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Information, Digital, and Socio-Psychological Technologies in the Training of Specialists in the Social Sphere

Liudmyla Mialkovska[1], Svitlana Cherneta[2], Iryna Sushyk[3], Yaroslava Martyniuk[3], Oksana Maiboroda[3], Nadiia Savchuk[3]

[1]Department of Foreign and Ukrainian Philology, Faculty of Digital Educational and Social Technologies, Lutsk National Technical University, Lutsk, Ukraine.

[2]Department of Social Work and Pedagogy of Higher School, Faculty of Pedagogical Education and Social Work, Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Lutsk, Ukraine.

[3]Department of Social and Humanitarian Technologies, Faculty of Digital Education and Social Technologies, Lutsk National Technical University, Lutsk, Ukraine.

Correspondence: Liudmyla Mialkovska, Department of Foreign and Ukrainian Philology, Faculty of Digital Educational and Social Technologies, Lutsk National Technical University, Lutsk, Ukraine.

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the application of various educational technologies in the process of training specialists in the social sphere. It is shown that one of the important aspects of professional training is the formation of a generalized orientation in the future social work specialist in terms of goals, subject, means, composition of future professional activity, and this, in turn, represents a problem, since complex types of professional activity are not amenable to rigorous analysis, always leave a person space for creative search. As a guideline on the path of addressing this problem, the importance of didactic design of the training of specialists in the social sphere is emphasized, based on the combination of socio-psychological and information-digital technologies in the educational process, including with the aim of motivating students to adopt the paradigm of life-long learning.

Keywords: social sphere, information technologies, socio-psychological technologies, digital communications, education, training

1. Introduction

Modern socio-pedagogical research states that the problem of training specialists for the social sphere is consistent with the requirements of professional education standards for the qualifications of social worker, and the success of solving this problem is mediated, first of all, by identifying the factors that determine the processes of social integration and reintegration of the student's personality in the context of the transformation of the structure and essence of vocational education (Tsaras et. al., 2018). The training of professional social workers is “embedded” in psychological and pedagogical education and, at the same time, “is based in its development on a certain set of provisions of various sciences and the accumulated experience of practical methods of socio-cultural, psychological-pedagogical, and medical-social support of the individual” (Liddell & Lass, 2019).

It should be noted that social work acts as an interconnected system of practice, theory, and values. Social work is a kind of mechanism for the implementation of social policy (Shytyk and Akimova, 2020). Of course, the practice of social work is always associated with the state and state social policy, which has different traditions in different countries. Designing the training of social work specialists is becoming a necessary function of scientific research in the field of higher education in constantly changing social conditions. The requirements for the development of a personnel infrastructure of social protection institutions adequate to modern social technologies form the state order for the higher education system of social education in terms of a qualitative result - the professional competence of graduates who are conductors of social policy, able to organize the process of social support for the population, effectively solve a range of social problems and have a humanistic orientation of personality (Nissen, 2020). All this actualizes the problem of training social work specialists at a university in the aspect of social education - designing advanced content and technologies as the main didactic components that meet the prospective needs of social and personal development, aimed at shaping professional competence as a personal resource that provides the ability to positively change the

client's social situation (Popovych et. al., 2022). From these positions, the integration and synergy of information, digital, and socio-psychological technologies in the training of specialists in the social sphere is of particular importance.

Deep one for the system of training social work specialists is the contradiction between the need for their mass training and the completely unique qualities that a person engaged in this activity should possess. Social work is a complex, emotionally loaded activity that imposes special requirements on the personality of a specialist: the ability to reflect and optimally regulate own activities when faced with difficulties (Popovych et. al., 2021). Under these conditions, there is a need to form a flexible distributed system of life-long learning, with the help of which a person can continuously improve his professional skills throughout his life, which allow him to be professionally mobile and creatively active person (Kryshtanovych et. al., 2022). However, the foundations of this system, the very motivation of a graduate to life-long learning, is laid precisely in the process of studying at a university, and only a set of technological (digital) and socio-psychological methods of teaching is capable of shaping it.

According to forecasts, total social work employment will increase significantly in the nearest decades (see Figure 1 below).

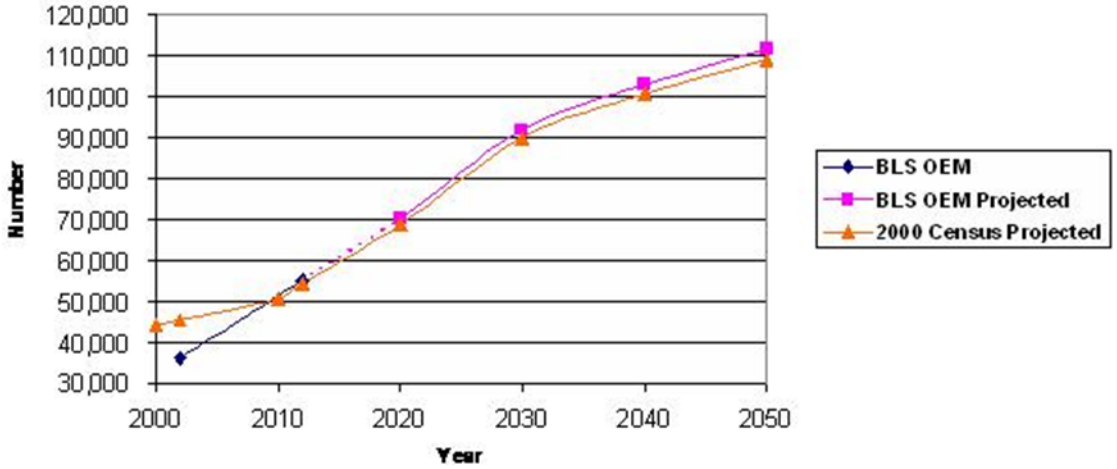

Figure 1. Projections of the number of professional social workers in long-term care, according to the U.S. National Industry-Occupational Employment Matrix (OEM) developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) *(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).*

The profession of a social worker is becoming increasingly more in demand. The social sphere today permeates almost all aspects of society, and almost everywhere there is a shortage of specialists who can professionally solve its specific problems. All this actualizes the role of the system for improving the training of social workers, designed to form their readiness for innovation, to promote the development of professional and personal qualities that are in demand in a dynamically developing professional environment. The competence of social workers largely depends on the organization of their education, on the quality of the applied socio-psychological and information-digital technologies for their education. The purpose of this article is to explore the application of various educational technologies in the training of specialists in the social sphere. The article aims to highlight the significance of developing a comprehensive understanding and orientation in future social work professionals regarding the goals, subjects, means, and composition of their future professional activities.

