring the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). Reference will also be made to the United Kingdom's (UK) four social work professional bodies: Social Work England (SWE) – Professional Standards (Social Work England, 2020); Wales – Practice Guidance (Social Care Wales, 2017); Scottish Social Service Council – Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers (Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), 2016); and Northern Ireland – Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers (Northern Ireland Social Care Council, 2019). Through this journey you will discover how social work involves working collaboratively with a wide range of individuals, and therefore, importance is placed on communication. You will look at different types of communication and the significance of how you conduct, and present, yourself. Social interactions and relationships form the basis of social work practice and therefore communication will be examined within this chapter along with subsequent chapters and throughout the book.

Social workers need to have a wide range of knowledge of different theories, models and perspectives along with an understanding of how these can be applied in practice. You will look at what we mean by knowledge and how knowledge can be gained in many different ways including from working with individuals with lived experiences. Three domains of the PCF – Professionalism, Context and Organisations, and Professional Leadership – will be explored with an emphasis on what represents good social work practice. This will be followed be examining what is meant by reflective and reflexive practice. Firstly, you will be introduced to the dramaturgical approach to reflection and, secondly, reflexivity will be explored through looking at how your own behaviour, mannerisms and assumptions impact on the individuals you are working with. The concepts introduced in this chapter will be developed in further chapters and therefore it is intended that here we lay the foundations of what good social work practice is.

Conduct and presentation

Earlier, we have made reference to how social workers conduct, and present, themselves. These are two different aspects: within a social work context, 'conduct' refers to professional behaviour and the expectation to meet certain standards, for example, the social work professional standards. Whereas, how we 'present' ourselves refers to our presentation of self, including how we dress, how we engage and how we interact with individuals. Here we can see how conduct and presentation of self overlap, for example, communication and language. We could present as being polite and courteous; however, our language could be offensive. This would relate to our conduct and therefore failing to adhere to the professional standards. Throughout the book, we will refer to how we present ourselves, which will include both conduct and presentation of self.

The professionalisation of social work

The professionalisation of social work has a long history; for example, Flexner (1915) concluded that social workers were not professionals, but rather mediators. Social workers did possess the expertism, but referred individuals to professionals such as doctors for medical reasons and teachers for education. Within current social work practice, this is referred to as networking, working in partnership and working collaboratively. Drawing on other professional's expertism provides a more thorough, and evidenced-based, assessment; this will be discussed in Chapter 7. The historical context can also be explored through books such as Timms and Timms (1977). Timms and Timms include three thought-provoking chapters that ask: does social work work?, what should a social worker be able to do?, and what should a social worker know? These are three important questions that are as relevant today as when the book was first written. These will be explored within this chapter and throughout the book. We will return to these three questions as we draw the book to a close. Another interesting book that provides a historical, and also political, context is Jordan (1984). Here Jordan invites us to the 'academic discipline' of social work noting that it is not the same as many other academic disciplines but rather a

> *practical activity, in which the personal qualities of the worker may be as important as the knowledge he or she possesses; in which how the worker acts and communicates may be as significant as what he or she decides to do; and the success or failure of which can be evaluated from several different perspectives.*

(Jordan, 1984, p. 1)

Activity 1.1

Thinking about the term 'personal qualities', how would you describe personal qualities? Write down four examples of what you understand by personal qualities in relation to your daily life.
Ask yourself why these personal qualities are important in your relationships with other people? For example, family, friends, work colleagues.

Comment

You may have identified the importance of how you present yourself and how you communicate with others, such as do you present yourself as being confident, knowledgeable and approachable, do you listen to what people say, do you consider their different perspectives, and do you consider the words you use when in conversation with other people? These qualities and characteristics will be explored further within this chapter and throughout the book.

For a more recent and comprehensive examination into the history of social work, including global social work, see Parker and Finch (2020), and for professional social work and social work identity, see Parker and Doel (2013). The former examines the early beginnings of social work, the poor law and the subsequent amendment, the emergence of social problems and social reforms, whereas the latter explores some of the contested meanings and developments of social work along with the history and sociological context of professionalism and professions.

Exploring the meaning of profession, professional and professionalism

The terms profession, professional and professionalism are open to interpretation. They are frequently used to describe job roles, how individuals undertake those roles or how an individual presents themselves. However, as Parker and Doel (2013) suggest, if you can act professionally, you can also act unprofessionally. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to differentiate between professional and unprofessional. Here we are guided by the PCF (British Association of Social Workers (BASW), 2018) and the UK's four social work professional bodies: SWE – Professional Standards; Wales – Practice Guidance; SSSC – Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers; and Northern Ireland – Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers (see Table 1.1). When we consider the three terms, profession, professional and professionalism, they also relate to expertise, being qualified and belonging to a professional body. However, we also need to consider how an individual may represent their profession, for example, social work. Phrases such as 'the social worker demonstrated good social work values' are frequently heard, but also consider how social workers are often represented in the media.

Activity 1.2

Thinking about the people you know and your experiences of interacting with different people, what do the terms profession, professional and professionalism mean to you? Write three sentences for each of the following:

Profession
Professional
Professionalism

Comment

Thinking about the above exercise, did you consider any specific qualities such as individual characteristics, mannerisms, behaviours, skills, job roles, qualifications or other aspects that denote a profession, being a professional or when we would use the term professionalism? What was important to you about these terms?

