

## Introduction

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**W**E ARE PLEASED to introduce this book to you, the reader, and we invite you to read it critically, creatively and constructively. You may ponder why, given that there are many books on social work practice methods, you should read this one. This is a book with a difference. Generally, social work literature is dominated by theory and practice issues, and practice and theory or thinking and doing, and doing and thinking. These are important, but they are mostly bereft of being. The main focus of this book is how to conceptualise and apply being in social work practice along with thinking and doing. We strongly believe that conscious and explicit use of being enhances the quality of social work practice. So the motto of the book is how to improve oneself and practise better by focusing on being.

This is not to suggest that social workers and social work practice are not doing well. More than a century of professional social work presence in the world – and its continuous spread – testifies to its need and the quality of work performed by thousands of social workers. However, what seems to dilute that effort or make it inadequate is the ever-growing social problems and needs, increased complexity and a ‘patchwork’ of responses to those problems. Poverty, unemployment, increasing inequality, inbuilt and entrenched structural exploitation at a global scale (e.g. the global financial crisis, outsourcing of work, the migration of capital to the detriment of labour, all under the ideological umbrella of market forces, managerialism, liberalisation and privatisation) on the one hand and, as a consequence, increasing social instability and risk, drug, alcohol and mental health issues, homelessness, family disorganisation or breakdown, child abuse and neglect, youth unemployment, gender discrimination, domestic violence, the situation of the disabled and the elderly on the other hand, seem to suggest that we need something more than thinking and doing and doing and thinking, theory and practice and practice and theory.

Such social problems and needs are complex both at macro and micro levels. At all levels, including individual, family and community, they need complex responses in terms of commitment, judgement and decisions. Instrumental approaches appear effective, but they are failing in many ways. We believe building being along with

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thinking and doing will strengthen the social worker and the social work profession to take bold steps, to take right decisions and to pursue them to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities, and society in general. Towards that goal, this book has attempted to develop the concept of being and a reflective social work practice model that blends thinking, doing and being. It also demonstrates the application of the model across social work practice methods, such as work with individuals and families, groups, communities, human services organisations and social work research.

### ■ Readership

This book is based on our practice in social work and teaching experience in the Bachelor of Social Work, Master of Social Work and related human-services courses. Its content is relevant to educators and students of social work, social welfare and human services. It is equally interesting and useful to social work practitioners, youth/welfare/human services workers and trainers, in both government and non-government organisations. It can be used as a textbook in social work theory and practice courses and/or subjects, and it can also be used as an important reference in the relevant social work methods subjects, depending upon the need. Although most of the examples are drawn from the Australian context, the reflective social work practice model blending being, thinking and doing can be used in any country's context. Hence the scope of the book is global.

### ■ Organisation

The book is organised into eight chapters. Recapitulating historical roots and definitions of social work, chapter 1 presents our understanding of contemporary social work practice and discusses the concepts of thinking, doing and being. It shows how being is neglected in social work and needs to be strengthened. By discussing conceptual and theoretical aspects of reflective practice, in chapter 2 we develop the reflective social work practice model that blends being, thinking and doing. It also includes an analytical framework that explicitly captures being in various phases of practice. The next five chapters show the application of the reflective practice model on the methods of social work practice. Chapter 3 shows how the model is useful while working with individuals and families. The application of the model for group work practice is discussed in chapter 4. The use of the model for community practice is discussed in chapter 5. With the strength of the model, how social work research can assume an empowering, enabling and action-oriented approach is discussed in chapter 6. Chapter 7 demonstrates the application of the model in the welfare administration

and organisational context. The final chapter reflects on the contents of all seven chapters in terms of thinking, doing and being, and contemplates future directions for social work practice.

### ■ **Special features**

For pedagogical purposes, the book has some useful features. Each chapter has clearly posted learning objectives and key themes and concepts at the beginning. A summary of the chapter and questions and exercises are presented at the end. In addition, a number of reflective questions are posed in the text of the chapter, although an answer is not provided in the text for every reflective question. A social worker's thinking, doing and being related to the practice case and personal reflections are separately analysed and presented in each chapter. We believe these features should facilitate learning and teaching with ease.