2. Literature Review

One of the main features of the multi-stage system of training social workers in the US and Western Europe is the fundamentalization of education, which represents the basis for long-term professional growth and ensures competitiveness in the face of any drastic changes in the development of the profession. It is important that the educational and professional programs of each level represent a certain completed stage of education, allowing either to continue it at the next level, or to improve and deepen professional knowledge based on the systemic fundamental education received (Laging & Zganec, 2021).

In the literature analyzing the development of social worker education, it is noted that at an early stage in the development of the profession, the content of the curricula was almost exclusively determined by educational institutions - universities and colleges of interest (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012). At present, different countries have different approaches to the approval of curricula, and in all of them the professional community maintains high requirements for the quality of training of specialists. Tracking the content of curricula and the quality of mastering

them by students is carried out in line with three main approaches (or their variations) (Pyles & Adam, 2016):

- approval and control of educational standards and curricula is carried out by state structures (ministries, special committees, etc.) with some freedom of the educational institution;
- control over the content of education is carried out by public organizations of professional social workers (unions, associations, councils, etc.);
- the content of education is the prerogative of the leadership of the educational institution.

In countries such as Austria, Belgium, Spain, France, Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, the general standards of education are determined by law at the state level. For example, in Sweden, the Ministry of Education sets the "framework" standards for social work education, which are developed by the educational institution with an emphasis on own local characteristics. Local authorities, in turn, participate in shaping the content of training by determining the specializations of graduates required at the regional level (Laging & Zganec, 2021).

Frederic Reamer writes that "following an ambitious collaboration among key social work organizations in the United States—the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), and Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA)—the profession adopted new, comprehensive practice standards focused on social workers' and social work educators' use of technology (NASW, CSWE, ASWB, & CSWA, 2017). Approved by these organizations' boards of directors, these comprehensive standards address a wide range of compelling issues related to social workers' use of technology to provide information to the public; design and deliver services; gather, manage, and store information; and educate social workers" (Reamer, 2019, p. 422).

In the process of training social workers in Western countries, the theory of D. Sean is becoming increasingly popular, according to which a social worker is always a researcher, since the situations in which he has to act are usually distinguished by uniqueness, uncertainty, and a conflict of values. Research skills are developed not only as a result of observing the actions of an experienced specialist, but as a result of reflection on own actions, as well as a joint discussion of problems in the form of a reflective dialogue (Gloyne & Brown, 2021). Therefore, an important role in teaching research activities is given to teaching staff. J. Burton (2015) notes that the main role of the teacher-mentor is to help the student comprehend his experience in order to prepare him for meeting new situations and, most importantly, to explain the essence of the transfer mechanism. The transfer makes it possible to maintain a common approach in the context of progressive specialization and opens the way to the construction of curricula that meet educational and professional requirements, but at the same time allow presenting the material quite concisely and in realistic terms (Burton, 2015). Rogers emphasizes that, based on Sean's approach when analyzing the structure of professional knowledge and the process of their assimilation, for example, formal, content and practical components are distinguished in the structure of professional knowledge, each of which, in turn, requires different didactic techniques and appropriate technologies for its development (Rogers as cited in Field et al., 2016).

In particular, experts rightly point out that without didactic justification, the use of digital technologies in the pedagogical practice of teachers of higher and vocational education is very difficult (Daniela, 2015). Unfortunately, the process of their implementation occurs quite spontaneously: ideas arise that are immediately tried to be implemented without any psychological and pedagogical analysis. Many of the specialists involved in the introduction of digital technologies in education today are not familiar with pedagogy, but are well versed in the information and technical systems. For this category of workers - programmers, engineers - elementary psychological and pedagogical training, knowledge of the results of scientific research in the field of psychology, pedagogy, medicine, primarily from the point of view of the introduction of digital technologies, is important. Misunderstanding and lack of reliance on patterns and didactic principles for organizing the educational process do not make it possible to effectively use the resources of digital technologies in the educational process (Reyes et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, in overall, technology has transformed the nature of social work education, and now there is a crucial need of synergetic combination of digital technologies with social-psychological ones, based on the convergence paradigm.

3. Method

The methodological basis of the study was the general philosophical provisions on the relationship, interdependence and integrity of the phenomena and processes of social practice, about the dialectical way of cognition of reality, the relationship between theory and practice, about the social determinism of activity and the creative essence of the individual, about activity as a way of self-realization of a person, as well as sociological, psychological, pedagogical ideas in the field of theory and practice of project activities, social work, research on pedagogy of higher education.

The theoretical basis of the study is the leading provisions of the philosophy of education and the methodology of

pedagogy, modern conceptual areas of social work, patterns of development of social work, patterns of professional development of a future specialist, approaches to designing the content of education.

The methodological basis of the study implied a systematic approach to the pedagogical process, focusing on the understanding, revealing of mechanisms and the identification of diverse types of connections that ensure the integrity of the object of study. A set of methods was used: a comparative analysis of literary sources, the study and generalization of advanced pedagogical experience, the study of program and methodological documentation, content analysis.

