Having considered what social work consists of in Chapter 1, I want now to consider what a social worker needs in order to do a good job. A good place to start is therefore to think of an actual task that a social worker might be required to do, and consider what the social worker needs to be able to do it well.

**Exercise 2.1**

Susan is a child of six, who has spent two years of her life – including the first three months – in various foster homes, due to the difficulties her mother Frances has had in coping as a parent. The difficulties were due to Frances’ mental health problems and her ambivalent feelings towards Susan, who was the child of a rape. The current fostering episode has been going on for four months and Frances has come to a decision that she cannot care for Susan and that she wants to give her up for adoption.

*(Continued)*
The social worker required to follow through on this request is called Tom.
What would Susan and Frances want and need from Tom?

Comments

Placing older children in permanent families is difficult and carries a high risk of failure (research suggests that the chances of an adoption breakdown are in excess of 10 per cent for a child placed at Susan's age [PIU, 2000]). Susan has been experiencing changes of carer and ambivalence from her mother all her life so far. She is very unlikely to settle easily into a adoptive home. She will find it hard to trust or commit herself to new carers. She will find it hard to let go of her mother sufficiently much to make room in her heart for new carers. She may well behave in ways that are hurtful and difficult for her adopters.

Frances will of course also find the whole process extremely difficult. She may have further changes of heart. She may show her ambivalence again by simultaneously asking for Susan to be adopted and undermining the plan when it is actually happening.

Adopters will be hard to find for a child of this age, and yet it is important to find the right adopters – adopters who will be able to stay the course. There will be a lot of legal and procedural steps to go through. There will be questions about future contact between Susan and Frances. There will be other professionals with strong views about a very emotive case.

You may have come up with other ideas but here is a list, in random order, of ideas that occur to me about what Susan and Frances will need from Tom:

- Ability to listen.
- Knowledge of the adoption process.
- Unflappability and an ability to inspire confidence.
- Firmness: an ability to stick to his guns.
- Ability to convey that he is not passing judgement and to convey what Carl Rogers (1967) called 'unconditional positive regard'.
- Ability to work with children.
- Able to cope with the distress of others in a sensitive way without being overwhelmed by it.
- Strong commitment to meeting the needs of children.
- Ability to communicate.
- Realism: a determination to build a plan that will work rather than a plan that looks good but will fall apart in practice.
- Knowledge of children's needs – and in particular knowledge of children's needs in this kind of situation and the effects on children of inconsistent parenting and parental rejection.
- Awareness of the needs of parents giving their children up for adoption.
- Some understanding of the effect of mental health problems.
- Understanding of the needs of adoptive parents.
- Understanding of the emotional dynamics of the adoption process.
- Understanding of the dynamics of child placement.
- Knowledge of techniques for working with children and helping them come to terms with loss and distressing experiences.
- Ability to 'grasp the nettle' and make difficult, perhaps unpopular decisions, where these are in Susan's best interests.
- Ability to network and recruit help.
What makes a good social worker?

I am sure there are many other things that could have been added to the list above. The point I want to make now, though, is that the kinds of qualities that are needed by the social worker in Exercise 2.1 fall into several categories. Some of them are about knowledge: knowledge of the adoption system, knowledge of the effects of parenting on child development, understanding of the placement process, knowledge of techniques for working with children and so on. Some of them are about skills: ability to network and recruit help, ability to listen, ability to work with children, ability to inspire confidence and so on. Some again are about values: commitment to meeting the needs of children, non-judgemental attitude and so on.

You might feel that some of the points in my list are not about knowledge, skills or values, so much as about personal qualities (unflappability, for example). I suggest, though, that what we call personal qualities are really either skills or values that have become part of ourselves and that we bring to the job. ‘Unflappability’ is really a skill – the ability to remain calm in difficult situations – although, it is true that people with very anxious temperaments may find it hard to acquire; rather that in the same way that ball control in football is a skill, but some people have a natural aptitude for it and some do not.

Another point that you might make is that some of the most important things that Susan and Frances might need from Tom are not to do with him personally, but to do with the context in which he operates. Whatever his knowledge, skills and values, Susan and Frances would need him to be properly supervised and supported, to have adequate time, to have good administrative support and so on. At the end of this chapter, under the heading ‘realism’, I will come back to the issues raised by the real-world context in which social work is practiced, where resources are limited and practice is necessarily constrained as a result.

