INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

Social work is a troubled and troubling profession. Its role and place in the professional firmament of the twenty-first century are hotly contested. Challenges to its current organizational structures and purpose are emanating from several sources: policymakers disillusioned by its failure to control deviant populations and respond adequately to human need; other professionals, particularly those in the health arena, who find social work's remit vague and its helping stance antagonistic to theirs; 'clients'[1] who complain about its oppressive and coercive dimensions; managers who seek to curb professional autonomy; practitioners who endeavour to provide appropriate forms of practice in unconducive contexts that are exacerbated by an inadequate resource base, high staff mobility and overwhelming caseloads; and social work educators who struggle to theorize its position in a demanding globalizing environment and contribute to the development of new forms of practice. Each of these stakeholders has a legitimate perspective and shifting sets of concerns that have to be addressed if social work is not to be dismembered by the forces of change that are reconfiguring its professional boundaries and questioning its existing ways of working and knowledge base.

Understanding the nature of the changes that are reframing social work locally, nationally and internationally is crucial if social work is to survive as a discipline and practice making a worthwhile contribution to human well-being. Responding to this becomes a challenge that requires social work educators and practitioners to

rethink their approach to social work to develop theories and forms of practice that can use the profession's existing strengths, particularly its capacity for critical, reflexive practice, to move in directions that are consistent with a value base rooted in promoting human rights and social justice in and through practice. A key context for practice is a globalizing one in which what have been taken as the fixed borders of the nation-state, which have hitherto bounded social work as a discipline responding to parochial matters, have become a leaking sieve as global forces shape the local while in turn being reframed in and through the local. Increased social interaction within and across borders combines with technological developments to bring home the message that people live in an interdependent world where events in one locality carry considerable implications for what happens in another, with attendant consequences for residents. Engaging with others to reformulate practice requires contextualization at the local, national and international levels.

In this book, I take the reader on a journey that explores the complex, interactive and multi-layered contexts of practice to unpack its professional depths, examine the dynamics underpinning particular approaches to social work and highlight their strengths and weaknesses. I do this in the hopes of contributing to client empowerment by encouraging practitioners to become the best they can be: that is, practitioners who can respond to the contemporary demands of practice and work within an egalitarian, human rights-based framework to promote the well-being of clients as active citizens. To meet this aim, I embed practice in a partnership rooted in the principles of solidarity and reciprocity to link individual growth with social support and development. An individual becomes a person by interacting with others, whose own humanity and agency are (re)affirmed in the process. Responses to human well-being are negotiated and welfare needs met (or not) through these interactions.

A critical, reflexive approach to practice highlights the transferable elements of knowledge and skills that practitioners gain in their work with specific client groups and settings. It helps to refocus their theoretical and conceptual thinking in ways that transcend the limitations of particular ways of working to facilitate innovation and a wider understanding of issues and how to address them. A broadened comprehension of the intricate dynamics of practice also reveals the importance of responding to postmodern critiques of identity and difference, not least because these attributes are so ingrained in individual consciousness and agency, but also because

social work's value base promotes social justice and human well-being. It also assists practitioners in developing a critical perspective that does not paralyse them in the chaos of intersecting sets of social divisions, each of which demands solutions that eliminate oppression and hardship or decrease their confidence in their capacity to deal with these effectively. The insights so gained will help practitioners in improving their practice regardless of the setting or client groups to whom they relate at any given time. Social workers will have to make these perceptions their own and adapt them to the specificities of their situation through further reflection and action.

Rethinking social work: Interrogating practice in an uncertain and difficult clime

Social work is suffering a crisis of confidence as it faces constant attacks from policymakers, practitioners, clients, academics and the lay public. These question its professional integrity and failure to deliver on its promises to protect vulnerable people, control deviant populations and improve the life circumstances of society's most disadvantaged individuals. In a globalizing world in which the nation-state is being restructured to promote the interests of global capital and neo-liberal ideologies, social work practitioners find themselves in the contradictory position of having to justify their existence as professionals explicitly charged with improving the quality of people's lives at both individual and collective levels while being subjected to the 'new managerialism' (Clarke and Newman, 1997) and asked to do more with less by becoming increasingly efficient and effective in rationing their chosen interventions at the same time as demand for their services is rising dramatically (Teeple, 1995; Ralph, Regimbald and St-Amand, 1997). These factors create an uncertain and difficult clime within which practitioners are obliged to respond to human need while reformulating their thinking about practice and how they do it.