Crucially, the interdisciplinary perspective adopted in the study played a pivotal role in illuminating the multifaceted aspects of social phenomena and human behavior. By integrating insights from sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and social work theory, the research provided a holistic view, unveiling the intricate interplay of factors shaping social practices and educational processes. This interdisciplinary lens not only enriched the depth of the study but also offered valuable insights into the complex challenges and opportunities faced by individuals and communities within the realms of education and social work.

In essence, the study's conclusions are underpinned by a deep understanding of the philosophical, methodological, and interdisciplinary foundations. These conclusions not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge in social practice, education, and project activities but also provide a solid groundwork for future research and practical applications in the fields of social work and higher education pedagogy. Through this comprehensive exploration, the study has not only expanded scholarly understanding but has also paved the way for informed and transformative interventions in the realms of education, social work, and beyond.

4. Results and Discussion

The person-centered paradigm is decisive in the didactic design of the training of social work specialists. It allows defining the methodological function in pedagogical design as the justification of the project in the form of an educational and professional environment in which there are potential conditions for the development of a personality competent in the field of decision-making in constantly changing social, professional, and personal situations.

Gino Baltazar (2017) warns that “quality of life across the world is improving, but tolerance, personal safety and inclusion are declining, says 2017 Social Progress Index (or SPI), an annual score that compares 128 countries using various key indicators in the areas of basic human needs, well-being and opportunities for advancement (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. World performance on the Social Progress Index and component scores *(Baltazar, 2017).*

At the same time, researchers found social workers’ quality of working life continued to decline. In 2020 study, The Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQOL) scale asks professionals to say to what extent they agree with a series of work-related statements on career satisfaction, stress at work, general wellbeing, home-work interface, control at work and working conditions (Preston, 2022). Scores of 71 or under indicate a lower quality of working life (see Figure 3). At the same time, on this background, social work practitioners’ burnout levels are high (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Overall WRQOL score by study phase and occupation *(Preston, 2022).*

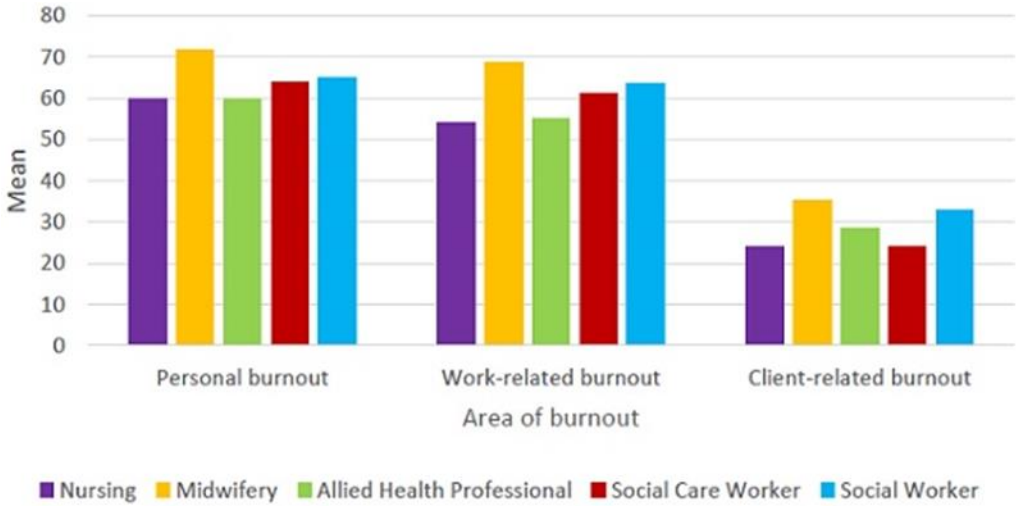

Figure 4. Social workers-practitioners' burnout scores, by occupation *(Preston, 2022).*

These two negative trends should be considered in conjunction, since decline in working life quality of social works inevitably leads to decline in quality of their services and, in long-term prospect, - to nation-wide decreasing of social work efficiency. At the same time, social workers' working life quality and their ability to prevent burnout strongly depend on professional skills and competence. Thus, the necessity of timely reviewing of applied educational technologies becomes even more evident.

The theoretical and methodological basis for the didactic design of the training of social work specialists at a university is a set of approaches of philosophical, general scientific (systemic, activity, synergistic, prognostic, axiological approaches), private scientific (competence, integrated, optimization approaches) levels of methodology and the level of methodology and technology research (scenario method and humanistic expertise), which allows determining the prospects of designing a didactic system, taking into account the scenario for the development of society, social sphere, profession, focused on the formation of competence, the basic requirements and content of the design components of a didactic system, process, situation (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014).

In general, the professional training of social workers, as well as the practice of social work itself, is so widely represented in the modern world that there is reason to talk about the variety of forms, levels, and models of education of specialists for the spheres of social work. In various modifications, there are several levels of education of social workers: pre-professional training, training in secondary specialized educational institutions, training of social workers in specialized higher educational institutions (faculties) and universities. At the same time, each country implements its own national approach to solving the issue of modernizing and reforming the content and technologies of training social work specialists in the context of global processes and taking into account the situation in their own country.

The European system of education in the field of social work was largely formed under the influence of civil initiatives, social movements, which were carriers of certain ideological views. The state, having taken under its control the professional training of social workers, has, as it were, completed the institutionalization of education in the field of social work. However, the new realities of social life dictate new tasks in the area of training social workers.

Interestingly, social work training in Denmark, like in Norway, developed without connection to the academic

community, but relied more on the development of practical skills needed to solve professional problems (Pyles & Adam, 2016). The modern concept of social work there is reoriented “to prevention, earlier intervention, the introduction of scientific methods of social work and regular monitoring of social programs. The share of practical work of students in institutions is quite large and amounts to one third of the total time of study (Pyles & Adam, 2016).