Knowledge, skills and values

For reasons that I will discuss shortly, it is important to be clear that knowledge, skills and values are three different things. The nature of the difference between them can be illustrated by analogy with driving a car. The knowledge component of driving is information. To drive a car you need to know what the steering wheel, brake and accelerator do. But anyone who has ever learnt to drive a car with a manual transmission will know that there is a vast difference between knowing what you are supposed to do when you change gear and operate the clutch and actually being able to do so in a fluent way. (Or consider learning to ride a bicycle, swim, play a musical instrument or touch type. In all these cases, knowing what is required is a vastly different thing from actually being able to do it.) The actual ability to do something is a skill, and it is something quite distinct from knowledge. In fact it is possible to develop a skill without possessing knowledge. Each of us has learnt a whole range of skills in early childhood, such as the ability to speak our native language, simply by trial and error without ever having been told how, and without ever having to learn the principles involved.
Values are something else again, for you could possess all the knowledge and the skills required to drive a car and still be a bad driver, in the sense that you could drive dangerously or in a way that was inconsiderate to other road users. If someone is caught driving at twice the speed limit in a built up area, it is unlikely to be because they don’t know what the accelerator does or because they can’t find the brake, nor is it likely to be because they lack the necessary skills to use these controls. It is more likely to be because, at least at that particular moment, they chose to give priority to something other than sticking to the rules or considering the safety of themselves or others. It is about their values.

Knowledge can tell us what our choices are and what their consequences might be. Skills set limits on what choices are practicable. But when it comes to making the choice itself, this will be determined by values.

There are different kinds and levels of knowledge and skills, and there are different levels at which it is necessary to think about values. To return to my driving analogy, a degree of knowledge is required by those of us who use a car, but we do not really need to know how a car engine works. A different level of knowledge is required by those who actually repair cars. The ordinary driver also requires some skills, but not the same level of skills as are required in a rally driver or a police driver who is expected to engage in high-speed car chases as part of their job. In much the same way Tom, the social worker in Exercise 2.1, will need to apply knowledge and use skills far in excess of those that are normally needed in day to day life. His system of values will also need to be more highly developed in respect of his professional role in the sense that his job will face him with ethical dilemmas that he might never encounter in other contexts.

Life is always more complex than any theory or model. To divide the qualities required by a good social worker into knowledge, skills and values is somewhat rough-and-ready and you may be able to think of finer distinctions or identify difficult grey areas that cannot neatly be assigned to one or other of these categories. But I think it is a useful division all the same because it helps us to be clear what is at issue in any given situation. Confusion and misunderstanding can occur when we are not clear in a given situation whether we are talking about knowledge, skills or values.

One common source of confusion is between knowledge and skills. It is easy to forget that merely knowing something is not the same as being able to put it into practice. Knowing that Mrs X could do with some counselling is not the same thing as being a skilled counsellor. Knowing that the Y family are making a scapegoat of one of their children is a very far cry from having the skills needed to help the family move away from this destructive pattern of behaviour.

Another source of confusion is between knowledge questions and value questions. Knowing the degree of risk posed to Z in a given situation is one thing. Deciding what degree of risk is acceptable is quite another. The first is about knowledge; the second is about values.

Before looking at knowledge, skills and values separately you may like to consider the kinds of knowledge, skills and values that are needed in another area of social work.
Exercise 2.2

Alice Young is 88. A former librarian, she lives on her own in a detached house. She is physically rather frail and has on three recent occasions had falls and been unable to get up: on one occasion this was in the garden, on another she was in the hallway and was able to attract the attention of a passer-by by shouting, on another it was in the back of the house and it was sheer luck that her nephew, David, happened to be visiting the same day. David visits weekly. Alice has no other relatives in the area and she avoids contact with the neighbours. She can be quite aggressive if people approach her. The house is dirty and in a very poor state of repair. She has no central heating and lives most of the time in a downstairs room piled with books and papers where there is an electric fire. David has several times tried to persuade her to have some help in the home but she has always adamantly refused.