While social workers are being publicly castigated for failing to do their job, particularly in the area of child welfare, the boundaries of practice are being reconfigured. Other professionals, especially those in health care, psychiatry and psychology, have assumed control of many of social work's constituent parts and the borders between the different professions have become increasingly blurred and contested. Additionally, many of social work's clients are turning to self-help groups to meet their needs as they begin to demand a greater say in the type of services available and more

control over how these are accessed and run. At the same time, as they raise their voices and demand to be heard, clients have begun to challenge the validity of expert knowledge as *the* determining knowledge that not only defines how their problems are constructed and given meaning, but also affirms what options might solve them. Government is also assisting these developments through social policies and legislation that encroach on social work's terrain while introducing new arenas where its work is being promoted. For example, in Britain, the personal advisers working in Job Centres and community workers linked to Sure Start and other community regeneration initiatives are doing social work. In these ways, the contours of social work are being both appropriated and extended and the boundaries of the profession are becoming more fluid and less certain than previously.

The specific nature of the disenchantment with its practitioners varies from country to country, as might be expected in a locality-based profession like social work. The possibilities for initiating real changes in the circumstances in which people live seem greater in low-income countries where social workers sit alongside clients to address structural inequalities by mobilizing local populations in community-based actions (Kaseke, 1994; Healy, 2001). In Britain, even the term 'social work' is in danger of disappearing from public pronouncements as political discourses in this field promote the label of 'social care' in its place. This replacement signals more than a semantic shift. It signifies the deprofessionalization of practice in a particularly Fordist simplification of social work's complexities by embodying these in the notion of competence-based practice that is being foisted upon practitioners through public policies and legislative fiat.

The attempt to assert Fordist principles in practice is paralleled by that of (re)affirming the importance of empiricist knowledge, a move best typified in the rush to evidence-based practice (Sheldon, 2000; Trinder, 2000) that takes uncritically the view that there is only one possible way of collecting and verifying evidence. This is a primarily positivist approach reflected in the dominance of risk assessments as the key tool for intervention strategies (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001). By ignoring experiential evidence, empiricist approaches to evidence-based practice devalue the richness and complexity of human interactions and the dialogical features that arise through the exercise of agency between participating parties. Thus, the resulting 'evidence' can often be a simplistic caricature that is used to create a fictive narrative which can be easily reproduced as expert knowledge signifying *the* 'truth'.

The competing focus on experiential evidence exposes the contested nature of knowledge (Belenky et al., 1997) and indicates that there are many knowledge-producing narratives that have to be taken into account. This alternative approach helps to unmask the reality that what passes as empirical evidence is little more than the systematic collection of anecdotal narratives that become treated as data through the power of research and the ability of the researcher to create a consistent story by analysing accumulated materials through a particular lens. This becomes posited as *the* accepted truth with a power of representation that lasts as long as other people, whether or not involved in the research, find it credible.

What counts as evidence has a highly subjective element to it. This subjectivity is central in (re)defining relationships between individuals and groups and their external world and affects their consciousness of it. Lack of consciousness does not mean false consciousness. It is simply that individuals who have constructed their lives around particular discourses cannot conceive of alternative ways of framing their situations even when their day-to-day experiences are dissonant with their worldviews. Such reframing can occur through the consciousness-raising endeavours propounded by Paolo Freire (1972) when the individual concerned develops a different narrative by participating in different types of experiences or someone engages that person in formulating other ways of understanding and acting upon his or her world.

Social work can be defined as an exercise in engaging with people to facilitate the telling of their story around a particular problem relating to their well-being, that is, to articulate what has happened to them and why. Its interactive base makes social work a *relational profession*. In this, practitioners and clients become co-participants in elaborating other narratives in which new possibilities for action open up (Hall, 1997; Cedersund, 1999). Their 'new' narratives are formed through interactions between the worker(s) and client(s) and the worldviews to which they individually subscribe, as these shape the realm of the possible for them.