In general, student training is built in such a way that the main professional competencies are formed in the first year and 3 months, while specialization is 2 years and 3 months. Thus, within three and a half years of study, the student receives a professional bachelor's degree, which makes it possible to continue education in the magistracy and postgraduate studies. The topic of the bachelor's thesis should be an actual problem for social work in terms of theory and practice, the problem field should be approved by the educational institution. In the bachelor's project, the student must demonstrate the ability to use the extensive knowledge base gained in the course of study, relying on academic methods of work. A student can work on a bachelor's project in a private, public, or government company (Hagerty, 2018).

In teaching, as well as in the development of a package of educational and methodological materials, international, primarily American achievements in this area are widely used, and not only because the United States is the birthplace of social work, and it was here that the first Schools for the Training of Professional Social Workers appeared. The high level of professionalism achieved by this country in the field of social work is recognized throughout the world. In addition, in most countries (and this was confirmed at the latest World Social Work Congresses), namely American models of training social workers are used today as the most universal and meeting the expectations of society and the possibilities of the profession (Gloyne & Brown, 2021).

The conditions for ensuring the effectiveness of the theoretical and practical training of social workers in the United States are as follows: taking into account the interests of students in the preparation of an individual training program and in the choice of specialization; sequence of passage of theoretical courses and admission to practice; formation of the content of education, taking into account regional characteristics; organization of practical training; careful selection of social agencies and practice leaders; close cooperation of the university with social agencies; the involvement of the teaching staff in raising the level of professional training and the quality of education. The principles on which the training of social workers in the United States is based are given below (Gloyne & Brown, 2021):

- the principle of combining educational, research, and practical activities of both students and teachers, allowing to actively influence social policy and social practice in society;
- the principle of practice-oriented final certification, which involves the assessment of students' mastering of educational material on the basis of projects (grants) created by them and actually operating projects (grants) and programs of social work with this category of the population;
- the principle of maximum use of the socio-pedagogical potential of the educational institution, the society around it;
- the principle of adapting the best world experience to the conditions of the region and a particular educational institution;
- the principle of interdisciplinarity, which is characterized by the desire to organically combine the main areas of knowledge on the basis of strengthening the significance of some fundamental disciplines.

A very popular method of teaching both in European and American universities are social projects. Students determine the goals and content of social projects on their own - they are only required to comply with social design technologies. From the teacher leading the class, the students receive the necessary tools and expertise of the projects they proposed, and all the work on the projects is carried out independently during the entire period of teaching the discipline (one semester). In the future, thanks to the knowledge, skills, and experience gained during the course, students independently implement projects and submit them to social project competitions at various levels (university, regional, national) (Chuiko et al., 2021).

In the course of mastering the discipline, students are given a practical task - to develop and defend their own social project that allows them to solve a specific problem in the social sphere at the level of a municipality, social organization, or small group. The social project is developed by students collectively in groups of two or three people, which contributes to the formation of teamwork skills and develops organizational skills. Thus, students are involved in the information-analytical, socio-diagnostic, organizational, managerial, methodological work, which, in accordance with the professiogram of a social work specialist, are the main types of professional activity. The technology of teaching students to design takes into account the requirement of modern education - providing students with the opportunity to take the position of the creator, the subject of activity. The organization of teaching students to design corresponds to the technological stages of social design.

The first stage of work on a social project is preparatory work (project initiation). At this stage, it is necessary to choose

a project topic, determine the target group, identify a social problem, determine the object and subject of design, and develop a project concept. Forms and methods are the following: for the development of creativity among students, exercises, the method of association, the method of focal objects, as well as techniques for formulating and evaluating a project idea (brainstorming, Disney strategy, the "6-5-3" method, building a "problem tree" and " goal tree," SWOT analysis, SMART test), "Mirror of progressive transformations", etc. are used (Hagerty, 2018).

The second stage is the work on the text of the social project. Analytical work is required to write the project text. Students must present the problem in quantitative terms and structural characteristics. To do this, it is necessary to refer to the study of the literature, select statistical data, or independently conduct a mini-study. Forms and methods are the following: analysis of projects implemented in the city, district, and other regions, business game, control questions method, scenario creation, preparation of documents: information card, project plan, estimate, etc. The third stage is the presentation (defense) of the project. The defense of a social project takes place at a seminar, at a faculty project competition, or at a course exam. The student within 10 minutes, using multimedia tools, in a bright concise form sets out the concept of the project. The fourth stage is the preparation of an expert opinion on the social project of classmates. To develop the skills of expert work, students are invited to prepare an expert opinion on a social project of classmates (Hagerty, 2018). Thus, gradually mastering all stages of work on the project, students master the skills of holistic social project activities.

In order to increase the efficiency of training future specialists in the field of social work, much attention should be paid to obtaining and improving professional skills in working with various categories of the population. In this regard, the actual direction in professional training is the volunteer activity of students, which is an important way to acquire new knowledge, develop social skills, form moral values, and strive for continuous professional self-improvement. This form of activity allows to consistently and in a certain system combine the student's theoretical training with practical work, and thereby contributes to the formation of competencies. Acting as a volunteer, the student gets such opportunities as: independently choose the area of interest in accordance with the future profession; directly provide targeted social assistance; work on a par with practitioners, adopting their many years of experience; master specific social technologies and apply them when working with a client; acquire socially useful connections; have access to information, methodological sources, etc. Namely by volunteering a student can determine how correctly he has chosen a field of activity for himself, find out the degree of correspondence of personal qualities with the profession of a social specialist he is mastering. In the process of volunteering, the student directly provides targeted social assistance, which creates conditions for the development of professional competence of the future social work specialist.

In this context, special attention should be paid to the Newcastle model of social education, developed by Bayan English, Joe Gaha, Jilla Gibons, Lyon Flynn and Debbie Plath in 1990-1993 and used in many Australian educational institutions. In particular, the Newcastle Model is based on the belief that one can become a good social worker by combining theory with practice and using small group work. The model was introduced in 1991; the first graduates embarked on a learning process based on experience gained and an integrative approach to social work education.