A neighbour has contacted the social services department, saying that Miss Young is not safe living on her own, because of the risk of further falls and also, it is suggested, a fire and health risk. The neighbour, Mrs Thomas, is a forceful woman who was once a magistrate and the headmistress of a local school. She insists that she represents the general opinion of the whole street when she says that Miss Young needs to be found a home where she will be with others and can be looked after. She considers that Miss Young is mentally confused and not capable of making judgements herself. She cites a retired doctor, a university professor and a solicitor as other neighbours who support her and would also like to be consulted. Mrs Thomas suggests that the role of the social services department is to kindly but firmly insist that Miss Young go into residential care.

The social worker dealing with this is Fatima. If you were Miss Young, what qualities would you want and need Fatima to have?

Comments

Powerful, forceful people such as Mrs Thomas can be quite hard to stand up to. A group of powerful people whose social position leads them to expect to have their own way can be really formidable. Therefore, among the qualities I think Fatima would need would be the ability to stick to her guns and stand up to pressure. This is partly a question of skill and partly a question of values. Fatima needs to be committed to the idea that her client is Alice Young and that it is Alice Young’s best interests that she should be thinking about.

On the other hand, the neighbour’s concerns are genuine and understandable and the neighbours need to be listened to and then helped to feel comfortable with whatever the outcome of the assessment is. So skills of empathic listening, tact, diplomacy and assertiveness are all necessary.

Such skills will also be necessary in dealing with Miss Young herself. This will be a difficult task as it sounds as if Miss Young may well be suspicious of – and resistant to – any sort of social work involvement. Fatima will need to be able to cope if Miss Young is aggressive and she will need to be able to find a way of conveying reassurance. She will also need to be able to enlist support from whatever network Miss Young has – her nephew and her GP, if no one else – and perhaps involve other professionals.

The qualities I have discussed so far are mainly to do with skills and values, but Fatima needs knowledge too. The neighbours suggest that Miss Young is ‘mentally confused’ and incapable of making her own decisions, but people often assume that elderly people are mentally confused.
when in fact they are not, particularly if they are ‘difficult’ or eccentric. Although Fatima will need to obtain medical advice on Miss Young’s mental state, she needs to have a good understanding herself of the effects and symptoms of different kinds of dementia (Alzheimer’s disease and arterio-sclerotic illness are two of the commonest causes) and how to distinguish between these and, say, the effects of isolation or of personal eccentricity.

She will also need to have a good idea of what services are available – and what services her agency would be able to fund – so that she can discuss these knowledgeably with Miss Young. (The last thing Miss Young needs is to be offered services which turn out not to be available!)

In the event that Miss Young agreed to having some support at home, Fatima would also need the skills and knowledge that are required to be a good care manager, something we will come back to in Chapter 9 (always assuming that Fatima would continue to work with the case and would not have to pass it on to another worker.)

More on knowledge

Out of knowledge, skills and values, knowledge is the easiest to write about. In principle you can acquire knowledge from a book but in respect of skills and values, a book can only ever provide pointers and suggestions.

Earlier on in this chapter, when I used the analogy of driving a car to explain the difference between knowledge, skills and values, I suggested that the knowledge part of driving a car is knowing about the controls and how they work. Of course there not much comparison between the fairly basic knowledge that is needed to drive a car and the range of knowledge that is available in social work. Social work is not a machine with a single, agreed set of controls. (No one disputes that the brake pedal is what you use to stop a car moving, but social workers can and do disagree about which approaches are helpful and which are not.) Nevertheless knowledge in social work, as in driving a car, consists of information which, when skilfully and ethically applied, allows us to do a competent job.

The following are some of the kinds of information, over and above local factual knowledge and life experience, that are available to us:

- Research findings
- Policies and procedures
- Theory

I will now briefly consider these in turn.

Research findings

We hear a lot at the moment about the importance of ‘evidence-based’ practice. What this means is practice the principles of which are derived from research. It would be naïve to suggest that ‘research’ represents a unified, uncontentious body of knowledge. The interpretation of research findings is often a matter of debate and the methodology is frequently open to question. It is often the case that research findings can be produced in support of
several different – and even opposite – courses of action. Nevertheless, research findings represent a body of accumulated thought and knowledge, which can greatly expand and enhance the knowledge that we possess as the result of our own experience. This is for the following reasons. (In order to illustrate my points I will refer to one particular piece of research which I happen to be familiar with: the research study by Gibbons et al. [1993] on the long-term effects of physical abuse.)