Social work is the practice of intervening in the lives of individuals who need assistance in the acts of everyday living. Even at the best of times, it is a deeply problematic practice, mediating as it does the relationship between an individual in need and others in society who may or may not be in need. That those privileged enough to have the welfare resources they require have to be convinced of the value of helping others acquire theirs is a problem for social workers. They have to address queries about entitlement to

services and assume responsibility for their provision in tricky and contested circumstances. The neo-liberals' severing of the direct connection between service provision and the state's responsibility to pay for meeting acknowledged need further complicates the relationship between practitioners, as representatives of the state, and their clients. It does so by raising barriers against the fulfilment of unmet needs. Responding to the needs of vulnerable people requires equality amongst citizens as expressed through entitlement to services; the human rights that underpin citizenship; solidarity as articulated through reciprocity between providers and users; and access to resources and services. Practitioners' difficulties also arise because they have to act as if there were certainties of practice when few are present.

The philanthropic gaze: Privileging residual welfare provisions

The personal social services can be provided by a plurality of providers – the state, the voluntary, commercial or household sectors. Professional social work occurs within particular social contexts and is guided by specific legislation, social policies, cultural practices in a given locality and accumulated professional knowledges termed 'practice wisdoms'. Each of these elements is constantly argued over and changing, and those whose knowledge or narrative counts assume a critical position in setting practice agendas. Although social work can be practised amongst people at all stages of the life cycle, involve people from all classes, genders, ethnicities and abilities, contemporary provisions accessed through the welfare state have become reserved largely for poor people (Jones, 1998) and those who are otherwise disadvantaged and under-resourced. Practitioners often struggle against a backdrop of the low status accorded to clients and working for members of the public who are in need.

   Social work practice is complicated by its traditional association with residual provisions that target socially excluded needy individuals, families, groups and communities. Accessing publicly funded personal social services has been cast in charitable, almsgiving terms and adjudicated by knowledgeable experts who reinforce a sense of disentitlement or residuality. I term this the 'philanthropic gaze'. Under it, recipients of assistance are defined as a homogeneous group that can be segregated into 'deserving' and 'undeserving' members. The former may have some of their

needs met under stringent conditions; the latter are left to rely on their own resourcefulness, or the expenditure of energy in activities which may or may not be lawful. The grouping and regrouping of clients into deserving and undeserving categories for the purposes of resource allocation forms part of the processes of regulation that Foucault (1991) called the 'technologies of governmentality', which are rooted in regimes of control.

Professional regimes of control are an important 'technology of governmentality' and are used regularly in social work. These are constantly being (re)formulated as different stakeholders attempt to shape welfare agendas. The state's responsibility to care for the casualties of a particular way of organizing social relations is offloaded onto the individual concerned through its employees, the practitioners who use knowledge and expertise to implement socially sanctioned regulatory regimes. Contemporary regimes of control in social work are embedded in neo-liberal discourses about welfare.

The philanthropic gaze is not restricted to those securing help from the welfare state. It is also practised by other providers whose beneficiaries are divided into deserving and undeserving clients (Whitton, 1931). Encapsulated by charitable giving, the philanthropic gaze undermines citizenship. Organizationally sanctioned rules and regulations guide interventions in the voluntary sector too. These are no less controlling than those exercised by welfare state professionals. Under the philanthropic gaze, asking for help is an admission of failure. Negative responses to these requests affirm clients' perceptions that recourse to the residual provisions on offer proves malfunction on their part. Their definition as failure has also been confirmed in Culpitt's (1992) analysis of neo-liberal welfare provisions.

Social workers are associated not with universally accessible benefits placed at the disposal of citizens, but with residual ones handed out as charity to deserving supplicants. Working within the philanthropic gaze embroils practitioners as key architects of regulatory practices that impact negatively upon excluded peoples. Residuality constitutes clients as passive beings dependent on others for their welfare and reinforces the negation of both active citizenship and the affirmation of individual and collective human rights and agency. Consequently, services are not designed within a rights framework by those needing them, but are determined by others and offered on a 'take it or leave it' basis (Dominelli and Khan, 2000).

In compromising the citizenship status of recipients, residuality reinforces a charitable rather than a rights-based notion of

entitlement to services. Practitioners are assumed to know what is best. Clients are cast as deficient individuals who display little initiative for planning their own lives and are expected to behave according to professional diktat. Social work practitioners have also been constrained by a lack of professional autonomy, practising as they do within a contingent reality that has been shaped by a dependency on the state and the goodwill of its citizenry to operate.

The location of public provisions targeting poor people within a multilayered context of pluralistic providers has meant that wealthy people who require personal social services can purchase unstigmatized professional assistance through the market and avoid being compromised through residuality or being subjected to the philanthropic gaze. Through market-based provisions, they can exercise voice by using their purchasing power and exit strategies to favour those arrangements that they find empowering, in a way that those reliant upon public sector professionals cannot.