Activity 1.3

Following Activity 1.2, join your sentences together to form a paragraph. When writing your paragraph, consider what makes a social worker a professional, how does a social worker practice professionally and conclude your paragraph with a sentence outlining your reflections on these two final points.

Comment

In Activity 1.3, you re-visited the sentences you wrote in Activity 1.2 to create a paragraph. Here, you considered what makes a social worker a professional and how a social worker practices professionally. You concluded your paragraph with a sentence outlining your reflections on these two final points. Take one more look at your paragraph, would you add anything further? Could you now write three bullet points identifying what you intend to do, at university and during your placements, to demonstrate how you could present yourself professionally. For example, in order to develop my knowledge and understanding of professional practice I will become more aware of my actions, interactions and the manner in which I present myself. Now explain how you could become more aware. What would you need to do; how would you know when you have done it? Have you included any timescales? For example, in three months I will return to, and complete again, Activities 1.2 and 1.3 and compare my two paragraphs.

What does being a social worker mean to me

As you progress through the social work degree, such terms will become much clearer as your knowledge increases and you have a greater understanding of the social work role. As I write this book, I reflect on what these terms mean to me as a social worker. As a social worker I belong to a profession. The profession has a professional body and therefore I need to be appropriately qualified in order to register with it. To call myself a social worker, which is a protected title, I need to be qualified. As a social worker, I am observed as a professional, I represent the social work profession and therefore there is a requirement to uphold the professional body's professional standards. To uphold these standards I have responsibilities, I need to be accountable, I need to be aware of my

actions and interactions (see Table 1.1). This also includes my personal life and what is often overlooked by many people is that this includes how I use social media and thus I need to be digitally responsible (Taylor, 2017).

Professional standards

Through the Professional Standards (SWE); Practice Guidance (Wales); Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers (SSSC); and the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers (Northern Ireland), as outlined in Table 1.1, we are able to identify the importance of developing self-care skills, developing and maintaining relationships, working collaboratively, maintaining trust, developing confidence, safeguarding, promoting good practice including promoting the rights and interests of individuals, in addition to taking responsibility for our own learning and development. As you progress, you will develop your knowledge and understanding of social work practice along with the many different theories, models, perspectives and the legislative framework. You will also integrate your learning with practice experience gained through placements and thus your social work identity will begin to develop. As your journey through the social work degree course approaches the end, your identity, that of a newly qualified social worker (NQSW), will emerge as you enter the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), see Table 1.1.

Professional practice

Along with personal qualities and practicing in a professional manner, you also need to have knowledge. Shulman explains that

> professional education is not education for understanding alone; it is preparation for accomplished and responsible practice in the service of others. It is preparation for 'good work'. Professionals must learn abundant amounts of theory and vast bodies of knowledge. They must come to understand in order to act, and they must act in order to serve.
>
> (Shulman, 2005, p. 53)

As you start out on your journey, it may feel quite daunting when you think about all that you need to know. It is important to remember that knowledge can be gained in many different ways including experience. We have now started to identify that a social worker needs both personal qualities, which facilitate acting professionally, and knowledge, in order to undertake the role of a social worker. We have introduced the terms profession, professional and professionalism. Such terms may exemplify characteristics, qualifications, knowledge and experience. Shulman (2005) suggests that professional education is preparation for responsible practice. Responsible practice includes presentation of self and commitment to studying and self-development. We will add to this as we progress through the chapters. Figure 1.1 places preparation for professional practice into context.

Table 1.1 UK social work professional standards; practice guidance; codes of practice for social service workers and employers; standards of conduct and practice for social workers

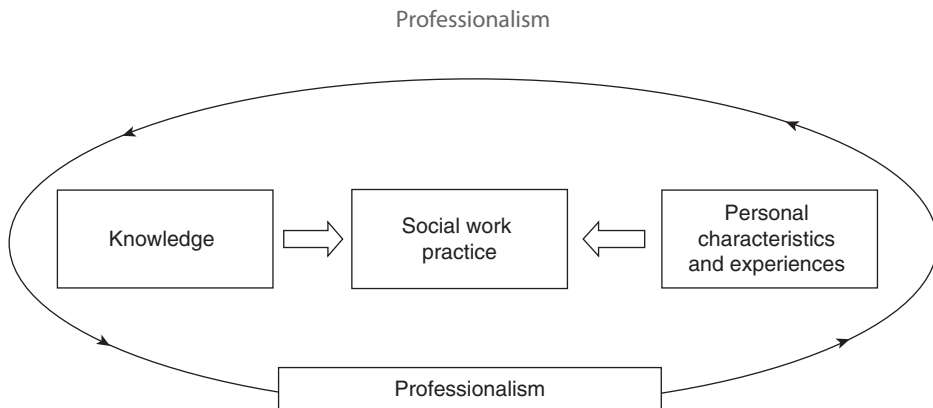| Social work England – Professional standards	Wales – Practice guidance	Scottish social service council – Codes of practice for social service workers and employers	Northern Ireland – Standards of conduct and practice for social workers
Promote the rights, strengths and well-being of people, families and communities.	Person-centred social work.	As a social service worker, I must protect and promote the rights and interests of people who use services and carers.	As a social worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests and well-being of service users and carers.
Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of people.	Good social work practice.	As a social service worker, I must create and maintain the trust and confidence of people who use services and carers.	As a social worker, you must strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.
Be accountable for the quality of my practice and the decisions I make.	Safeguarding individuals.	As a social service worker, I must promote the independence of people who use services while protecting them, as far as possible, from danger and harm.	As a social worker, you must promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm.
Maintain my continuing professional development.	Developing and managing self.	As a social service worker, I must respect the rights of people who use services, while striving to make sure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.	As a social worker, you must respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.
Act safely, respectfully and with professional integrity.	Working with colleagues.	As a social service worker, I must uphold public trust and confidence in social services.	As a social worker, you must uphold public trust and confidence in social care services. As a social worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.
Promote ethical practice and report concerns.	Contributing to service improvement. Good conduct.	As a social service worker, I am accountable for the quality of my work and will take responsibility for maintaining and improving my knowledge and skills.	As a social worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests and well-being of service users and carers.

