Values & ethics in practice

Improving the protection and wellbeing of children in Europe: enhancing the curriculum
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Ethical approaches

Human rights & ethics

Why is ethics important in social work?

Where do practice codes sit with ethical practice

Scenarios

Where do you sit?

Ethics lies at the heart of social work practice........it is at the heart of social work itself  
It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.

-Aristotle

"There is only one way to avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing."

- Aristotle

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will_in_antiquity
If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

Desmond Tutu
Ethics has to do with what my feelings tell me is right or wrong

Ethics has to do with my religious beliefs

Being ethical is doing what the law requires

Ethics consists of the standards of behaviour our society accepts

I don‘t know what the word means

www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/what-is-ethics/
At its simplest, ethics is a system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their lives.

Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy.

The term is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition.

Ethics covers the following dilemmas:
- how to live a good life
- our rights and responsibilities
- the language of right and wrong
- moral decisions – what is good and bad?

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What is ethics?

[www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml)
“...we need to talk about values, even though the available conceptual tools may be clumsy and we cannot be sure exactly what we mean.

Indeed it is in part precisely because the concepts are difficult that we need to talk about them. The point of identifying and debating values is to give expression to intuitions and beliefs about the essential ends of human life and social living.”

(Clark, 2000, p.29)
Approaches to ethics

- **Meta-ethics** deals with the nature of moral judgement, the origins and meaning of ethical principles.

- **Applied ethics** looks at specific controversial topics, e.g., war, animal rights, capital punishment.

- **Normative ethics** concerned with the content of moral judgements and the criteria for what is right or wrong.
Types of normative ethics

at its simplest!

- **Kantian Ethics**
  a deontological (duty) moral theory— the rightness or wrongness of actions does not depend on their consequences but on whether they fulfill our duty

- **Utilitarian ethics (consequentialist)**
  morally right course of action in any situation is the one that produces the greatest balance of benefits over harms for everyone affected

- **Virtue ethics**
  looks at the virtue or moral character of the person carrying out an action, rather than at ethical duties, rules, or the consequences
Do you agree with Richardson’s analysis?

Do you agree with her final decision?

What would you have done from the perspective of your group?

Why?

Make a case for your group response.
Global 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 knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

(IFSW/IASSW 2014)
Is the role of social work to promote social justice and promote equality and diversity?

To what extent do your personal values and ethical base support / hinder this?
Task

Identify three most important values/ethical issues for you

Why, are these important to you?

Share with your neighbour

Be prepared to share with the larger group
Why are personal attitudes, values and beliefs important to social work (or any profession)?
Task

Identify three of the most important influences for your ethical / value base

How, and why, have they influenced your position?

Share with your neighbour

Be prepared to share with the larger group
Where do values & ethics come from?

- Family
- Friends
- Culture
- Religion
- Politics
- Professional codes
- Social media
- Greek philosophers
- Books
- Others
How might our personal attitudes impact on our professional role as a social worker?

Consider your own attitudes towards:

- people who use drugs
- people who sexually abuse children
- people who commit benefit fraud
- people who drive when they are drunk
- people who physically chastise their children
- people who migrate and seek asylum
- people who send their children abroad to claim asylum
UN Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1  Right to Equality

Article 2  Freedom from Discrimination

Article 3  Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security

Article 4  Freedom from Slavery

Article 5  Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment

Article 6  Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law

Article 7  Right to Equality before the Law

Article 8  Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal

Article 9  Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile

Article 10 Right to Fair Public Hearing

Article 11 Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty

Article 12 Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence

Article 13 Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country

Article 14 Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution

Article 15 Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It

Article 16 Right to Marriage and Family

Article 17 Right to Own Property

Article 18 Freedom of Belief and Religion

Article 19 Freedom of Opinion and Information

Article 20 Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Article 21 Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

Article 22 Right to Social Security

Article 23 Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions

Article 24 Right to Rest and Leisure

Article 25 Right to Adequate Living Standard

Article 26 Right to Education

Article 27 Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community

Article 28 Right to a Social Order that Articulates this Document

Article 29 Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development

Article 30 Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights
Human Rights:

- Indivisible – can’t pick and choose
- Inalienable – can’t be taken away
- Inabrogable – can’t be traded, given away

REALLY !?