Practitioners can transfer from one provider sector to the other through a revolving door of employment opportunities, often created by state policies that promote the marketization of social services (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996b). The kind of relationship established between workers and clients is determined not only by the capacities of individual professionals, but also by the contexts within which they deploy their skills to configure particular possibilities in practice. In the public sector, practitioners and clients work to establish emancipatory frameworks for practice within tightly constrained and constraining parameters, particularly with regards to resources at their disposal and the range of structural inequalities that they can directly address. Where chronic underfunding has made a difficult job more so, the capacity of both practitioners and clients to exercise agency is more contingent. But as they are involved in constituting their reality as well as being constituted by it, they may challenge their position through these interactions. Operating within a wide variety of controls and contexts, social work practice has become the art of the possible.

In this book, I examine social work as both the art of the possible and the science of creating a better future by drawing on empirical research, experiential knowledges and practice wisdoms to consider how social work can respond more appropriately and urgently to the social problems that beset our world at local, national and international levels. In a postmodernist framework, attempting such a project would be diminished through the accusation of being 'modernist' and out of touch with current realities. To this charge,

I reply that one only needs to look at the myriad manifestations of injustice in both British society and other countries to appreciate that in the current historical juncture, the privilege of taking for granted the benefits of modernity is reserved for the few. I would rather place what energies and talents I have at the disposal of those who are not so privileged to help them realize their goal of improving their situations. Conceptualizing social work according to liberationist precepts places it within moral discourses concerned with the realization of social justice in the local, national and international domains.

Continuities and discontinuities in practice

British social work since the Second World War has been located largely within the state sector and has engaged primarily with socially excluded people who are poor and vulnerable. Its location within the welfare state reflects a change from its nineteenth-century origins as a primarily voluntary activity with indirect links to the nation-state (Walton, 1975). The balance between social work and the state has been a constantly shifting one. During the latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, it has changed again to encompass a different mix of statutory, commercial, voluntary and domestic provisions. The processes of change are likely to continue initiating further innovations in practice as the twenty-first century evolves.

In countries like the United States, social work has been consistently less embedded within the statutory sector. Those accessing services through public provisions are stigmatized because these are aimed at socially excluded individuals and families with no other resources. Public services have been set aside as inferior and available only under strictly controlled conditions (Alinsky, 1968; Teeple, 1995), an arrangement that currently exacerbates public perceptions of clients as unworthy and incapable individuals (Zucchino, 1997). This stratification also enables wealthier people to purchase high-quality personal social services from the commercial sector without loss of face.

The situation differs again in low-income countries. In southern Africa, social work professionals have been more concerned with developing people's capacities within their communities, usually geographically defined, to promote social and community development (Kaseke, 2001) and redress the imbalances of a social work profession that was initially established to meet the needs

of white settlers (Kaseke, 1994; Simpson, 2002). In these countries, social work concerns are more in keeping with an agenda based on addressing structural inequalities than with individual improvements, although these are also evident. In Zimbabwe, social work professionals have played key roles in initiating structural responses to social problems (Kaseke, 1994), whereas in post-apartheid South Africa, the black majority government has taken a direct role in promoting the social development approach through its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (Simpson, 2002). Consequently, social work discourses that favoured casework primarily for the white population during the colonialist apartheid era have given way since 1994 to those endorsing social development and community action (Simpkin, 2001; Simpson, 2002).

The emphasis on structural inequalities and community mobilization in Britain has parallels in the preoccupations of the Settlement Movement at the end of the nineteenth century (Walton, 1975) and the Community Development Projects supported by the British government from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s (Loney, 1983; Dominelli, 1990).[2] The shifting popularity between individualizing and structural discourses in the profession has marked continuities and discontinuities in social work practice as different actors have gained control of its agenda and sought to (re)make it in their image. This has included benefactors, practitioners, educators, policymakers and sometimes clients, organizing to ensure that certain discourses hold sway over others in particular localities at different times (Kendall, 2000, 2002).

Social workers have consistently been charged with the duty of upholding the human rights of vulnerable groups (Ife, 2001), although what constitutes these rights has been hotly contested and what has been encompassed within them has shifted throughout the profession's history. A human rights orientation is an extension of the expectation that practitioners facilitate the expression of citizenship for those who have been denied the opportunities to exercise it in the course of their daily lives. Affirming the human rights of socially excluded people renders social work a politicized profession, an aspect of practice which may place its practitioners on a collision course with employers, politicians, policymakers and the general public.