1. It greatly increases the amount of information placed at our disposal in terms of quantity. That is: it often draws on a much larger number of cases than we could have encountered in our own experience. Thus Gibbons et al. (1993) looked at 170 cases of children who had been physically abused and compared them with another group of 170 children who had not been physically abused but were carefully matched with the abused group in other respects.

2. It greatly increases the amount of information placed at our disposal in terms of range. Research can provide us with information about situations that we may ourselves never have encountered before or may offer us a perspective that we could not have obtained from our own experience. Gibbons et al. look … at the effect of abuse 10 years on. Few social workers are in a position to systematically follow up on abuse cases after that period of time and none are in a position to make comparisons with a matched control group of non-abused children.

3. The more rigorous methodology used in formal research challenges assumptions and biases that inevitably creep in when we attempt to evaluate our own experience. Human beings tend to look for evidence to confirm their pre-existing theories. Thus, if we believe that abuse has such-and-such an effect on child development we will tend to notice evidence that seems to confirm this, while unconsciously discounting evidence to the contrary. Good research methodology is designed to eliminate these kinds of unconscious biases. In the Gibbons et al. study, the researchers who compared the data collected from abused and non-abused children did so ‘blind’, which means that when rating a particular case they did not know which group it came from (a process analogous to the way that wine enthusiasts sometimes go in for ‘blind tastings’ so as not to be influenced by preconceptions based on reading the labels on the bottles.)

The kind of research that can be used to inform social work practice falls into a number of categories. It may provide information about the extent of a problem. It may provide pointers that can be used to identify situations where problems are more likely to occur (risk indicators). It may help with our understanding of a problem by exploring its causes or its effects. Research also commonly looks at outcomes of different types of intervention or evaluates different approaches. It can also give voice, in a systematic way, to the perspectives of people other than the professionals themselves – including, crucially, the perspectives of service users and carers – by collecting and publishing their views. And, in so far as researchers try to systemise or draw out their findings in the form of explanations or suggestions for action, the findings of research become a source of theory.

Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures exist at a number of levels. At the highest level there is the law of the land, which sets out the legal duties and responsibilities of social workers in various areas. Among the key pieces of legislation in England and Wales, for instance, are:
The NHS and Community Care Act, 1990 (laid down the framework for the provision of personal care to adults).

The Children Act, 1989 (provides the framework for social work with children and families).

The Mental Health Act, 1983 (sets out the powers and duties of ASWs).

All three of these pieces of legislation represented major turning points in provision for these three client groups, although all have been modified or added to by subsequent legislation and will in due course be supplanted altogether. There are of course many other pieces of legislation which are relevant to social work in the UK, including the Human Rights Act, 1998, which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into British Law.

As well as legislation, social workers also need to be aware of government guidelines.

Examples of government guidelines

In the field of services for older people, the British government provides a multi-agency assessment framework: Single Assessment Process for Older People (Department of Health, 2002).

In the children and family field, the key British government guidelines (at time of writing, though likely soon to be revised) are Working Together to Safeguard Children (Department of Health, 1999a), which sets out the framework of the interagency child protection system in England and Wales and the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000).

In addition to legislation and government guidance, employers also have specific policies and laid-down procedures that define how you are supposed to do your job and specify who within the organisation is responsible for what.

Familiarity with what these documents is important because:

- If you don’t follow prescribed guidelines you are likely to find that you are acting illegally and in breach of your contract with your employers.
- One of the things that service users need from you is that you ‘know your way around the system’. You need to be able to give service users accurate information in response to questions like: How will their request for a service be dealt with? Who will make the decision? Why has such-and-such a meeting got to take place? Indeed, you need to be able to anticipate these questions and provide the information that they need without them having to keep asking for it. Giving service users accurate information about the system is a basic, but very important way
of empowering them. (You may well know yourself from personal experience how frustrating it can be dealing with large organisations where no one seems to be able to tell you what is going on.)

- Guidelines and procedures set basic standards and can help ensure consistency and clarity. Ignoring them can result in the opposite: absence of standards, inconsistency and confusion.

So knowledge of the relevant legislation, government guidance, and agency policies and procedures is important part of social work knowledge. This is not to say that a social worker is required to believe that everything that is laid down in the form of guidelines and procedures is necessarily helpful. Any thoughtful social worker will find many things to disagree with in the rules she is expected to follow – sometimes laws and guidelines are impossible to implement in practice, are self-contradictory or have negative consequences – and I would suggest that one of the responsibilities of a conscientious social worker is to give honest, assertive feedback when this is the case. But ignorance of the procedural framework is not an acceptable option.