### ■ **How to read this book**

The book is written in a simple and readable style to facilitate its use by students, educators and practitioners. Although the chapters are logically sequenced, readers may read any chapters according to their interest. However, we suggest that you read as follows. To have a broad overview of social work and the social work profession, and of expected social work standards and to understand the concept of thinking, doing and being, read chapter 1. To understand the meaning and variants of reflective practice, reflective practice theories, and our reflective social work practice model, read chapter 2. Some understanding of the reflective social work practice model is necessary to properly follow the content of the remaining chapters. Thus understanding the model in chapter 2 is a prerequisite for following the remaining chapters. But the model may be modified according to your practice requirements. If your social work theory and practice subject combines all the social work methods, the whole book can be used as a textbook. If you are studying each social work method as a separate subject/course, we recommend that you read it as follows: for work with individuals/casework subject/unit, read chapters 2 and 3; for a group work subject/unit read chapters 2 and 4; for a community organisation and development subject/unit read chapter 2 and 5; for a research methods subject/unit, read chapters 2 and 6; and for a welfare administration/human service organisation subject read chapters 2 and 7. To gain an understanding in summary of all chapters and future directions of social work practice, read chapter 8.

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## ■ Feedback

Peer reviewers of this book indicated that it is both introductory and in depth. It is so – as it begins from simple concepts and moves to complex issues. To some extent it is because of the nature of the subject, being, that we are looking at. We also believe that readers need to be challenged to know more with rigour. For some concepts and readings, you may need to take additional reading to facilitate a better understanding. The reviewers also commented that ‘the book provides a different perspective to social work training by emphasising the being, which is often not a focus of the training’. As reviewers have recognised and commented, we have tried something new and different, and we are conscious that it is far from perfect and that our model and the analysis of being can be improved. To better meet your needs and needs of practice with any future editions, we would appreciate your feedback on the book.

We wish you an intellectually stimulating and challenging read.



## Contemporary social work practice: thinking, doing and being

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IN THIS BOOK we attempt to develop the concept of being in the context of social work theory and practice. We will demonstrate how being can be applied across all practice methods:

- working with individuals and families
- working with groups
- working with communities
- social work research
- social services administration and management.

On the basis of our experience and reflections, we believe that the explicit development and use of being in social work strengthens both the practitioner and the practice. This emphasis on being enhances the quality of engagement with people, communities and their institutions. It can better help practitioners to meet needs and resolve issues, thereby developing stronger communities in which individuals and families can thrive.

### ■ Chapter objectives

The main objective of this chapter is to discuss contemporary social work practice in terms of broad trends in social work education, practice and the profession, and the place and importance of 'being' within it. After studying this chapter, readers should be able to reflect on the following:

- the meaning(s) of social work
- a history of social work
- broad trends in social work education and practice
- Australian social work and professional development
- the concepts of thinking, doing and being and how these are connected and/or disconnected in practice.

## ■ Main themes and concepts used

Some of the core ideas discussed in this chapter are the meaning of social work as an evolving concept and a brief history of social work. By examining the evolution and development of professional social work in the past 120 years, it identifies broad trends in social work education and practice in terms of remedial and developmental social work, as well as some emerging approaches. It then discusses how social work education and practice has evolved in Australia and contributed to these trends in social work. Further, it discusses how social work has developed as a profession. It asks whether (and how) the profession is based on thinking in terms of theory and a body of knowledge, doing in terms practice and skills, and being in terms of virtues. Reflecting on contemporary social work practice, we suggest that the concept of 'being' in social work is neglected and underdeveloped and that it does not have an explicit equal place in practice along with thinking and doing.

This chapter will cover some core concepts and terms used in social work, including Charity Organisation Society, Settlement House, clinical/remedial social work, developmental social work, profession and professional body, accreditation standards, thinking, doing and being. Although most of these concepts are discussed to some extent in this chapter, we recommend that you develop familiarity with them early on.