Intervening to advantage those who have transgressed hegemonic social norms even though they may be disadvantaged or oppressed persons can be unpopular. As a result, not everything practitioners do is applauded, even if it proves to be in the best interests of the client in the short term, and society in the long term. Examples of

British social work interventions that have not carried much public confidence include social workers' attempts to prevent young deprived offenders from perpetrating crime by taking them on trips abroad to instil in them a sense of responsibility for their behaviour (Burchard, Burchard and Farrington, 1989; Barry and Mclvor, 2000; Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002), and using social work practice to alleviate the damaging impact upon clients of oppression in society-at-large (Mishna and Mushat, 2001), to develop self-respect and respect for others, and to acquire interpersonal skills, including collaboration to achieve goals (see Phillips, 1993, 1994).

Supporting people who are experiencing human rights violations can aggravate social workers' relationships with their ruling authorities. In some situations, practitioners have paid for supporting the underdog with imprisonment and/or their lives (Fariman Fariman, 1996; Ife, 2001). In promoting human rights, social workers tread a tightrope over a chasm that requires considerable knowledge and skill to cross safely. Taking action to support human rights is risky and the outcome of their negotiations cannot be guaranteed. They are constantly negotiating risks, sometimes with respect to clients, at other times in relation to themselves.

Unity and fragmentation in social work

Social work covers a wide range of client groups, activities and settings. Its remit extends from work done with isolated individuals with few social networks to work encompassing complex social systems involving the many sub-systems associated with them. Social work is constantly being defined and redefined as it evolves in response to shifting contexts and demands. Its base is constantly changing by fragmenting and regrouping, although it retains unity around its core values and overall purpose. Social work's broad reach and interdisciplinary nature have challenged practitioners and educators who have tried to put boundaries around its remit, if only for strategic purposes like establishing discrete training programmes and professional credentials. Social workers also have to negotiate complex and contradictory sets of demands and expectations.

The desire to be inclusive of diversity in practice at the local level within what has become a globally recognized profession has prompted the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) to agree a definition of what constitutes social work:[3]

> 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[ers] intervene[s] at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IASSW and IFSW, 2001)

This definition is an inclusive one and indicates the variety of roles and functions that social workers occupy across the world. Ranging as they do from one-to-one interventions to groupwork and community action, these reveal that social workers can act as counsellors, therapists, clinical practitioners, probation officers, social care workers, youth workers, planners and community workers. Its scope makes it difficult to draw exact boundaries around the profession and can get social workers involved in demarcation disputes with other professionals in allied fields, particularly those in health/social care work done in community settings, therapeutic psychology and rehabilitative psychiatry. It also involves social workers in a number of different tasks which include securing changes in individual behaviour, providing direct services, co-ordinating the provision of services by others, advocating for change in social structures, reforming government legislation and reformulating social policies.

This diversity in practice is also reflected in the wide range of educational training arrangements that exists worldwide (Garber, 2000) as social work educators have to prepare practitioners to work in a broad spread of settings, with different legislative remits, cultural traditions and client groups, and using diverse practice methodologies. The IASSW and the IFSW are endeavouring to increase the international profile of the profession and create unity within its vast diversity. They are also seeking to address the implications of these complexities by developing global qualifying standards for the profession (see Sewpaul, 2002) through another joint effort.[4]

While certain interests promote a degree of unity in the profession across national borders, there are counter-pressures leading to the deprofessionalization and fragmentation of the profession. Deprofessionalization has occurred as a result of managerialist imperatives that further Fordist relations of production in service provision and delivery, as exemplified in specific countries including New Zealand, Australia and Britain. The exigencies of Fordist production, sometimes referred to as Taylorism, have been

codified under the rubric of competence-based social work (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996a).

Competence-based social work is bringing Fordist methods of mass production developed in the manufacturing sector into the service one. This can be construed as the proletarianization of professional labour because a key aim of Fordist regimes is to simplify complex tasks as routine activities that can be undertaken by anyone. Fordism is being fostered by management anxious to exercise greater control over the activities of practitioners and gain more labour flexibility (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996a; Clarke and Newman, 1997). The attempt to mimic industrial production processes in human services has not received universal acclaim (Black Assessors, 1994; Dominelli, 1996). The practices and attendant pressures generated by this approach are more in keeping with the demands of bureaucratic accountability and the rise of a corporatist culture intent on securing profits from the delivery of welfare services at the expense of a caring profession that is a moral activity practised for the benefit of others.