Theory

The third kind of knowledge is what can be loosely called theory. Since theory and its application to practice is the subject of the rest of this book, I will not discuss it further here except to say that, if research provides us with information on which to act and policies and procedures provide us with rules, theory provides us with ideas and models which we can use to make sense of the situations we find ourselves in and/or to help us shape our responses.

More on skills

Practice techniques can be learnt from books but the actual business of applying them is something that can only be learnt through doing. It is rather like learning to ride a bicycle. One could write down what you need to do to ride a bicycle – hold the handlebars, turn the pedals, adjust your body weight from side to side so as to maintain balance and so on – but the skill of balancing on a bicycle is one that everyone has to learn by trial and error. It is a matter of acquiring useful patterns of responses which, with repetition, become almost automatic.

In Parts II and III I will include, at intervals, what I will call 'practice notes' (indicated by) in which I discuss the application of the various ideas and methods under discussion. In these notes I will include comments on 'skill requirements' in which I will refer to the kinds of skills that you would need to possess or develop in order to be able to make effective use of the ideas under discussion. Different people come to the job with differing levels of skill in specific areas. It is important to be aware of the level of your own strengths and weaknesses in the area of skills so that you (1) know what you need to work on and (2), as far as possible, work in ways that utilises your strengths. Exercise 2.3 invites you to look at your current skills.
Exercise 2.3

The following is a list of some of basic, non-specialist skills which are helpful in most areas of social work practice. (You will probably be able to think of many others.)

You may find it helpful to look through this list and divide the skills up under the following headings:

- Confident now – those skills which you are confident you possess.
- Confident for the future – those skills which you are not sure you possess now but which you feel you could acquire with practice.
- Not confident – those skills which you suspect you may always find difficult.

1. Ability to stay calm in the face of anger and distress.
2. Ability to say difficult things to people (that is, to give people messages which may distress them in a way that is both clear and honest and sensitive to their feelings).
3. Competence at expressing yourself clearly in writing.
4. Ability to stand up for what you believe is right in the face of pressure to change your mind.
5. Analytical ability (that is, the ability to get to the ‘nub’ of a problem, ability to see a pattern).
6. Ability to get on the right wavelength with people you are talking to (children, people with disabilities, people from different cultural or class backgrounds).
7. Ability to think on your feet (that is, to respond appropriately to situations which you had not planned for in advance).
8. Competence at multi-tasking (keeping track of several different jobs at the same time).
9. Ability to avoid panic in stressful situations.
10. Ability to prioritise (that is, to choose between competing demands on your time, perhaps at short notice).
11. Ability to assimilate information quickly.
12. Organisational skills.
15. Ability to accept criticism.
16. Ability to use authority.
17. Ability to follow through plans to completion.
18. Ability to challenge the behaviour of other people without being aggressive or judgemental.
19. Ability to choose the right words when talking with people.
20. Ability to operate effectively in meetings and in groups.
21. Ability to enthuse and motivate others.
22. Ability to admit to your limitations and seek the help of others.

Comments

I obviously cannot guess how you may have answered this but I have included in this list skills which, in my own case, would fall into each of the three categories.

(Continued)
You may like to consider how the skills you are confident in and those you are unconfident in seem to group together. For instance, if you are less confident in (1), (5), (11) and (12) it looks as if the area you need to work on is to do with organising and presenting information. If you are less confident about (2), (4), (15), (16) and (18), then the area you are finding difficult would seem to be to do with assertiveness.

It is important to get the perspective of others, though, because others may well see you as having skills which you yourself were not sure that you possessed. For a social worker, after all, it is often the viewpoint of others that is most important. (If your service users think you are good at conveying empathy then you are, even if you yourself doubt it. By the same token if your service users think you are not good at it, then you aren't, even if you thought you were.) This means that you should not necessarily always assume that you can accurately assess your own skills. But an awareness of areas which you find difficult and an willingness to be honest about this is important for good, reflective social work practice.