The origins of the creation of this model go back to the 19th century, to the names of the founders of the theory of education based on the experience of social work, Dewey (1859-1952) and Jane Adams (1860-1935), who made a great contribution to the context of social justice and social change. The experience of Dewey and Jane Adams has been studied by many followers in the field of social work, and the initial ideas for creating a teaching model were useful a few years later to Kolb (1984), Knefelkamp and Schneider (1997), Bowd and Knight (1996). For example, Kolb prioritized the definition of learning needs, and then his model evolved into the development of self-directed group learning and the use of the foundations of critical thinking. Self-directed learning according to Kolb is associated with the goals and objectives of teaching the individual and the group, and therefore, the problems of applying new knowledge to the task - experience, reactions - are initially posed, and the same critical thinking completes all. Knefelkamp and Schneider placed the Kolb model in a social framework and built their own concept of education, which consists in the desire to involve people in the fight for social justice. The "trigger" model is considered by the authors as the need to involve the student in a variety of experiences from different points of view. The trigger may be a speaker-practitioner with experience or knowledge of the problem or customer. Developing the Kolb Model is matching the Framework of Social Justice in the Newcastle Model Program (Lagen & Zganec, 2021).

The emphasis of self-directed learning is the main idea traced to the example of the Newcastle approach and suggesting the idea of motivated learning by various internal stimuli, including the need for self-esteem, curiosity, striving for achievement and satisfaction with the results achieved. The Newcastle model is focused on using the experience of the group in the performance of learning tasks. At the same time, the group consists of clients, students, practitioners - as teachers. The practical course of the Newcastle model is based on the following positions: contracting with groups of clients to design modeling exercises in the classroom; the use of secondary sources of experience - documentaries, feature films, plays, as well as the life experience of the participants (autobiographies, biographies, literature). In the

process of performing the practice and its reflective interpretation, the academic group participating in the educational process, based on their own experience, develops a set of necessary qualities of a social worker:

- involvement in social work while understanding the essence of the main social problems;
- communication skills;
- mercy;
- self-discipline;
- competence;
- education (knowledge of theory, research, and legislation in the field of practice);
- critical reflection;
- creativity (creative approach to problem solving);
- freedom of thought;
- scientific character (research of new opportunities);
- organization and self-organization;
- professionalism;
- positivity.

As a result of observations and analysis of relevant sources - the problem-based learning model developed by the Newcastle University Medical School and the work of Kolb, Bowd and Sean - English researcher integrated them into seven components of learning for practice and determined behavioral outcomes. Their essence is as follows (Pierson, 2021):

1. Research and discovery: the acquisition of knowledge necessary in the practice of social work.
2. Critical reasoning and analysis: the process of thinking (development of logical thinking and evaluation skills, mastery of reasoning and judgment, use of means to achieve understanding of available information).
3. Feeling and evaluation: the search for meaning (the ability to evaluate the quality, importance and relevance of information; the meaning of the situation for the people involved in it).
4. Communication: the exchange of information and the transfer of meaning (communication skills using verbal and non-verbal signals; use of oral, written, visual, audio and other means).
5. Intervention: action or joint participation in action (interaction with clients based on understanding, assessment of situations, communication with others in a social, political, and economic context).
6. Professional approach to work: performance of work over time (the ability to organize own work individually, in groups or in an organization).
7. Self-directed learning: preparation for lifelong learning (recognition of learning opportunities for the purpose of self-learning, self-control; participation in professional seminars).

In connection with the above, in the process of critical reflection of experience, a four-year program for the preparation of a bachelor of social work was structured and proposed within Australian context. The teaching principles are based on the ideas of pedagogy, and students, by gaining concrete experience, learn to use the acquired knowledge through the implementation of projects, and not in the process of passing exams and study assignments (Kochubei & Tkachuk, 2023).

The Newcastle model includes a clarification of the learning objectives for each course and module, resulting in an emphasis on students acquiring the skills necessary for self-directed study: literature search and assessment, critical analysis, oral and written communication, interaction, self-awareness, creativity, and self-esteem. Undoubtedly, in this process, a large role is assigned to the teacher – however, not to the teacher-examiner, but to teacher-animator, who takes a more active position in interaction with students. In the educational process, assistants who act as colleagues, mentors, trainers, consultants, and leaders are also of some importance. The Newcastle model, which uses earlier programs, including the Kolb model, is aimed at acquiring practical skills and abilities for social work professionals in order to learn how to deal with the unresolved problems of equality and justice that confront humanity throughout life.

Butler-Warke and Bolger (2020) in their article describe empirical study based on the detailed responses to questionnaires and interviews with social work graduates who studied between 1968 and 2012 to evaluate social work training and education among graduates at one of north-east Scotland's universities as an opportunity to reflect on social

work education outcomes and motivations for undertaking training. Being asked what element of course led to preparedness as social worker, the respondents gave answers, the percentage of which are given in Figure 5 below.

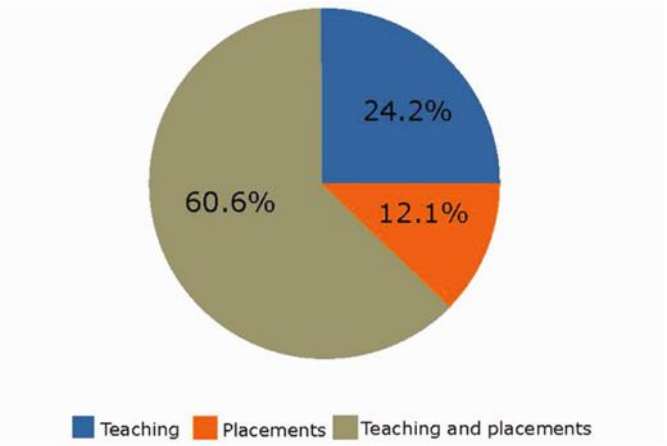

Figure 5. Element of course that led to preparedness as social worker, according to Butler-Warke and Bolger (2020) study *(Butler-Warke &Bolger, 2020).*

Thus, combining theory with practice in the field gives the best results, while attempts of practical work without appropriate training appears to be quite ineffective with regard to preparedness as social worker.