Figure 1.1   Preparation for professional practice

Professional capabilities framework

Following an exploration of profession, professional and professionalism, let's introduce the PCF (British Association of Social Workers (BASW), 2018). The PCF is a framework for nine levels of social work in England (see Appendix 1). There are four pre-qualifying levels: Point of Entry, Readiness for Practice, End of First Placement and End of Last Placement. The remaining five levels are all qualifying levels. There are nine domains and three super domains. Each super domain is placed above three domains; however, they also relate to the other domains and therefore all of the domains are interwoven. All of the domains directly relate to social work practice. The PCF domains are illustrated as a fan; see Appendix 1. As we work through the chapters, we will continue to make reference to the PCF domains and how they relate to practice. We will not refer to the full domain level descriptors; these can be accessed on the BASW website. Additionally, BASW also includes the 'Digital Capabilities Statement for Social Work', which is a 'framework to guide practice. It identifies the knowledge, skills and values social workers need to develop their use of digital technology in practice' (BASW).

Activity 1.4

Go to the BASW website and look at the PCF level descriptor for Professionalism. Can you identify the similarities and differences between the different levels (Point of Entry, Readiness for Practice, End of First Placement and End of Last Placement/Completion)?

Comment

On closer inspection of the PCF domain Professionalism, firstly, we can see that we need to 'identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional

development'. In Activity 1.1 you identified the various characteristics relating to profession, professional and professionalism. Within this domain you can see the need to identify and behave professionally, in addition to being committed to continuing professional learning and development. As we work across the columns of the domain, we can see the four levels and the level descriptors below each level. At entry level you are expected to be able to demonstrate an initial understanding of social work and have commitment to becoming a social worker, in addition to recognising your own strengths, initial understanding of the importance of self-care and to take responsibility for your own learning. With each level, the expectations and responsibilities increase; however, your knowledge and understanding should also increase through your academic studies, practice experience gained through placements and reflecting on your studies and practice, thus integrating your learning.

Activity 1.5

Return to Activity 1.3, and the paragraph you wrote, now take a look at the PCF domain Professionalism and see if you can identify any characteristics, phrases or commonalities between your observations and the similarities and differences you noted in Activity 1.4.
Return to your paragraph, is there anything you would add or remove, if so, why?

Comment

Through these activities you are beginning to identify the characteristics of a professional social worker including how you should present, communicate and be committed to continuing professional development. Following Activity 1.5, it is observed that these attributes are a requirement and as such a social worker needs to demonstrate professional integrity and accountability at all times.

The importance of communication

Relationships

Professionalism, and particularly how a social worker presents themselves in terms of their presentation, demeanour, reliability, honesty and respectfulness along with communicating with others, is essential in building and maintaining relationships. Wonnacott (2012) describes social work as involving 'the capacity to develop and maintain relationships, manage the emotional dimension of the work and make judgements and decisions, often in the light of conflicting information' (p. 13). Trevithick (2012) observes that relationship building is based 'on the knowledge, skills, values and qualities, which social workers bring to the work' (p. 164). We are able to identify aspects of both of these quotations within the PCF domains. When we think about how

a social worker presents themselves, consideration should be given to communication, which is essential in not only building relationships but also ending relationships. Ending relationships appropriately is a must. When working with children and their parents you need to discuss timescales, how long will you be working with them, and endings. Your assessment and intervention will be time limited. This is important when working with children who could become attached and distressed when suddenly they realise that you are no longer involved. Parents also need to be informed. Therefore, it is vitally important to discuss the piece of work to be undertaken with clarity, openness and honesty. Additionally, you do not want to create an attachment and/or dependency, but rather independence. Here we see the importance of communication skills. Communication could be described as either verbal or non-verbal; see Figure 1.2.
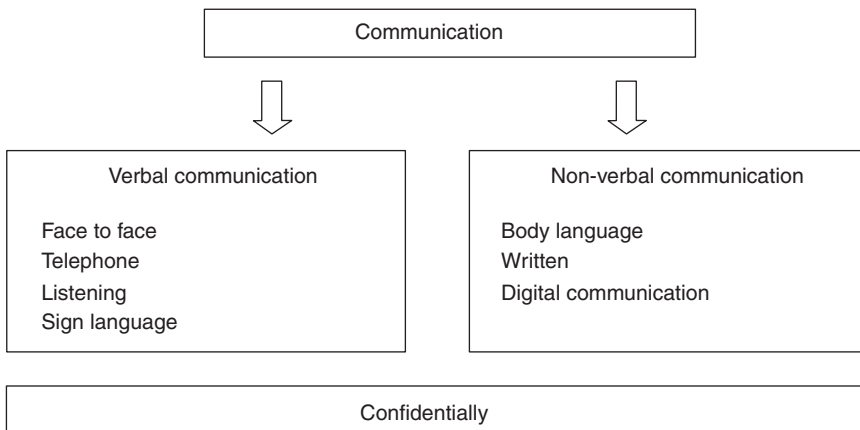
Figure 1.2 Communication