Competencies have been endorsed for drawing a broad segment of the social care workforce into training. This is a much needed improvement given that many of these workers are not qualified. I am concerned about this training being set at a low level in Britain, primarily National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2, and its failure to address the absence of a career ladder or low pay for front-line staff. Poor wages and the lack of career opportunities exacerbate and reinforce the low professional status ascribed to social work as 'women's work' (Wilson, 1977; Toynbee, 2003). These shortcomings contribute to my scepticism about the capacity of competence-based approaches to raise the status of social work (Dominelli, 1996, 1997).

Competence-based approaches rely on functional analyses and the processes of risk assessment and risk management to draw boundaries around unacceptable behaviour and curtail 'dangerousness' vis-à-vis others or limit self-harm. Risk assessments attempt to predict the likelihood of a particular individual engaging in dangerous behaviour and thereby inculcate a sense of certainty in uncertain situations (Quinsey, 1995). Convicted sex offenders and families with children in abusive situations are often subjected to risk assessment and management processes by practitioners to reduce the potential for harm. Risk assessments as currently practised have become mechanisms of (self-)regulation, a technology of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) whereby professionals engage with those concerned to enable the latter to themselves control the risks

that they may either produce or encounter and limit the potential of identified risk factors to disrupt their lives. Sadly, risk assessments have unreliable outcomes despite their alleged scientific basis (Quinsey, 1995). In emphasizing individual control, risk assessments enable the state's representatives, practitioners, to evade their responsibility for ensuring the existence of a general life-enhancing environment for all. Producing such a climate is a trust the state holds on behalf of all its citizens. Its violation is of direct concern to social workers, who are charged with promoting people's well-being.

Self-regulation occurs primarily through individual input. The category of deserving and undeserving clients is relevant because regulation is fostered through the deployment of scarce state resources to deserving cases. Clients who benefit from limited family support services in deserving cases of child abuse or from special programmes for sex offenders illustrate this trend. Despite their precarious condition, those excluded from such programmes are expected to fend for themselves. For them, risk can continue or even increase rather than reduce. Notwithstanding the fact that risk assessments give the impression of imposing order in difficult circumstances rather than curtailing actual risk (Quinsey, 1995), the capacity to identify or calculate potential risk is still an advance over a total indifference to it.

The 'new managerialism' (Clarke and Newman, 1997), competence-based approaches and risk assessment and management have wrought significant changes in an arena of work that has traditionally been dominated by relational concerns and professional autonomy practised as discretionary interventions in the lives of individuals with few resources and opportunities for subverting professional power relations. Like other forms of bureaucratic developments imposed on practitioners, these have yielded mixed results. On the positive side, the new managerialism has curtailed the privileging of professional autonomy; demanded greater accountability for practitioners' use of scarce resources; sought to increase service users' choice as consumers of services provided by social services agencies; and attempted to raise the standards of both practice and qualifications amongst the many workers who previously practised social care as personal care without appropriate training.

On the negative side, the new managerialism has not resulted in the anticipated additional resources and services necessary for hard-pressed individuals, families, groups or communities. Nor has it led to the empowerment of either clients or workers; contributed to a reduction in the heavy workloads that obstruct the creation

of innovative forms of practice; promoted the evolution of client-centred methodologies; encouraged stability in practice; or furthered the development of the dedicated professionals who work hard to meet the needs of clients in impossible situations (Dominelli and Kahn, 2000; Dominelli, 2001).

These pressures keep social work in a creative, if stressful, tension which may become counter-productive as practitioners respond by leaving the profession in droves. Staff turnover in Britain is particularly high in urban areas like London. Vacancies remain unfilled for substantial periods of time and have prompted overseas recruitment.[5] Depending on the borough, London vacancy rates vary from 12 to 56 per cent. How can social work meet today's challenges when so many forces are undermining its capacity to assert its rightful place in the panoply of professions that have the express purpose of serving people?