- Three generations:
  1\textsuperscript{st} civil & political – free speech, free assembly, to vote, fair trial

2\textsuperscript{nd} economic, social & cultural (ones social work engage with most – Ife 2001)

3\textsuperscript{rd} collective – economic development, environmental, harmonious society
Inalienable human rights

- Which of the above rights will / may you see being breached as a social worker?

- If they are being compromised by your practice are you practicing ethically?

Discuss
Four “General Principles” help to interpret all the other articles and play a fundamental role in realising all the rights in the Convention for all children. They are:

- Non-discrimination (article 2)
- Best interest of the child (article 3)
- Right to life survival and development (article 6)
- Right to be heard (article 12)
With a first reading of the Cox family case study what would be the three things that you would focus on?

Why these?
What informed your decision from rights / values / legal perspective?
- Opportunity v risk
- Need v demand
- User v carer
- Care v control
- Personal v society / government
- Resources
- Constraints (time etc)
Doing

Knowledge & understanding

Skills and abilities

Ethics, values, personal commitment

Knowing

Being
A practitioner model and applying policy into practice

Technical rationality (law and policy)

Knowledge Skills Values

Human rights

Braye and Preston-Shoot (2006) adapted

Morality and ethics
Often values are distinguished from knowledge; ethics / moral issues from legal, technical and policy matters.

These distinctions are useful, but can’t be implied that knowledge can be value free. Or that legal / technical / policy decisions can be made without consideration of ethics.

“Most decisions in social work involve a complex interaction of ethical, political, technical and legal issues, all of which are interconnected” (p18)
Ethical issues, problems and dilemmas

- Ethical issues
  All work in the social welfare professions is an ethical issue/has ethical dimensions, from the everyday practices of practitioners to the construction of the profession and the policies it implements.

- Ethical problems
  Decisions that are explicitly ethical ones, with a clear ‘right answer’ in the eyes of the decision-maker.

- Ethical dilemmas
  A choice between two equally unwelcome alternatives.

Banks, 2012 p19; Banks & Williams, 2005
Thompson’s PCS model
(Thompson 2016)

Personal

Cultural

Structural
PCS

- **Personal**
  - individual thoughts, feelings, attitudes, actions
  - practice interactions with service users

- **Cultural**
  - shared values, attitudes and expectations
  - assumed consensus about what is right and ‘normal’
  - religion
  - family
  - social & gender roles
  - arts, music, culture, humour

- **Structural**
  - network of social divisions
  - institutionalised oppression & discrimination
  - socio-political patterns of power & influence
What are the PCS aspects of the Cox family that you need to take into consideration?
In your groups (x3) discuss the case study in relation to either Kantian (1), Utilitarian (2) or Virtue (3) ethics and decisions.

- Be prepared to make your arguments to the bigger group for 10 mins

- General discussion why you believe your argument/decision is the right one and challenge other groups
SSSC Code of practice for social service workers

Social service workers must:

- Protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers
- Strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers
- Promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm
- Respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people
- Uphold public trust and confidence in social services
- Be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.
Will the SSSC code of practice help you understand how to practice ethically in this case?

If yes – how?
If no – why not?
“It’s my job to provide appropriate advice and support and resources: it’s not my job to care”

(Alistair – Alan Davies in ‘Damned’ Channel 4)

http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/09/22/watch-clips-jo-brands-social-work-comedy/
“Our role as social workers is to care for people. We cannot bend the values that shape the social work profession.”

http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2015/09/16/social-workers-defending-rights-refugees/

- Why not?
- Think about how this impacts on your practice?
Are there any overarching ethical and value issues that concern you from the case study and / or the discussions today?
Essay question:

- Why is ethics important in social work practice?
- 2500 words.
References:


Scottish Social Services Council (2014) *Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers*, Dundee: SSSC