More on values

Some commentators have criticised social work education for being too preoccupied with values at the expense of knowledge and skills:

Values in particular have come to occupy a strangely central position, with CCETSW [CCESTW was the body responsible for the training of social workers in Britain until the advent of the GSCC] appearing to believe that they can be substitute for knowledge and understanding (Jones, 1996: 190–1).

Values in themselves are certainly not enough. Good intentions are of little use, or even harmful, if you do not possess the skills or the knowledge to express those values in practical terms. Consider the case of the heart surgeon who was a very good man – and very well-versed in medical ethics – but had no understanding of anatomy and did not know how to use a scalpel.

But, although values may not be very useful without skills and knowledge to put them into practice, it is certainly also the case that knowledge and skills are not much use without values. This is because, as Downrie and Telfer (1980: 22) very concisely put it: ‘No amount of knowledge of what is the case can ever establish for us what we ought to do about it’. Think about the case of Alice Young, the elderly woman in Exercise 2.2 whose neighbours wanted her put in a residential home for her own safety. It would be desirable to gather as much information as you could about the possible risks to Miss Young in her own home and about Miss Young’s capacity to make decisions. But let us imagine for a moment that you had infinite knowledge and were able to calculate the precise risks to Miss Young of staying in her own home and the precise level of her cognitive functioning. This would be very helpful but it would still not actually answer the question for you as to whether Miss Young should be allowed to make her own decisions about the risks she takes. For the value questions remain:
• When is a person’s right to make her own choices in life, including risky choices, outweighed by her right to be protected by others?
• How much does a person’s thinking capacity have to be impaired to tip the balance in favour of protection?
• How great does the risk have to be to tip the balance in favour of protection?

I think that social workers sometimes get confused about this and imagine that, if only they gathered enough information these difficult decisions would somehow solve themselves as if they were purely technical problems.

In the ‘practice notes’ in Parts II and III, I will summarise some of the issues about values which seem to be raised by the various ideas and techniques which I discuss, under the heading ‘ethical considerations’. You will probably disagree with me about some of these, and will probably think of other important values questions which I have failed to mention.

**Realism**

In Chapter 1, I alerted you to the fact that, in social work (as in social policy more generally), rhetoric is often a very different thing from reality. What social work claims to do, or is asked to do, or feels it ought to do, is often quite different from what it does or can do in fact. It seems to me that, since social work has a real effect on the lives of real people, one of the ethical duties of a social worker is to attempt to deal with reality rather than with fantasy. In other words, social workers should spend their time doing things that will actually improve the lives of service users, rather than things whose main benefit is that they create illusions which make social workers themselves feel good, or their managers feel good or politicians look as if they are doing something, or ease the consciences of the general public. Andrew Maynard and I (Beckett and Maynard, 2005: 98) spoke of this principle as the ‘duty of realism’:

> As social workers we should not inflict interventions on service users which have a low chance of success or are likely to do more harm than good, in order to meet our own need to feel that we are ‘doing something’. Nor should we pretend that the likely outcomes of our interventions are more positive than they really are in fact.

Part of the duty of realism is recognising the constraints that social workers operate under in terms of time, material resources, knowledge, skills, training and support. If you are provided with inadequate resources to do your job you can and should challenge this – realism is *not* about accepting things as they are without complaint; it is about refusing to pretend that things are better (or worse) than they actually are – but the fact remains that it is irresponsible to ahead with a plan of action if the resources at your disposal mean that it will be impossible to carry the plan through, just as it would be responsible (for instance) for a doctor to carry out a surgical procedure if she lacked the appropriate equipment, support or expertise.

Because this principle is important, and not often enough discussed in the social work literature, I will include notes on ‘real-world constraints’ under the ‘practice notes’. I will also return to the theme of realism in a broader way in Chapter 11.
Chapter summary

This chapter has considered the various ingredients that go to make good social work practice. The topics covered have been:

- **What makes a good social worker?** The things that a service user would want and need from a social work and suggested that these could be divided into knowledge, skills and values.
- **Knowledge, skills and values:** The difference between knowledge, skills and values and some confusions that can occur.
- **More on knowledge:** The kinds of knowledge available to social workers including research findings, policies and procedures and theory.
- **More on skills:** The skills involved in social work.
- **More on values:** The role of values in social work.
- **Realism:** Realism should be a basic principle in social work.

In the next chapter I will discuss what is meant by ‘theory’ in the context of social work, and how it relates to practice.