Communication skills

Communication and interpersonal skills are significant within social work. A social worker needs to articulate clearly and succinctly what they have to say using words that are understood by all the individuals they are working with (Koprowska, 2020). Whether meeting someone for the first time, or when you have built a relationship with an individual, you need to be mindful of verbal and non-verbal communication, listen attentively and clarify your understanding of what they have said, what has been discussed and agreed. The words you use, how you say something and the manner in which you say it, along with your body language all play a part in effective communication. You will develop these skills through academic engagement and during your placements.

Acronyms

When we are communicating, the use of acronyms can be confusing, misleading and misinterpreted. Many individuals will not be familiar with a series of letters and thus,

what the acronym stands for. Other professionals might have the same acronym, but it means something completely different. Imagine attending a multi-agency meeting and the following acronyms are being used, what do they mean?

- CAMHS
- CSE
- MARAC
- PIES
- SCR

A list of acronyms can be found at the beginning of the book.

Euphemisms

Another confusing and misleading aspect of communication is euphemisms. Fearnley (2012) observes that 'the language adopted when communicating with children about their parent's illness strongly influences how they begin to make sense of what is happening or conversely how they make mis-meaning from the situation' (p. 42). This quotation is about working with children in a very specific situation, but it illustrates the importance of the language we use. Therefore, it is essential that communication, verbal and non-verbal including written or digital forms, is clearly, sensitively and effectively articulated. We can see that without effective communication there is the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation and actions or interactions might not be appropriately implemented. Consequently, children may be placed at risk of significant harm. Significant harm will be explored in Chapter 6.

Confidentiality

With regards to communication and being professional, another important factor to consider is that of confidentiality. This includes sharing information (see the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)), and therefore it is important to be aware of where we are, who we are with and who can hear what is being talked about. The Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-Agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children 2018 (HM Government, 2020), discussed in Chapter 6, provides a comprehensive guide to sharing information. Sharing of information includes verbally, written and through digital formats.

Case study

You are on a train, the carriage is full, and a male makes a telephone call. His voice is loud and although you are a few seats away you can hear every word. You are reading a book, but are distracted by the telephone call. The male refers to himself as Doctor Forrest, and states which hospital he is a based at. He begins talking about a patient and

(Continued)

(Continued)

although the details are sparse, you think to yourself I do not need to know about the patient, and you continue to read. The doctor then makes a second telephone call and discusses another patient. He refers to the patient's name, you stop reading your book, the patient's diagnosis is discussed and this time the information is in much more detail.
What are your immediate thoughts?
How would you feel if it was one of your family members or a friend he was talking about?

Comment

The doctor is sharing information inappropriately, breaching confidentiality and acting unprofessionally. If this information was about a family member you might contact them to express your feelings about their diagnosis. What if they had not yet been informed of the diagnosis? What if they were aware of the diagnosis, but had decided not to inform family members? This provides an example of the importance of being self-aware when discussing service user's information and that it should not occur in any public space or place. Another location to think about is the communal area of lifts in public buildings. Imagine the following scenario – two colleagues returning to the office following a meeting discuss the outcomes in the lift. Who else is in the lift? Do they need to know? Be conscious, self-aware and remember the Data Protection Act (2018) only share information that is appropriate and where confidentiality is assured.

Communication in practice

Communication is essential when working with individuals, building networks and working in organisations. Communication, relationship building and networking are all important skills. Additionally, we need to consider self-management, for example, being aware of, and regulating our emotions, considering our value base, assumptions and beliefs. These are all areas identified within the PCF domain Context and Organisations. This domain refers to engaging, informing and adapting to changing organisational contexts. There is also reference here to how policy and social environments shape practice along with the need to work effectively, contribute to the development of organisations and services. Here you see the significance of multi-agency and inter-professional working, this will be explored further in Chapter 6. We can also begin to see the relationship between the two domains Professionalism and Context and Organisations.

Presentation of self

Presentation of self is evident within both the Professionalism and Context and Organi-sations domains. If communication is crucial in relationship building, it also needs to be acknowledged that sometimes social workers need to challenge other individuals. This

needs a calm, sensitive approach; attentively listening to their perspectives while at the same time providing a clear rationale for their involvement, their intervention and what will happen next. This is a skill that will develop with experience. A suggestion for developing your skills would be to observe how social workers and other professionals challenge. This might include listening to what questions they ask to gather information, raise concerns and how they apply, and articulate, policies and procedures in practice. You need to develop a professional curiosity, a critical questioning approach, asking the why, what, when and how questions to gain knowledge and understanding. Additionally, social workers have a role in shaping and challenging organisational structures. This will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Professional leadership

The PCF domain Professional Leadership includes promoting the profession and good social work practice, along with taking responsibility for your learning and development. Also included in this domain is sharing, supporting and working collaboratively to assist others in their learning and development. Social work is a multi-disciplinary profession and therefore, as we talked about earlier, a social worker needs a wide range of knowledge, but also the ability to apply that knowledge in practice and share with others. The PCF domain Knowledge states:

Develop and apply relevant knowledge from social work practice and research, social sciences, law, other professional and relevant fields, and from the experience of people who use services.

