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**TRAINING TECHNOLOGIES AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL  
IDENTITY AND READINESS OF FUTURE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS**

**Анотація.** Сучасна трансформація соціальної роботи посилює вимоги до професійної підготовки майбутніх фахівців та актуалізує необхідність поєднання теоретичних знань із практичними компетентностями, професійними цінностями і сформованою професійною ідентичністю. Метою статті є теоретичне обґрунтування потенціалу тренінгових технологій як засобу формування професійної ідентичності та професійної готовності майбутніх фахівців із соціальної роботи. Методологічну основу дослідження становлять аналіз, синтез, порівняння та систематизація теоретичних підходів до професійної підготовки соціальних працівників, професійного становлення, експерієнтального навчання та використання тренінгових технологій. Професійна ідентичність і професійна готовність розглядаються як взаємопов'язані, але відмінні результати професійної підготовки: перша відображає усвідомлення та прийняття здобувачами професійних ролей, цінностей, відповідальності й належності до професійної спільноти, тоді як друга характеризує здатність і готовність ефективно виконувати професійні завдання. Обґрунтовано потенціал тренінгових технологій для інтеграції теоретичних знань, професійних цінностей, практичної діяльності, міжособистісного досвіду та рефлексії. Особливу увагу приділено їх значенню в контексті сучасних соціальних викликів України, пов'язаних із війною, вимушеним переміщенням, психосоціальними потребами населення та трансформацією громад. Наукова новизна полягає в концептуалізації інтегративної моделі, що охоплює когнітивний, аксіологічний, діяльнісний та рефлексивний компоненти професійного становлення. Зроблено висновок, що тренінгові технології можуть виступати проміжним освітнім середовищем між теоретичною підготовкою та реальною професійною практикою.

**Ключові слова:** тренінгові технології, соціальна робота, професійна ідентичність, професійна готовність, професійна підготовка, експерієнтальне навчання, професійні компетентності, майбутні соціальні працівники.

**Abstract.** The contemporary transformation of social work increases the requirements for the professional education of future specialists and emphasizes the need to combine theoretical knowledge with practical competencies, professional values, and a developed professional identity. The purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate the potential of training technologies as a tool for developing the professional identity and professional readiness of future social work professionals. The study is based on the analysis, synthesis, comparison, and systematization of theoretical approaches to social work education, professional development, experiential learning, and training-based education. Professional identity and professional readiness are considered as interconnected but distinct outcomes of professional education: the former reflects students' understanding and acceptance of their professional roles, values, responsibilities, and belonging to the professional community, while the latter characterizes their ability and preparedness to perform professional tasks effectively. The article substantiates the potential of training technologies to integrate theoretical knowledge, professional values, practical action, interpersonal experience, and reflection. Their particular relevance is emphasized in the context of contemporary Ukrainian social challenges, which require social workers to operate effectively under conditions of war, displacement, psychosocial distress, community disruption, and increased demand for social support. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the conceptualization of an integrative model that includes cognitive, axiological, activity-based, and reflective components of training-based professional development. It is concluded that training technologies can serve as an intermediary educational environment between theoretical preparation and professional practice, simultaneously contributing to the development of professional identity and readiness for future social work practice.

**Keywords:** training technologies, social work, professional identity, professional readiness, social work education, experiential learning, professional competencies, future social workers.

### **Introduction**

Contemporary social work is developing in an environment characterized by rapid social change, increasing complexity of clients' needs, transformation of social service systems, and growing requirements for professional competence. Social workers are expected not only to possess theoretical knowledge but also to communicate effectively, make ethical decisions, cooperate within multidisciplinary teams, respond to crises, establish professional boundaries, and work with individuals, families, groups, and communities experiencing complex life circumstances. Consequently, professional education should ensure the integration of knowledge, practical skills, professional values, and the ability to reflect on one's own professional actions.

Two interconnected outcomes are particularly important in this process: professional identity and professional readiness. Professional identity reflects how students understand themselves as future representatives of the profession, accept its values and ethical principles, and perceive their professional roles and responsibilities. Its development is recognized as an important objective of social work education (Wiles, 2017). Contemporary studies also demonstrate that reflection on educational and practical experience contributes to the gradual development of students' professional identity (Björktomta & Tham, 2024).