I answer this question in this book by arguing that social work is a profession that continues to be worth having. It has a unique remit as the profession charged with mediating the 'social', that is, working in the contentious spaces between the social conventions that guide individuals' behaviour and determination to conduct their lives according to their own agendas, whether these are socially acceptable or not, and the problems that structural inequalities engender in their lives. Social workers have the task of helping clients assume responsibility for their individual behaviour alongside addressing the inadequacies of the social configurations in which they are located. These features have characterized the profession for some time and constitute what has been termed the 'individual-in-their-social-situation' (Younghusband, 1978; Kendall, 1991; Dominelli, 1997).

Social work is a locality-driven profession struggling to respond to conflicting agendas set by clients' needs, professional imperatives and the demands of employers and policymakers. The mediating role of social workers is further complicated by forces emanating from outside the profession and the boundaries of the nation-state, particularly global forces that (re)structure and (re)shape economic and political directives nationally. Practitioners are expected to address macro-, meso- and micro- levels of intervention, even when working with individual clients (Dominelli, 2002a). Social workers seek to create a unity within the diversities that separate them from clients and struggle to find new balances for meeting the challenges that arise from a combination of local, national and international factors. To address these challenges, social workers need both generalist and specialist knowledge and skills.

I focus on the former in this book to argue that there is a role for social work in the third millennium. To secure their place within a society that demands greater responsiveness, efficiency and accountability from professionals, social workers need to redefine the profession, retheorize it and develop new paradigms of practice so that they straddle the demands of public officialdom for promoting social inclusion and the aspirations of individuals to play a greater part in making decisions about their lives. Handling uncertainties, contradictions and conflicting demands in highly charged atmospheres are routine features of contemporary social work practice. Social workers also have to work in partnership with a range of people who have an interest in creating the new practice theories and methods of the future. These include clients, employers, professional peers and policymakers.

To forge the necessary innovations, social workers can draw on an existing strong theoretical and practice base. This can be supplemented by research of both qualitative and quantitative kinds, as insights drawn from research will become indispensable in developing new theoretical frameworks and models for practice. Research will have to focus on many different ways of looking at reality, of accepting that both empirical and experiential knowledges influence how people see the world and act within it (Belenky et al., 1997). Meeting these objectives will require social work educators and practitioners to begin making their own claims for recognition of the contributions that they have already made and will continue to make to research; ensuring that the distinctive knowledges that arise from social work research and practice are acknowledged; and securing funding for social work research on a par with that obtained for other disciplines. In Britain, social work educators will have to give greater priority to research than has been the case in the past. In countries such as the United States, greater space should be accorded to qualitative and critical theoretical research. Amongst low-income nations and oppressed populations, the emphasis could be on research that produces locality-inspired and relevant theories and guidelines for practice.

Structure of the book

My desire to contribute to forms of practice that enable practitioners to meet the challenges of the future is the driving force behind this book. Any discussion about how this can be achieved has to take place within specific historical, socio-economic and political

contexts. It is impossible to encompass the whole of these either in practice or in the leaves between the covers of this book. Therefore, I have been selective in what I can cover. My choices have been guided by producing materials that will equip practitioners to engage in a critical reflexive practice that encourages the exploration of transferable skills that can be adapted to various situations, with different client groups in diverse settings.

I have based my choices on the realities of practice, informed largely by a British context that has an international reach. So, I consider the local, national and international contexts within which social work occurs and the implications of this for practice with individuals and communities. In exploring these, I focus largely on the two key client groups that social workers address, namely children and adults. I consider the social divisions that differentiate experiences for individuals and groups as they arise. Contexts impact upon individuals, groups and communities with both holistic and specific dimensions, but there are dynamics that they hold in common. For this reason, I do not cover all social divisions and forms of oppression in separate chapters. For a detailed elaboration of this argument, I refer readers to *Anti-Oppressive Social Work Theory and Practice* (Dominelli, 2002a).

I also engage with the political context of social work to explain variations within and across countries. This is strongly illustrated in work with offenders, which is increasingly being defined in England, Wales and the USA as a corrections and not social work service. I challenge this view by arguing that offenders are part of the communities in which they live and that rehabilitation must become a major element in the work done with them if they are to be returned to community life. This stands against the warehousing principle that Bauman (2001) asserts is the raison d'être of imprisonment, replacing the disciplining of workers highlighted by Foucault (1977). And, since communities form the locales in which practice occurs, I have included a chapter that deconstructs and reconstructs these for practice.