Exploring knowledge in the context of social work

Social work is multi-disciplinary

It can be seen that social workers develop knowledge through many different sources including through experiences and from individuals with lived experiences. It is important that we recognise and acknowledge that we can learn from these individuals when we listen to their experiences, stories and their journey to where they are today, and take time to talk to them. As you progress through your journey to becoming a social worker, you will begin to understand that social work is a multi-disciplinary profession and as such draws on many different disciplines; some of these are identified in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Social work draws on many different disciplines

Anthropology	Philosophy
Economics	Politics
Law	Psychology
Leadership and management	Social Policy
Neuroscience (a subdivision of biology)	Sociology

This is not an exhaustive list, but does begin to show the broad range of disciplines that informs social work practice, many of which have subfields. For example, cultural anthropology, social anthropology, community psychology, social psychology and cognitive psychology are all relevant to social work. As you begin your social work journey, it would be useful to explore these along with identifying others. For example, social anthropology examines how people live in the contemporary world, social psychology studies the behaviour of individuals in their social and cultural settings, and the various fields of philosophy explore ethics, morals and logic – the reasoning informing our arguments. These three areas alone provide a wealth of knowledge and understanding of how people live. They provide insights into behaviour, ethics, morals and reasons for the way they live as they do, in addition to providing an explanation to why they might behave in certain ways. When exploring different theories, models and perspectives always think critically about their strengths, limitations and unpinning philosophy 'a sceptical, analytic or questioning approach taken to the theories and models rather than simple acceptance' (Parker, 2020, p. 86).

Accumulating knowledge

As you read this, you may be asking where do we accumulate such knowledge from. Knowledge can be gained through different ways including academic studies, reading, reflection, experience and through talking to, and working with, different individuals. Knowledge can be defined as being explicit or tacit (Trevithick, 2012, Teater, 2020).

Table 1.3 Knowledge – explicit and tacit

Explicit knowledge	Tacit knowledge
Theories	'Gut' feelings
Models	Emotions
Approaches	Insights
Perspectives	Intuition
Policies and proceedings	Observations
Legislation	Experiences

Again, this is not an exhaustive list; however, what we can observe is that explicit knowledge underpins a social worker's practice, for example, child development theory, task-centred model, systemic practice approach and strengths perspective.

Tacit knowledge has the potential to influence a social worker's practice; however, a significant difference is that explicit knowledge is usually, but not always, based on fact, evidence or theory. A process has been undertaken to ascertain the facts. With tacit knowledge we need to think about how a 'gut' feeling or an emotion can be evidenced. Therefore, we can begin to see the importance of integrating theory to practice. Nevertheless, both explicit and tacit knowledge may contribute towards meaning-making, making sense of different circumstances and situations and making

decisions. We also need to acknowledge that a social worker would not go to court and report a 'feeling'; for example, 'I felt that the child was at risk', factual evidence would be required. A social worker may feel that a child is at risk, but it is through the assessment process, discussed in Chapter 7, that they gather the evidence to demonstrate how the child is at risk. The social worker would need to be aware of confirmation bias. In other words, the evidence needs to be factual and not biased towards proving the child was at risk to illustrate the initial feelings were correct. We will explore these areas further as we progress through the chapters.

What should a social worker know?

We will now return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: what knowledge should a social worker know? The Knowledge and Skills Statement for Child and Family Practitioners (Department for Education, 2018) identifies ten areas of what a social worker should know:

1. Relationships and effective direct work
2. Communication
3. Child development
4. Adult mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, physical ill health and disability
5. Abuse and neglect of children
6. Child and family assessment
7. Analysis, decision-making, planning and review
8. The law and the family and youth justice systems
9. The role of supervision
10. Organisational context

We have touched on many of these areas already and as we progress through the book we will return to and make links to others. We will also make connections between the Knowledge and Skills Statement, PCF and Professional Standards. As Shulman (2005) noted, 'professionals must learn abundant amounts of theory and vast bodies of knowledge' (p. 53), but how do we learn such amounts of knowledge?

Walker et al. (2008), although writing about practice education, provide an excellent resource for social work students. Chapter 2, *What Is Learning*, includes the continuous spiral of professional development and learning. The continuous spiral takes you on a learning journey, developing confidence, new knowledge, increasing understanding, embedding this knowledge in practice, exploring new ideas, generating and engaging in debate and identifying areas for further development.

Professional development

Applying such an approach to your learning will enable you to gain a greater understanding of different theories, models and perspectives. Through a process of reading, critical reflection and debate, learning will be consolidated. Additionally, through making links between modules studied at university, and practice experience gained during placements, practice becomes underpinned by theory and embedded within a legislative

framework. It is important to remember that social work also has a human dimension and thus it is inevitably that building, maintaining and ending relationships will also be determined by your own presentation of self. Therefore, there is an element of learning about oneself, questioning your own values, feelings and emotions and how these might influence your own practice. This relates to the PCF; 'recognise the impact my own values and attitudes can have on relationships with others' (PCF domain Values and Ethics). This will be explored further in Chapter 2. Additionally, we need to have an understanding of the wider issues, such as social, economic and political, which affect organisations, communities and individuals including children, young people and families.