Professional readiness concerns the ability to transform acquired knowledge, values, and competencies into appropriate professional action. Therefore, a student may understand the principles and values of social work but remain insufficiently prepared to apply them in interviewing, counseling, conflict management, assessment, teamwork, or crisis response. The relationship between understanding oneself as a professional and being capable of professional action is therefore an important issue in social work education.

This problem has particular relevance for Ukraine. The full-scale war has significantly transformed social needs and professional social work practice. Forced displacement, loss and bereavement, veteran reintegration, disability, socioeconomic difficulties, family crises, and psychosocial distress require social workers to operate in increasingly complex circumstances. The war has simultaneously affected the development and transformation of social work itself, increasing the importance of flexible professional preparation and the ability to respond to rapidly changing needs (Romaniuk et al., 2024).

Traditional academic instruction alone cannot fully reproduce the interpersonal, ethical, and emotional complexity of such professional situations. Training technologies may help bridge this gap by providing students with opportunities to model professional situations, practise relevant skills, receive feedback, and reflect on their experience.

Despite considerable research on professional identity, experiential learning, field education, and interactive teaching methods, the potential of training technologies to simultaneously develop professional identity and readiness for practice requires further theoretical conceptualization. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate the potential of training technologies as a tool for developing the professional identity and professional readiness of future social work professionals and to conceptualize the mechanisms through which training-based learning contributes to their professional formation.

Professional formation in social work involves considerably more than the accumulation of theoretical knowledge. Students gradually acquire an understanding of the professional community to which they intend to belong, its ethical standards, values, responsibilities, and expected patterns of interaction. Professional identity can therefore be considered a developing perception of oneself as a social work professional based on the integration of personal experience with professional knowledge, values, roles, and ethical principles.

This process is particularly significant because social work is both a practice-based and value-based profession. Professionals frequently encounter situations in which there is no single standardized solution. Decisions require consideration of the client's needs and autonomy, ethical principles, available resources, institutional requirements, and possible consequences. Professional identity consequently provides an internal framework through which future specialists interpret their roles and responsibilities.

Professional identity develops through interaction between academic learning and professional experience. Wiles (2017) emphasizes its importance as an outcome of social work education, while Björktomta and Tham (2024) demonstrate the value of reflective practices in helping students connect educational experiences with their emerging understanding of the profession. Reflection allows students to

analyze their reactions, values, strengths, limitations, and professional boundaries and thereby transform experience into professional learning.

Professional readiness represents another dimension of professional formation and can be understood as a future specialist's preparedness and capacity to perform professional tasks appropriately. It includes theoretical knowledge but cannot be reduced to it. Readiness requires the integration of cognitive, communicative, operational, ethical, and reflective competencies that enable students to act in actual professional situations.

Professional identity and professional readiness should therefore be considered complementary rather than separate outcomes. Professional identity primarily answers the question "Who am I becoming as a social work professional?", whereas readiness addresses "What am I prepared and able to do as a social work professional?". Identity influences the values and professional position underlying action, while successful professional action reinforces students' perception of themselves as competent members of the profession.

This relationship requires educational environments where students can not only learn about professional activity but also experience elements of it. Field education performs an important function in this regard; however, real practice cannot guarantee that every student encounters the same professional situations, while some situations may be too complex or sensitive for initial learning. Training technologies can complement field education by providing a relatively safe environment for modelling, practising, and reflecting on professional activity.

In the context of social work education, training technologies can be understood as a structured system of interactive and experiential methods aimed at developing professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavioral strategies, and reflective capacities through active participation. They include role-playing, simulations, case analysis, group problem-solving, structured discussions, behavioral rehearsal, feedback, and reflective exercises.

Their methodological foundation is closely connected with experiential learning, according to which experience becomes educationally meaningful through reflection, conceptualization, and subsequent application. In training-based learning, students perform professionally relevant actions, analyze the results, connect their experience with theoretical concepts, and test modified strategies in subsequent activities. Experiential approaches are particularly appropriate for social work because they facilitate the integration of knowledge, experience, and reflexivity (Cherian & Prakash, 2022).

For example, a simulated client interview requires a student not simply to describe active listening but to establish contact, formulate questions, recognize emotional responses, maintain professional boundaries, and respond to unexpected information. Subsequent feedback and reflection make it possible to identify successful and problematic strategies and relate them to professional standards.