The current models of training social workers in different countries differ in many ways, ranging from the most general issues (how to manage an educational institution, funding, choice of didactic methods) to particular problems (training content, percentage of theoretical and practical courses, organization of educational-field practice). Despite the difference in approaches to the understanding of specialization, there is a growing general conviction that a social worker should freely "move" within the framework of the received profession, and specialization should not prevent the transition from one sphere of application of efforts to another. When changing the field of activity, the social worker should not lose competence, i.e., such characteristics of competence as professional mobility and adaptability are updated. This leads to the fact that in training the main emphasis is made on mastering basic knowledge and skills, which are the integrative basis of the profession as a whole and allow the specialist to easily adapt in various fields of application of social work, transferring his skills to a new field of activity.

In connection with the presence of a wide range of specializations in the social work, social sphere, the need was clearly identified for the development of a single framework for professional activity, which would combine the training of professionals of various orientations, for example, social workers in psychiatry, medicine, school, or professionals working with an individual, groups, or communities. Awareness of the need to integrate various areas of social work has significantly influenced the education of specialists. The diversity of specializations required the identification of common, or "generic" characteristics in the activities of social workers, which ultimately helped to unite social workers into a single professional group and stop the trend of isolation of various areas of social work (Minzhanov et al., 2016). In this regard, the curricula of most schools of social work in the world, first of all, teach the general principles of social work, and are not limited to training students in performing specific operations for specific areas of social work.

Throughout the world, the education of social workers has gone from highly specialized technical training to the search for unifying concepts and the development of a common standard that allows training professionals for all branches of social activity. This was an important contribution of schools of social work in achieving professional identity and raising the status of the profession. Today, almost all countries that train social workers are convinced of the need for a close unity of theory and practice in the learning process.

The researchers note that the profession of "social work" refers to those rare types of professional activity, where often not professional knowledge and skills, but the personal qualities of a specialist largely determine the success and efficiency of work. The image of the profession of a social worker depends not only on the specialists' knowledge of the basics and subtleties of the profession, but also on their upbringing as individuals, the manifestation of spiritual and moral qualities in working with people. The moral culture and personality traits of a social worker largely determine the success of his interaction with the client and are a necessary condition for his professionalism. Since the profession of a social worker can only be mastered in an individual-personal context, professional education should be focused primarily on the personality of a specialist (Butler-Warke & Bolger, 2019). To perform the functions assigned to them, social sphere specialists need not only an appropriate professional education, but also a personal readiness to comply with certain professional and ethical norms and principles. Especially important are such personal qualities of a social

worker as intellectual, general cultural, and moral potential. The presence (formation and consolidation) of such qualities allows the social worker to more effectively carry out his professional activities. These personal qualities also develop due to the effective synergy of educational technologies.

One of the most interesting, but not yet widely used socio-psychological technologies in the training of social work specialists, is the technology of mentoring or coaching. Despite the fact that the concept of mentoring in education is not new and is well developed, the idea of mentoring among students, based on the principle of "peer to peer", has been actively implemented in the practice of universities only in recent decades, and the number of studies devoted to this problem is still limited. Some sources raise the issue of the effective organization of mentoring and note its positive impact on the process of academic and social adaptation of first-year students (Howlett & Rademacher, 2023; Iordanou et al., 2015).

A possible way to implement the technology of mentoring "the head of a social organization - a mentor" can be a form of 'shadow mentoring' (Shadowing). Shadow mentoring is a special form of mentoring in which a student is temporarily attached to a mentor - the head of the organization for included monitoring of the work process, professional features. This type of mentoring can be used to get a quick, hands-on introduction to the workplace and organization, and can be mentored by employees at all levels, from skilled professionals to top executives. A special developmental effect for both participants is given by a special discussion of the beginner's observations, as well as his feedback to his mentor.

An example of the implementation of mentoring technology - a mentor-navigator - is the technology of a teacher-mentor, whose task is to help the ward to discover his personal meaning in the profession, to self-determine, to build a professional career trajectory. It is important that at this stage the student not only improves professional skills, but also develops special professional and personal qualities and soft skills, taking into account which direction of professional career he chooses (Pyles & Adam, 2016).

The mentor-navigator works in a dialogue mode with the ward, gives him the opportunity to understand and develop himself. The word "navigator" means that he directs the movement of a specialist, for example, recommends which refresher courses to take, which competitions to participate in (naturally, he accompanies this participation, helps in preparing materials himself or directs mentee to a person who knows how to do it well), suggests in which new direction (type of activity) his ward can take part, organizes different types of trials and new practices (social, environmental, educational, innovative) (Pyles & Adam, 2016).

Social work specialists in the course of their professional activities face various problems: uncertainty, responsibility; moreover, social work covers many areas of knowledge, and the emerging tasks have to be performed simultaneously. It also includes: emotional burnout, or a problem that a social work specialist cannot choose his clients; insufficient resources, etc. The mentoring technology allows the future social work specialist (mentee) to get satisfaction from his work, increases self-confidence and motivation, allows him to gain new knowledge and ways of solving clients' problems, to form innovative competence.

The training of specialists in the field of social work is a complex and diverse process. This creates the basis for the formation of the future professional as a person. The introduction of students to research activities, scientific research is provided by the definition of personal and professional self-development, self-determination, self-realization. In the course of scientific research, methods of forecasting, modeling and design are used, which contributes to the formation of the creative personality of a social sphere specialist. At the same time, stimulation of scientific and cognitive interest in the early stages of university education helps to increase the creative research potential of students. We especially note that it is important in research education to master methods of action: the ability to work with primary sources, observe and analyze phenomena and facts, compose and solve problems, formulate a hypothesis, conduct an experiment, process its results, summarize materials in the form of a report, use achievements of sciences related to social work. Thus, awareness of the specifics of research activities involves the formation of students' ideas not only about its component composition, but also about the versatility of such activities, about the nature of the actions included in it, highlighting the sides of research activities and describing them.