## ■ The meaning(s) of social work

What is social work? To begin with, we must recognise that there is no universal and singular definition of social work. However, it is important to ask the question in order to better understand one's identity as a professional social worker. There is an ongoing debate and concern about what social work is. In terms of language, the term 'social work' is not owned by the social work profession. Many people who work in communities and assist others as volunteers, community leaders, politicians, religious or spiritual leaders and so on often claim to be social workers and proudly say that they do social work. The prefix 'social' seems to make things too trivial, general or diffused.

### REFLECTIVE EXERCISE 1.1

Consider your own responses to the question: what is social work? What is your general understanding of social work?

The root of the word 'social' is found in Latin, where *socius* (noun) means not only 'ally, confederate' but also, by extension, 'sharer, partner and companion'. Its adjective *socialis* means 'of or belonging to companionship, sociable, social'. Another Latin word associated with *socius* is *socio*, which means 'to join or unite together, to associate: to do or hold in common, to share with'. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* lists four meanings for the word 'social' that emphasise respectively belonging, mutuality, group living, and activities to improve conditions of a society by addressing problems and issues (Pawar & Cox 2010a). From these meanings it is clear that the commonsense meaning of social work is work done in association or companionship for others and not for oneself. Its foundation is not individualistic but groups, sharing, mutuality and confederation.

The use of the term 'social work' and/or professional social work by professional bodies and social work practised by non-professionals and professionals has created confusion in some communities. Some people wonder about the difference between the two. Although the degree of this confusion may differ from one place to another, its existence, and its contribution to the 'social work identity issue', cannot not be denied. Has 'professional social work' departed from the original meaning of 'social'? Some social workers, both emerging and established, continue to raise the question of what is social work and whether what they are doing constitutes social work. As it is a troubling question, often producing a discomfiting response, the meaning of social work as defined by professional social work bodies keeps changing and evolving to suit the given socioeconomic, political and cultural context. For example, Gibelman (1999) shows how the social work profession in the United States developed and used different definitions of social work at different times. Similarly, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has developed, adopted and used different definitions of social work. In an earlier version, the AASW (1999) in its code of ethics stated:

The social work profession is committed to the pursuit and maintenance of human well-being. Social work aims to maximise the development of human potential and the fulfilment of human needs, through an equal commitment to: working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being and working to achieve social justice through social development and social change.

Later, in its 2010 version of the code of ethics, the AASW (2010) adopted the following social work definition agreed by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (IFSW & IASSW 2004): 'The social work profession promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles

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of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.’ Although this internationally agreed definition of social work has been adopted by the AASW, some argued that this definition of social work is individualistic, Eurocentric and universalistic, and does not make sense for some countries and cultures. Responding to these and similar criticisms, international professional bodies IFSW and IASSW called for further debate and discussion of the definition of social work. In January 2014, the IASSW (2014) board has approved the following new definition of social work:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes 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 well-being.

The inclusion of some new elements such as social development, indigenous knowledges, diversity and collective responsibility seem to be in response to the critique of the earlier definition. Looking at this evolving concept of social work, one may argue that the meaning and definition of social work will be questioned from different cultural and ideological perspectives, and the debate and discussion should continue as the meaning keeps evolving to capture what it does where, when and how. But, interestingly, such debate and questioning may not exist in ‘social work’ carried out by other people in communities (non-professional social workers). Many people and organisations in communities (e.g. volunteers, community leaders, religious leaders, faith-based organisations, and NGOs) state that they do ‘social work’, and most people and communities seem to simply accept it. Then why are we, professional social workers, so much concerned about defining and redefining social work? Are we concerned about our ‘status’ as professional social workers? Are we troubled about our boundaries? Therefore are we concerned about our identity? Do these questions focus more on ‘self’ rather than on others? It is important to reflect on these and similar questions while thinking about the meaning of social work and to contribute to further debate and the construction of meaning. Perhaps the consideration of the origins of social work might help in this meaning-making process.