Simulation is particularly valuable because it allows complex professional situations to be reproduced without exposing actual clients to the consequences of novice mistakes. Recent empirical evidence indicates that virtual simulations can contribute to the development of assessment and direct-practice skills among social work students (Jefferies, 2024). Training methods can therefore create an intermediate educational environment between academic instruction and real professional practice.

However, interactive activity alone does not guarantee professional learning. A training exercise should have a clear educational purpose, correspond to relevant professional competencies, and include structured feedback and reflection. The facilitator's task is therefore not merely to organize activities but to help participants understand the connection between their experience, theoretical knowledge, professional values, and future practice.

The potential of training technologies can be conceptualized through four interconnected components of professional formation: cognitive, axiological, activity-based, and reflective.

The cognitive component involves understanding the theoretical foundations, methods, roles, responsibilities, and ethical requirements of social work. Training does not replace theoretical instruction but provides a context in which knowledge becomes functionally connected with professional situations. Case analysis and simulations require students to select and apply relevant knowledge rather than merely reproduce it.

The axiological component concerns the internalization and practical interpretation of professional values. Respect for human dignity, social justice, client autonomy, confidentiality, non-discrimination, responsibility, and professional boundaries become particularly meaningful when students encounter situations in which different values or interests conflict. Training scenarios allow ethical principles to be transformed from abstract declarations into criteria for professional decision-making.

The activity-based component represents the transition from knowing to doing. Through role-playing, simulations, group tasks, and behavioral rehearsal, students practise communication, interviewing, counseling, assessment, conflict resolution, teamwork, problem-solving, and decision-making. Repeated practice makes it possible to identify difficulties and develop more flexible professional strategies. Evidence concerning simulation-based social work education supports its potential for strengthening practical skills through realistic and engaging learning experiences (Jefferies, 2024).

Finally, the reflective component integrates experience with professional self-understanding. Students analyze not only what they did but why they acted in a particular way, what emotions influenced them, how their behavior affected others, and what should be changed in future practice. Reflection therefore connects professional readiness with professional identity. Research on reflective writing in social work education similarly demonstrates that structured reflection can support professional identity formation and make students' learning and development more visible (Björktomt & Tham, 2024).

On this basis, an integrative model of professional development through training technologies can be proposed:

Cognitive component → Axiological component → Activity-based component → Reflective component → further professional development.

The model should not be interpreted as a strictly linear sequence. Its components interact continuously. New knowledge influences professional values and decisions; practical action reveals gaps in knowledge and competence; reflection changes students' understanding of themselves and stimulates further learning. Training technologies consequently create a cyclical process through which professional identity and professional readiness mutually reinforce one another.

An important characteristic of the proposed model is that the effectiveness of training-based professional development depends not only on the content of individual exercises but also on the consistency with which students progress through different levels of professional learning. At the initial stages of social work education, training activities may focus primarily on understanding professional roles, recognizing the values of the profession, and developing basic communication skills. As students acquire theoretical knowledge and initial practical experience, training scenarios can become progressively more complex and include ethical dilemmas, multidisciplinary interaction, work with resistant or emotionally distressed clients, crisis situations, and cases requiring the simultaneous application of several professional competencies. Such gradual complication allows training technologies to accompany professional development throughout the educational process rather than functioning as an isolated teaching method.

The integrative nature of training technologies is also manifested in their ability to create a connection between individual professional development and group-based learning. Social work is fundamentally relational, and the professional formation of students occurs through interaction with other people. During training sessions, participants encounter different perspectives, behavioral strategies, communication styles, and interpretations of professional situations. Observing peers, participating in joint problem-solving, receiving feedback, and discussing alternative approaches encourage students to reconsider their own assumptions and develop greater flexibility in professional interaction. The group therefore becomes not only an organizational format for training but also a specific educational resource through which professional norms, values, and models of cooperation are experienced and critically interpreted.

Another significant aspect concerns the development of professional self-efficacy. Repeated opportunities to perform professional actions in a supportive educational environment can gradually reduce uncertainty associated with entering professional practice. Successful completion of progressively more complex tasks, together with constructive feedback and analysis of mistakes, allows students to recognize their developing competencies without creating an unrealistic perception of complete preparedness. At the same time, training may help students identify areas in which additional knowledge, supervision, or practical experience is required. In this respect, professional readiness should not be interpreted as absolute confidence but rather as the ability to combine competence with awareness of one's professional limitations.