As it is known, the competence-based approach involves the use of activity and personality-oriented learning technologies, i.e., will inevitably actualize the problems of the development of research activities of students as a system-oriented training technology. The very same scientific work of students acquires new features of the innovative system of formation of professional and personal competencies of the future graduate.

In US universities, the case method is widely used in the training programs for social workers. The case method in social work in the United States began to take shape at the end of the 19th century thanks to the activities of Organized Charity Societies. It was a procedure for the analysis conducted by employees of charitable societies regarding the causes of social problems in individuals or individual families in order to decide on the possibility of providing

assistance. In order to make a balanced and informed decision on the allocation of material assistance, preliminary work was required to collect information about the client. The sources of information, besides the individual himself, were relatives, family, school, neighbors, employers, and various kinds of documentation (medical records, case histories, etc.). It was assumed that the abundance of data collected would lead to an understanding of the causes of the problem. And if the cause is found, then it will not be difficult to apply treatment and solve the problem. At the same time, the ultimate goal of social work was not the allocation of material assistance, but a positive change in the personality of the client himself, which should have occurred as a result of conversations, meetings and personal contact with a specialist. The information collected about the client, the protocols of conversations held with him and reports on the work done were drawn up in the form of a personal file (case). "Organized Charity Societies" introduced a system for recording, registering, and storing such cases of clients. In each district division of the Societies, books were kept, where not only applications and petitions for help were recorded, but also information about the work done in accordance with the applications received (Pierson, 2021).

Simultaneously with the expansion of areas for collecting information about clients, the practice of discussing their cases spread not only in district divisions, but also at general meetings of charitable agencies. Here everyone, including paid staff, volunteers and stakeholders from various professional fields (doctors, priests, police officers, teachers, school guards, etc.), could work together to solve a client's specific problem. In addition, it helped to develop a common line of conduct and a unified way of action for employees of charitable societies, as well as to formulate general criteria for assessing the situation and approaches to choosing ways to provide assistance.

Gradually, the selection of adequate methods of providing assistance, based on the conditions of a particular case, became an increasingly important component of charitable work. Helen Clark wrote that social workers were looking for a "charity formula." As a result, the social case work developed the following sequence of actions, which included the following (Pierson, 2021):

1) determining the type of problems (drunkenness, criminal inclinations, immorality, neglect of parental responsibilities);
2) finding out the reasons (low wages, illness, poor living conditions, poor heredity);
3) selection of methods of treatment (material assistance, "friendly visits", assistance in finding work and medical care, placement of a child in education, training in economical housekeeping, and others).

Thus, the system of social work of an individual nature and its method, the "case method," gradually began to take shape. Namely it was adopted for teaching students in the first schools of social work in the United States. The method of studying individual situations, which appeared in the system of training social workers, naturally aroused the need for appropriate educational literature containing a set of didactic material for discussion. In this regard, the book "Social Diagnosis" by M. Richmond provided invaluable assistance to teachers of schools of social work. It contained comprehensive recommendations on how to conduct research and diagnosis of the client's situation. Thus, turning to history, one can discover a characteristic feature that was inherent in the practice of educating US social workers in the past and remains relevant at the present time - the active use of clients' personal files to comprehend the essence and master the methods of social assistance, or, in other words, a case study.

With all the terminological diversity and differences in approaches, the essence of case technology is to study a specific case - an empirical study of a modern phenomenon in its real life context. This training method is aimed at improving skills and gaining experience in the following areas:

– work with information - understanding the meaning of the details described in the situation; analysis and synthesis of information and arguments;
– identifying, selecting, and solving problems;
– work with assumptions and conclusions; evaluation of alternatives; making decisions;
– listening and understanding other people - group work skills.

Thus, case technology contributes to the formation of various groups of subject, meta-subject, and personal results in students.

An important point for the effectiveness of conducting a lesson with the help of a case study is the support of emotional tension in groups. In the educational process, the teacher can support the 'emotional stress' of students by the following means: mismatch of resources and goals; incomplete information about the object; competition of groups to develop a solution; competition of individuals to develop a solution; evaluation of performance by both the students themselves and the teacher (Suppes & Wells, 2017).

In the approach, when the author of the "specific case" is the teacher, it is assumed that the students will provide the

final work, for example, in the form of a report. When authored by the student, the assessment material is a case created by the student and the developer's proposals for subsequent collective discussion.

Today, the development of the professional activities of social workers is carried out in the context of not just digitalization and digital communication processes, but digital transformation. It is obvious that the educational process of training specialists in social sphere must comply with these realities, including the necessary and even ahead elements of digital technologies. It should also be emphasized that the development of the information component of the social work system is an inevitable process and makes it necessary to use these elements when citizens exercise their rights to social security, especially for socially vulnerable groups of the population, as well as persons with disabilities. Despite this interest in technology, the attention which in social work is paid on ICT in research, education and practice is not in line with the efforts of other national and international organizations that see ICT as critical to improving the lives of disadvantaged and disenfranchised people and necessary for all forms of civil participation.

In the process of medialization, various types of information are combined: it is converted into meanings, knowledge is reformatted from one level to another, and semiotic formations and special sign constructs are created out of reality and have no meaning outside the media and sociocultural environments (Fitch et al., 2016). The field of education, research, and practice in social work is surrounded by the rapid development of ICT. To ensure that social work practice is consistent with the standards and values of social work ethics, social workers need to be competent and ICT literate. This will enable social workers at all levels of practice to help improve the lives of disenfranchised and disadvantaged individuals by increasing access to education, knowledge, and other resources (Hitchcock et al., 2019).