### REFLECTIVE EXERCISE 1.2

Compare your own responses to the question ‘what is social work?’ with the above definitions of social work.



## ■ Origins of social work

The origins of social work are complex and controversial. The history (or histories) of the practice vary across different cultures and periods. In order to trace its origins, a critical question we need to ask is: where do we begin? The history of social work and its interpretation will be contested and articulated differently depending upon the way social work is understood and the parameters set around such an understanding. It is reasonable to assume that during different periods (ancient, medieval and modern), in different societies and communities, people and (religious) groups in formal and informal ways have been kind and helpful to each other, particularly in a crisis (Pawar 2014a).

Human history goes back thousands of years, and we may not have records of early social work practice. For example, the existence of Aborigines in Australia for thousands of years and their social work practices are not known to us. Activities like social work were carried out by religious missionaries before and during colonisation. The spread of human values such as compassion, love, kindness, generosity, sacrifice and so on can be traced in human history. Unearthing that kind of broadly understood social work history is an important research task that needs to be undertaken. However, here the origins or history of social work do not include such a past, although it is important and should be acknowledged. We discuss a one-sided history of the origins of professional social work known to us and available in the literature below.

### The Charity Organisation Society model

In the West, following the Enlightenment, reason, the Industrial Revolution, technological innovation and industrialisation, life significantly changed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Rural to urban migration, poverty, destitution, sickness and the situation of children and the elderly in urban centres in the midst of wealth creation were disturbing phenomena that attracted voluntary efforts of both individuals and organisations such as charity societies and settlement houses in the UK and USA. Both religion and rationality influenced their work as churches were significantly engaged in addressing social issues by developing children's aid societies and similar efforts to help the needy long before formal social work training began. Payne (1997) notes that casework originated in the attempts of the London Charity Organisation Society (COS), formed in 1870. The first almoner (medical social worker) was appointed in 1895. According to Rowlings (1997: 113), knowledge, skills and the value-based first school of social work were established in the UK and the Netherlands in 1896, in Germany in 1899 and France in 1907. Based on the UK's COS model, the first COS was founded in

New York in 1877, and it spread to other US cities. COSs tried to systematically organise voluntary charity efforts through 'friendly visitors' who looked into poor families and corrected individual behaviour (Leighninger & Midgley 1997: 10). The COS in New York offered the first formalised training program as a summer school in 1898. Later it became the School of Philanthropy in 1904 and School of Social Work at Columbia University. Later, several social work schools were established in the United States. In the first decade of the twentieth century, social work emerged as an occupation. Mary Richmond's role in the COS and her conceptualisation of social work and publication of the book, *Social Diagnosis* (1917) have significantly influenced the nature and development of the social work profession (Stuart 2013).

### 'Good works' and settlements

Another origin of social work may be traced to evangelical Christianity and Victorian 'good works', which had an approach of 'we care for everyone who comes'. Through this approach shelters for orphans and oppressed women were provided and university settlements were established (Payne 1997). Following London's first settlement house, Toynbee Hall, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founded Chicago's Hull House, the most famous settlement in the United States, in 1889. Settlement workers tried to organise and mobilise poor people to improve social and economic conditions by changing policies and provisions. This origin within social work is linked to community organisation and development (Payne 1997; Leighninger & Midgley 1997: 10; Stuart 2013), but has mostly remained in the background of social work education, practice and the profession.

### The casework approach

During its first twenty to thirty years, from 1890 to 1920, social work gradually became established as an occupation and profession in Western countries, and Mary Richmond's casework approach became a torch light for social work education and practice. It was a kind of consolidation period for developing social work knowledge and skills for the profession, and the consequences of World War I, among other things, lent themselves to such practice. During the following twenty to thirty years, from 1920 to 1950 or 1960, the Western social work education, casework-oriented medical model spread to many developing countries and colonies, and the model continues to dominate in the twenty-first century.

Therefore the foundation of professional social work education and training in Australia was laid under the influence of the British and the North American models. On the two models Lawrence (1976) commented: 'Although both followed