Professional leadership

What we have been exploring lies within the PCF domain Professional Leadership. Within this domain we can see that importance is placed on the promotion of good social work practice; 'we develop and show our leadership, individually and collectively, through promoting social work's purpose, practices and impact' (BASW, 2018). When we talk about professional development, we are referring to continuing professional growth, learning and development. Earlier in the chapter we referred to the social work degree as a journey and it is this journey that will enable you to learn about yourself, work collaboratively and develop professionally.

Reflective and reflexive practice

Reflection

Critical reflection is a significant part of the journey of professional development and social work practice. Through the process of reflection, you will be able to think about what you have done and why. This might include thinking about a conversation, an event, activity or intervention. Some of your reflections might include asking yourself whether you did it in such a way because you were taught to do it that way, because you have always done it that way or because you do not know any other way of doing it. When thinking about these questions, you may see that how you approached a situation might have been the best way, the only way; however, on reflection, there might be other ways of doing it. Critically reflecting on what you did, why, how and what was underpinning your work will enable you to evaluate and learn from the experience. The process of reflection is shown in Figure 1.3.
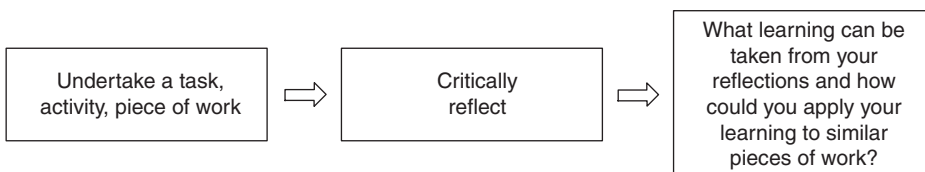

Figure 1.3 Process of critical reflection

Reflection may be undertaken alone such as writing a reflective account or with others during discussions, tutorials and supervision sessions. However, and importantly, it is the learning taken from those reflections that is significant. This is why it is very important to record those reflections and by doing so you are able to record the learning taken from the situation, along with the subsequent action plan of how you are going to implement the learning and again the reflections on the learning and action plan. Many people find that a learning journal is an excellent resource to record their reflections, actions and development. Here we can begin to see a cycle of reflection. There are many different models of reflection including Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988) and Schön (1983) (see Mantell and Scragg, 2019). When qualified you will need to demonstrate continuing professional development through critical reflection for SWE and re-registration.

Dramaturgical approach to reflection

I would like to introduce you to the dramaturgical approach to reflection. This approach of reflection is a fluid model, which encourages deeper reflection in many different dimensions. The dramaturgical model of social interaction is most associated with Goffman. Goffman's seminal text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959/1990) applies a theatrical language to everyday life and refers to individuals as actors who perform. Goffman uses the terms scripts, scenes, front stage and back stage, all of which you will recognise as being the language of the theatre. The 'dramaturgic' relates to self, to social interactions and how we as individuals perform to the wider world – the front stage (to an audience) or the back stage (when we are not performing to an audience). Goffman observes how individuals perform.

> *The perspective employed in this report is that of the theatre performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones. I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may not do while sustaining his performance before them.*
>
> (Goffman, 1959, p. xi).

> *It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role … It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.*
>
> (Park, R. E. 1950, Race and Culture, Illinois: The Free Press, p. 249 – cited in Goffman, 1990)

> *In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an*

integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons.

(Park, R. E. 1950, Race and Culture, Illinois: The Free Press, p. 249 – cited in Goffman, 1990).

These three quotations epitomise the suggestion that we are all performers. Every day we are performing to a wide range of audiences, at home, with friends and at work.

Activity 1.6

Think for a moment how you perform with those individuals you feel comfortable with? Does your performance change if another individual joins you – maybe someone you know or maybe someone you don't know? For example, think about the following scenario:

You have arranged to meet a group of friends in a local café. The group is well established and you all get on well. While talking, another friend joins the group, however, they have brought along one of their friends, someone who you have not met before.

How do you behave with the new person in the group? How do you react? What are your thoughts, feelings, does your performance change?

Comment

Think about the social worker and their performance with a wide range of audiences. The social worker presents themselves to a family, the parents, the children, to colleagues, managers and other professionals. They work in partnership to undertake and complete assessments. The social worker might have to present their findings at court. For each performance:

- the script will have variations;
- the language used may differ as the characters change, for example, the parents, children, professionals or when addressing a judge;
- each individual playing a different role;
- venues may change; and
- in each environment, there is the potential for the audience to change.

The dramaturgical model is illustrated through a series of scenarios. We will explore each of these in relation to the social work role. This is illustrated in Figure 1.4.