The possibility to work with BigData allows using the potential of artificial intelligence to accompany the educational, scientific, and creative activities of students. Artificial intelligence is also attracted by university students as a consultant on complex issues that require handling large amounts of data. Deep immersion in a professional environment (Deep Learning) is of particular interest in connection with the development of augmented reality (VR) virtual machines that allow modeling technological processes in a virtual space. The main thing is that in this case it is possible to see, feel, and evaluate own actions in a professional environment (at the same time, which is important, without causing possible damage to self and others). It is likely that a number of previously unexplored educational opportunities will be implemented to complement the range of previously known teaching methods in social work sphere. This should become the basis of smart didactics, based on the possibilities of digital technologies in mastering the culture of professional activity. From this point of view, smart didactics is a set of principles, patterns, and methods of forming the personal and professional success of a student in the educational process based on open dialogic interaction with the teacher, professional and educational environment, intelligent information support systems (artificial intelligence), as well as on the basis of internal dialogue, allowing stimulating activity in the development of cultural values and the achievement of professionalism. Now, when the era of “electronic textbooks” is over, it is important to understand the opportunities provided by information technologies to substantiate smart didactics, use cloud and blockchain technologies to develop the entire system of social workers education and create modern conditions for personal and professional development.

First of all, it should be noted that the use of modern media resources allows to simultaneously use the word, visualization, as well as combine perception with the performance of certain tasks and exercises, which in the traditional classification of teaching methods (according to the source of information) is represented by different groups of methods. It is possible not to consider these features, but to attribute them to existing methods - however, in doing so, we may not use the full potential of digital technology to the full extent. This means that more classification features are needed to reflect these features - for example, by the nature of the didactic function of digital technology in the educational process, by the degree of immersion in the virtual educational space, by the nature of the “locus-control” of the student's activity in the educational process (in the educational cloud), going beyond the specified boundaries of educational tasks (working with projects in the cloud), etc.

The Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) calls for the integration of information and digital technology into social work education, but there are no clear standards for integration or student learning. However, advanced information and digital technologies are already used in the learning process.

One of the popular directions is the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Modern educators agree that “the ability of VR technology to immerse a person in a virtual world determines the main direction for its development in education. Everything that cannot be created in the real world for technical, economic or physical reasons can be created in the virtual world” (Lanzieri et al., 2021). Social projects using virtual reality are aimed at solving various problems:

– rehabilitation of people with disabilities;
– development of empathy;

- human rights protection;
- education and culture;
- fundraising.

Among the most interesting projects that can be used in the training of social workers, there are the following:

1. As part of the "Specular Theory" project, boy Danny Kurtzman suffers from muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair. With the help of Specular Theory's virtual reality project, Danny rode the surfboard and had an unforgettable experience. This is a way to help people with disabilities explore a world that is impossible for them in real life.
2. The project "A walk through dementia" provides an opportunity to imagine the life of a person with dementia. Through virtual reality, one can understand what happens to a person who suffers from a disease. The educational application shows some of the symptoms of this disease.

The key to creating a socially oriented (SO-) VR/AR project is attention to the person, his problems, values, and experience. "And here the point of view is important: you look at what is happening from the inside of the event itself, because technology allows you to be in its center (or close to it) and become part of that environment," experts say (Lanzieri et al., 2021). The principles of SO-design in VR/AR projects are as follows: attention to human life; interactivity, the ability to interact with the environment, influence it; "point of view"; realism (Huttar & Brintzenhofeszoc, 2020).

In general, the immersive approach in the professional education of social sphere specialists can be defined as follows: a set of techniques and methods for organizing productive interaction between participants in the educational process in a virtual learning environment that provides interactive learning through sensory multi-vector impact on students with the aim of comprehensive practice-oriented professional development. This concept requires the definition of an associated category – "immersive learning environment." An immersive learning environment is understood as a construct that is systemic in nature and self-organizing, implemented as a dynamic process of influencing the student with the involvement of various elements of the simulated environment (Boulos et al., 2007; Trahan et al., 2019; Iatsyshyn et. al., 2020; Akimov et. al., 2020).

Another advantage of immersiveness in vocational education is the enhancement of the student's sensory abilities. It is about providing a comprehensive impact on the senses, which, of course, elevates the quality of assimilation and fixation of new information in the mind of the student to a new level. The reliance solely on visual modality was typical for the immersive technologies of the past generation, but today the immersive approach involves the impact on all reception channels when perceiving educational material.

To achieve the greatest efficiency, all the above technologies should be applied in combination, making up a clearly defined didactic project. A didactic project in the training of social work specialists, being a means of implementing the corresponding developed concept, is an educational technology that provides the design- and educational processes with a value-oriented result of the activities of the subjects of the educational and professional environment. In the educational process of university training, we consider it as a factor in the development of the personality and professional competence of a student, teacher, and social service specialist. In a practice-oriented form, a didactic project is an educational system, process, situation that ensures the achievement of high-quality training of social work specialists. In the process of implementing didactic projects, a special role should be played by the personal and semantic orientation of the content of training, the organization of independent work and self-development of future social sphere specialists, the widespread use of the latest information and digital technologies, cooperation, dialogue and pedagogical support as a means of interaction between the teacher and students, monitoring the formation of professional competence of students, humanistic examination of the educational and professional environment and educational projects.

5. Conclusion

The conducted research shows that the general conditions for successful training of social workers who are competitive in today's dynamic environment are: systematic and continuous professional training of social workers for practical activities, controllability of results at different stages of training, as well as the internal conditions of the university. A balanced use of information and digital technologies is necessary, without detachment from the humanitarian component of education, provided with the help of socio-psychological technologies. The effectiveness of social work training also depends on the methodological 'equipment' of this training, based on the principle of smart didactics.

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