Social workers have to oppose existing structural inequalities and oppression, including those which they perpetrate, if they are to become more inclusive. New orientations in theories and modes of social work intervention have to address the complexities of practice in a more holistic and fluid manner than has been the case hitherto. In these, social workers will engage with the uncertain and fraught worlds clients inhabit, alongside meeting the demands of those who provide the resources necessary for pursuing the objective of social justice in the daily lives of socially excluded

people without themselves becoming sources of further exclusion and oppression. This brings us to an active citizenship basis for practice within a human rights and social justice framework.

I examine the contexts within which practice occurs in this regard in chapter 2. Here, I analyse the changing contexts of practice to consider their impact upon practitioners as they respond to globalization, neo-liberal shifts in national policies and the new managerialism. Though usually neglected, these macro- and meso-level contexts are integral parts of micro-level practice. In the subsequent chapter, I reflect upon the continuities and discontinuities in social work's values and ethical orientation. I also explore connections between social work values, identity and social inclusion.

In chapter 4, I focus on practice with a specific client group – children. In this, I consider contradictory relations within families and social workers' involvement in their (re)production. This includes examining the balance between child protection-led interventions and preventative services that promote child welfare within the context of seeing children as human beings with rights of their own. I consider social work with adults, particularly the care of older people, in chapter 5. Adults currently comprise the bulk of social work clients. Here, I scrutinize the changing nature of social work practice as it becomes subjected to market discipline and explore the implications of this for practitioners' and clients' capacities to create effective working relationships. I highlight the increasingly contractual nature of social work practice and the opportunities and limitations for practice that this development presents.

I go on, in chapter 6, to explore why working with offenders is part of social work practice and should be retained as such. In it, I suggest that it is unhelpful to pit the rights of offenders to rehabilitation against those of victims and citizens to live in safe communities and reside in crime-free areas. Each of these groups is part of the same broader community and reconciling their interests to make communities worth living in requires dialogue across the criminal–non-criminal divide to address the causes of crime; assist offenders in making worthwhile contributions to their communities; and ensure that they refrain from treating communities and residents as objects for their self-gratification. To achieve these goals, practitioners will have to find a balance between the rights and responsibilities of all concerned.

In chapter 7, I consider the potential of community work to deal with problems caused by structural inequalities within the context

of a globalizing world. I consider the basis for developing new directions in practice in the following chapter, in which I argue that the concepts of agency, power-sharing, interdependence, reciprocity, citizenship and social justice can underpin the development of new forms of practice. Together, these concepts place human rights at the centre of social workers' agendas. Realizing human rights in everyday practice facilitates social workers' becoming more proactive and adventurous in pursuing social justice goals. To incorporate this vision in their work, practitioners have to reconceptualize human rights as relevant in both individual and collective contexts.

In chapter 9, I conclude that social work professionals have to promote the rights of people to receive services according to their needs whilst maintaining their rights and duties as citizens. Claiming rights as citizens, individually and/or collectively, carries the responsibility of being mindful of the rights of others and the need to enhance others' well-being alongside their own. The state as the guarantor of people's rights has to accept responsibility for ensuring that the structures and resources necessary for their implementation are in place. Taking these abstract rights on board requires governments to underpin the activities of all stakeholders, including the public, commercial and voluntary providers of the services.

In leaving matters to the laissez-faire ideology of the market, the state abrogates its responsibility for upholding the rights of its weakest citizens. The regulatory state has to rein in the excesses of the market and respond to people's demands for a rights-enabled existence. In short, if more than band-aid solutions to social problems are to be found, the state, through its practitioners and policymakers, in dialogue with all its citizens, has to be fully committed to transforming inegalitarian social relations. Doing nothing is not an option, because in doing nothing, politicians use the state's powers to confirm existing social exclusions and inequalities.

For social workers, human rights-led practice is based on respecting the dignity of people who are accepted as full citizens wherever they may live and eliminating structural inequalities. Following through on this approach requires social workers to make the case that access to the personal social services and involvement in their formation and delivery is the right of every individual regardless of status, attributes or place of residence. In short, people are entitled to services that have been freed from residuality. Such provisions have to address the different starting points and needs of those asking for assistance. One type of service provision will not meet

the needs of all. Paraphrasing Seebohm, it means that the one-stop shop will have to have many departments and boutiques. Responding to individuals in their diversity and engaging in direct dialogue with policymakers who can release resources and unblock structural impediments to progress will challenge social work educators and practitioners to end the separation of theory, policy and research from practice.