The script

Language

Characters / actors

Roles

Venue

Audience

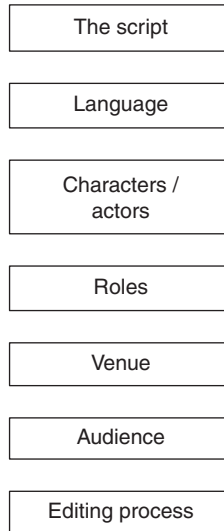| Editing process |
| --- |

Figure 1.4   Dramaturgical model

The script – placing the event, situation, circumstance into context. The telephone call, the home visit, the direct work with the child. The script sets the scene; this may be a referral, additional information or a report. It could also be the assessment.

The language – the social worker needs to consider language, avoid jargon, acronyms, colloquialisms and euphemisms and articulate clearly the purpose of their involvement, reasons for actions, recommendations and what will happen next. The social worker may adapt their language for the parents, children, colleagues, managers and other professionals. Language also refers to tone, level and the manner in which the words are spoken. Also consider both verbal and non-verbal communication, written communication and body language.

The characters/actors – who's involved. Within any situation, it is likely that there will be many different characters/actors. For example, the social worker, their manager, other team members, parents, children, grandparents, wider family members, friends, senior managers/directors, other professionals, judges, lawyers, barristers, foster carers, the list is endless. We can see therefore that the social worker performs to a wide range of audiences, and how they perform is dependent on the script. Within each performance they need to take into consideration their language during that performance. There are many different tools available for identifying family composition and support networks, some of these will be explored in Chapter 7. We also need to note that each individual will be performing and therefore, as Goffman (1959/1990) suggests, the performance will be what that individual wants us to see, the impression they wish to give; the front stage. However, we also need to consider the back stage and what the performers are not saying, doing or maybe hiding from us. These areas will be examined through a case study in Chapter 7.

The roles – within any given situation there are always a number of individuals, each playing their role. For example, each member of the family, parents, children, maybe

grandparents, have their role to play within the context of family life, here we can observe a myriad of interconnected relationships, which the social worker needs to be aware of, recognise and acknowledge. The social work role is complex, there are many different roles including undertaking assessments, protecting and safeguarding, supporting and advocating on behalf of children and adults and at times simultaneously. We also need to remember that social workers do not work in isolation, but within an inter-professional and multi-agency approach and as such work in partnership with other professionals too. We will explore these areas in greater detail in Chapter 6. Once again, we can see a myriad of interconnected relationships.

The venue – including the setting, environment, location. The social worker may be undertaking their role in many different settings including the office, the family home, a school, a hospital, a court. Each venue may have its own etiquette. In the family home the social worker needs to respect the family's space while at the same time undertake their work such as completing an assessment. The courtroom will have its own customs. It requires a dress code to be followed, a way of addressing the judge, the barristers and other members of the courtroom. As the venue changes, the expectations may change, the language may change and the social worker might add clarity to the initial script, present their assessment or evidence. Whatever the venue, it is important to remember confidentiality as discussed previously.

The audience – the audience is the individual or individuals who the social worker is working with, or addressing. Each individual, character/actor, plays their role, their performance may vary depending on the audience and on the other characters/actors. The venue may change. The language may differ as the social worker presents themselves to others. The social worker recognises, acknowledges and values the audience whether they are presenting information to an individual or a group of individuals during a meeting. Through experience, the social worker becomes skilled in articulating information clearly and succinctly and is able to present to the audience in a non-judgemental manner, using language that is not patronising, and which is easy to understand. It is always important to remember the professional standards by which we work, and thus the social worker should always be respectful, polite and courteous; and at all times be professional, as they represent the profession and demonstrate professionalism.

The editing process – the social worker will edit their communication, their language, their presentation of self, depending on the message they wish to convey. This will include verbal, non-verbal and/or written. The social worker reports an edited version to their manager of what they observed during a home visit, what the parents reported and what the children reported. They write an edited version of their case notes, chronology, assessment and report. While this editing is undertaken using a different language for the various audiences, the information must remain factual so that consistent information is being presented.

The dramaturgical approach in practice

A key strength of the dramaturgical approach is the emphasis on thinking about the different contexts, roles and environments the social worker might experience within practice. As we make our way through the book, this approach will become much clearer

as we refer to the scenarios while considering the different topics in each chapter. This approach to reflection is typically used for reflecting on practice, doing something, for example, following a home visit or the completion of an assessment. The latter, for example, would include breaking down the whole assessment process, considering each of the seven scenarios in relation to your practice and critically reflecting on the what, why, when and how you did every piece of work that contributed to the assessment. This would identify what worked, what did not work as you expected, what you would do differently next time and areas for further development. Within the book we will use this approach of reflection to plan how you might undertake a piece of work, for example, what you might consider prior to the home visit. On placement, for example, you could use this model of reflection to plan a piece of work, such as gathering wishes and feelings when working with a child, and again reflect on the work undertaken. In Chapter 5, we will explore this approach to reflection in more detail.

Reflexivity

Another significant factor to consider when thinking about professionalism is that of reflexivity. Critical reflexivity includes examining the role of emotions and how emotions might influence our practice and decision-making (Ingram, 2013). Reflexivity, according to Cunliffe (2004), 'means examining critically the assumptions underlying our actions, the impact of those actions, and from a broader perspective, what passes as good management practice' (p. 407).