Thus, training technologies contribute to professional formation at several interconnected levels: they provide opportunities to apply knowledge, experience professional values in action, develop practical competencies, interact within a professional learning community, and evaluate one's own readiness for future practice. Their educational potential is therefore determined not by interactivity itself but by the purposeful integration of experience, professional meaning, feedback, and reflection.

The proposed model also clarifies the dual function of training technologies. On the one hand, they contribute to professional readiness by allowing students to practise relevant actions. On the other hand,

participation in professional simulations, discussion of values, feedback, and reflection enables students to experience themselves in a professional role and therefore contributes to identity development.

he proposed approach acquires additional significance in the Ukrainian context. The war has transformed the conditions and priorities of social work and increased the diversity and complexity of professional tasks. Social workers may interact with internally displaced persons, veterans and their families, people experiencing bereavement and ambiguous loss, persons with disabilities, families affected by economic difficulties, and communities experiencing prolonged psychosocial stress. Research on the transformation of Ukrainian social work indicates that war-related changes have simultaneously created new challenges and stimulated adaptation within the profession (Romaniuk et al., 2024).

Accordingly, professional education should prepare students not only for standard service provision but also for uncertainty, interdisciplinary cooperation, psychosocial support, ethical complexity, and emotionally demanding interactions. Training technologies can model relevant situations before students encounter them in practice. Scenarios may include communication with a distressed client, work with a displaced family, interdisciplinary case discussions, conflict situations, community needs assessment, or establishing professional boundaries in emotionally intense interactions.

At the same time, training technologies should not be regarded as a substitute for field education, supervision, or direct professional experience. Their function is preparatory and integrative. Training can provide a controlled environment in which students develop initial strategies, identify their limitations, and learn to recognize situations requiring referral or additional professional support. This is especially important when working with vulnerable populations, where professional mistakes may have significant consequences.

Thus, in contemporary Ukrainian social work education, training technologies can contribute to preparing specialists who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of acting under changing circumstances while maintaining professional values, ethical standards, and reflective awareness.

### **Discussion**

The theoretical analysis demonstrates that the value of training technologies extends beyond the development of individual practical skills. Their broader educational potential lies in integrating knowledge, values, professional action, interpersonal experience, feedback, and reflection within a single learning process.

This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing professional identity as an important outcome of social work education (Wiles, 2017), the role of reflection in its formation (Björktomta & Tham, 2024), and the potential of experiential and simulation-based approaches for developing practical competencies (Cherian & Prakash, 2022; Jefferies, 2024). At the same time, the proposed model integrates these dimensions by considering professional identity and professional readiness as mutually reinforcing outcomes rather than independent educational goals.

Several limitations should be recognized. Training situations remain constructed representations of professional reality and cannot fully reproduce the complexity, responsibility, unpredictability, and emotional intensity of actual client work. Their effectiveness also depends substantially on facilitator competence, appropriate selection of methods, psychological safety, quality of feedback, and meaningful reflection. Training technologies should therefore be integrated with theoretical education, field practice, supervision, and other forms of professional preparation rather than used as an isolated educational approach.

### **Conclusions**

Training technologies constitute a significant practice-oriented component of contemporary social work education. Their educational potential derives from the possibility of integrating theoretical knowledge with professional values, practical action, interpersonal experience, feedback, and reflection. This makes them particularly relevant to the development of both professional identity and readiness for practice among future social work professionals.

Professional identity reflects students' understanding of themselves as representatives of social work, their acceptance of professional values, roles, responsibilities, and ethical principles. Professional readiness reflects their capacity to translate these foundations into competent professional action. The theoretical analysis suggests that these outcomes are interconnected and can be simultaneously strengthened through appropriately organized training-based learning.

The proposed integrative model identifies four mutually related components of this process: cognitive, axiological, activity-based, and reflective. Training technologies allow students to understand professional activity, interpret and internalize its values, practise professional actions, and reflect on their

own experience. Reflection closes and simultaneously renews this cycle by transforming practical experience into further professional development.

The relevance of this approach is particularly evident in contemporary Ukraine, where social work is being transformed by the consequences of war and the increasing complexity of individual, family, and community needs. Training technologies can provide future professionals with a relatively safe environment for preparing for complex professional situations while developing practical competence and a conscious professional position.

Further research should focus on the empirical verification of the proposed model, including assessment of how particular training methods influence different components of professional identity and readiness and whether these effects are maintained during subsequent field practice and early professional employment.

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