What Cunliffe is describing is relevant to social work. The 'good management practice' of social work includes social work values, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice along with having an awareness of one's mannerisms, behaviour and presentation of self and the potential impact these aspects may have on others. Therefore, a critically reflexive social worker is one who questions and self-examines their own assumptions, values, beliefs and presentation of self on others. They apply a critical questioning approach evaluating their actions and interactions including verbal and non-verbal communication and their relationships with others. The good management of practice also aligns with the PCF domain Professional Leadership.

The social worker who is critically reflexive 'draws upon very different ways of thinking about the nature of reality' (Cunliffe, 2004, p. 408). The good management of social work practice is therefore how we present, manage our practice and maintain our professional development. This is congruent with the professional standards, PCF and Knowledge and Skills Statement for Child and Family Partitioners. According to D'Cruz et al. (2007), there are three variations of the meaning of reflexivity. The first variation relates to the individual's ability to process information and create knowledge. This relates to the social worker's ability to understand information, knowing what processes to follow and generating knowledge for the purpose of knowing the next course of action. For example, the social worker thoroughly understands the referral, the purpose of their involvement and what they need to do next, and why, and through the assessment process is able to generate new knowledge and understanding in relation to the situation and circumstances in which they are working. The second variation describes reflexivity as an individual's self-critical approach. The individual questions

their beliefs and assumptions and explores the world around them from multiple per-spectives. They apply a self-examining approach to what they are doing including why and how. They also explore power between relationships including relationships between individuals and between individuals and organisational structures. The third variation examines how emotions influence a social worker's practice.

The reflexive social worker

The reflexive social worker is likely to have a greater understanding of how they present themselves and how their emotions might influence their ability to build, develop and maintain relationships. The critically reflexive social worker is able to explore the moral dimensions of their work ensuring that their practice and subsequent decision-making is ethical and supported by factual evidence. These dimensions are interwoven throughout the professional standards, PCF and Knowledge and Skills Statement for Child and Family Practitioners. How we present ourselves, our behaviours, attitudes, approaches and per-spectives might be instinctive, but they can also be learnt. Additionally, we need to ensure confidentiality, consider the information we are sharing and how we are presenting ourselves and how we are using social media and being digitally responsible (Taylor, 2017). As a social worker we need to promote good social work values and demonstrate commitment to challenging, promoting and empowering individuals (see Table 1.3).

The social work degree includes placements. The integration of the academic learning and practice experience is essential in the preparation for professional practice. We also need to be able to critically reflect on our practice and remind ourselves that if we can act professionally, we can also act unprofessionally (Parker and Doel, 2013). Building on Figure 1.1, we can add communication and becoming a reflective and reflexive social worker. We are now beginning to identify the foundations of professional social work practice – see Figure 1.5.
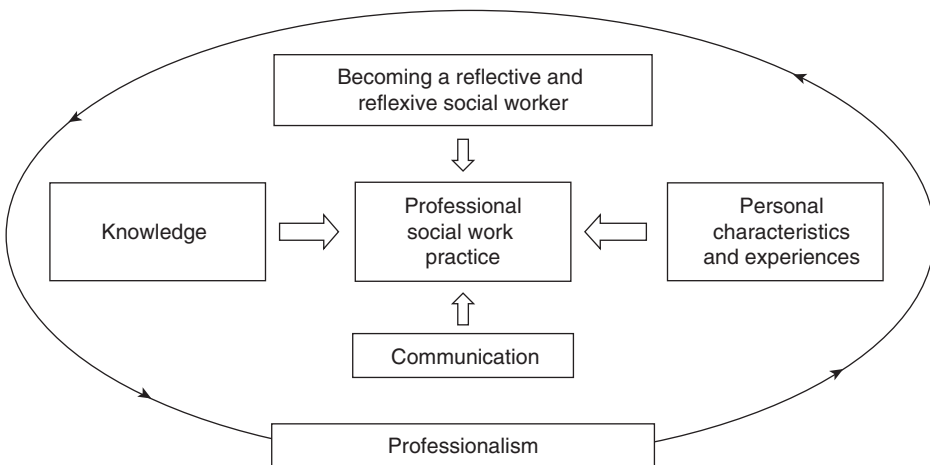

Figure 1.5 Foundations of professional social work practice

Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have introduced and started to explore some of the key features relating to professional, profession and professionalism. We have made links to the professional standards, PCF and Knowledge and Skills Statement for the Child and Family Practitioner. We have started to explore the significance of communication, the importance of knowledge and becoming a reflective and reflexive social worker. The next chapter will explore values and ethics relating to social work and therefore will build on, and develop, some of the concepts identified in this chapter, for example, communication, knowledge and good social work practice.

Further reading

Koprowska, J (2020) *Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Social Work*. London: Sage/ Learning Matters.

This book explores the communication and interpersonal skills needed for social work practice. This includes non-verbal communication, emotional expression and working with children and families. Chapters also explore communication skills in relation to working with individuals with additional needs along with group working, involuntary service users and hostility.

Parker, J (ed.) (2020) *Introducing Social Work*. London: Sage/Learning Matters.

Each of the chapters in this edited book considers social work knowledge, skills and practice. The book explores social work theory and methods, integrates theory and practice and includes specific areas of social work practice. This book provides a comprehensive introduction to social work practice from different perspectives.

Useful websites

BASW: https://www.basw.co.uk/social-work-training/professional-capabilities-framework-pcf.

BASW: https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/publications-policies-and-reports/digital-capabilities-social-workers.