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Research in Progress

The Experience of the Singleton Practice Teacher

Nigel Elliott

The research summarised here was carried out during 1986-7. The research is based upon two questionnaires. The first was addressed to senior staff holding a responsibility for training. Questions concern the preparation, supervision and consultation provided for practice teachers. Further questions attempt to establish the weight placed upon practice teaching in terms of agency priority and staff career development. Managers in two social services departments, two probation services and two voluntary casework agencies were interviewed.

The second questionnaire was addressed to singleton practice teachers supervising CQSW students on evaluated placements. The questionnaire concentrates upon the experience of the practice teacher during the current placement and it mirrors closely the questionnaire for management. Ten practice teachers were interviewed from six agencies, again covering social services, probation and voluntary casework agencies.

The questionnaires were directly administered by the author. They contain multiple choice answers, but the interviews were conducted in an open ended manner. Additional comments from the respondents were welcomed, so that a set of case studies was acquired. The emphasis, therefore, was on "data gathering clearly on the social and qualitative rather than the quantitative side" (Miller, 1983, p.21).

I concerned myself with singleton practice teachers because the majority of CQSW students are placed with them, while the student units have already been the subject of considerable research (Curnock, 1975; Sawdon, 1986. Previous studies that place singleton practice teachers in the agency-context include Symons, 1980; Syson, 1981).

Induction and Further Training

Barbara Symons (1980, p. 28) found that:

> "Preparation of supervisors, and the provision of time in which to apply techniques of supervision and skills in assessment, would not appear to rate very highly (in the agencies) at the present time".

In the agencies I visited, however, responsibility has now been assumed for the preparatory training of practice teachers. In all the agencies where I saw the managers, attendance on short (two or three days) introductory courses is an expectation for all practice teachers prior to taking their first students and eight out of ten practice teachers I interviewed had attended such courses.

Further training was generally not available. As one manager, from a social services department, said "there is no encouragement beyond the basic because the basic has to be got right first". Of the ten practice teachers, only one - a probation officer with 15 years' experience in supervising students - had been on any further training courses.

Supervision and Consultancy

The acquisition of skills by practice teachers in these agencies, therefore, needs to come through the experience of doing the job with the help of any support and supervision that the agency might provide. One-to-one supervision with the team leader was commonly available, although one manager, in a decentralised social services department, said that he could not be sure that this was uniformly available and three of the ten practice teachers were receiving no supervision at all.

I defined consultancy as support, focused solely on the practice teaching, that takes place outside the evaluative structures of line management. However, for the pur-

poses of this research, I allowed that the management may require staff to attend and that the content of the sessions may in part by predetermined by the consultant (Brown, 1984, pp.4-5; Kadushin,1977, pp.26 and 36-7). The managers from the probation services both reported that group consultancy is available and that attendance is an expectation for practice teachers. The practice teachers from the probation services whom I interviewed were well provided with consultancies. The provision of such help in addition to supervision in the probation service recalls the comment of Syson (1981, p.46) that the probation service "had a particularly well-defined policy towards practice placements".

The presence of a student unit in an agency could be a valued source of consultative help to singleton practice teachers. One local authority social worker, who was unsupported in any other way, found the student unit worker invaluable, while the probation officers in an area where the student unit had been closed said that this had worsened the service to students and supervisors because "a body of knowledge and expertise has been lost".

In general, the respondents valued the supervision, consultancy and team support that was available, but it was only in the voluntary casework agencies that the workers considered that this form of support was well rooted theoretically, with an explicit theoretical alignment between practice teacher and team leader.

Work Relief, Placing of Students, Evaluation

Whereas all the managers in the statutory sector whom I interviewed stated that they favoured work relief for practice teachers, in no case was there a structure, supported by senior staff, to assist in its provision. Of the eight practice teachers in the statutory agencies, only two received work relief and both of these had relied upon personal negotiation and the goodwill of the team to achieve it. Concerning the placing of students in the statutory agencies, the decisions whether an individual has the ability to take a student and whether the team has the capacity to accommodate a student was generally taken at the level of team leader and practice teacher.

In the voluntary agencies, on the other hand, there was an expectation by senior managers that social workers would take students and staff were appointed and work levels set in accordance with this expectation. Students in the voluntary sector bring an income with them, paid to the agency, and one respondent said that "the agency decides that teams and offices have the capacity; they provide the space and view having students as a primary function of the agency".

It follows, therefore, that in the voluntary agencies, experience and skill as a practice teacher is seen as a requirement in any candidate's suitability for promotion. The position in the statutory agencies was more ambiguous and, indeed, in the two probation services where I saw the managers, experience in practice teaching, while appreciated, is explicitly not a requirement for promotion.

Different practices between the statutory and voluntary agencies were revealed again by the replies to questions about the evaluation of practice teachers. In the voluntary sector, the workers mostly spoke confidently of receiving team feedback, comment from tutor and student at the end of the placement and comment from the team leader in the annual evaluation. In the statutory sector, the managers stated that practice teaching, in its own right, did not receive any formal evaluation and only one of the practice teachers - a probation officer - expected any genuine evaluation of his work. Others sought such comment in order, as one put it, "to enhance my practice", but they received no formal agency help in achieving this.

Summary of Research

This research indicates that agencies have accepted some responsibility for introductory training, supervision and consultancy for practice teachers. However, in the statutory sector, work relief remains rare and responsibility for achieving it rests solely at the individual and team level. The means of becoming a practice teacher is

often unclear and there is uncertainty among senior staff as to the part practice teaching should play in the career development of staff. None of the statutory agencies have made evaluation of the quality of placements an expectation and right for practice teachers and, in the main, the expectations of practice teachers in this respect were low.

The picture proved most haphazard in the social services departments, where practice teachers often had to fall back on their own resources to find what help they could for themselves. The level of satisfaction with the arrangements for practice teaching revealed by the responses of both managers and practice teachers was at its lowest in these departments. The picture proved more consistent in the probation services, but it achieved its greatest consistency in the voluntary casework agencies. In the interviews in the voluntary agencies, the staff displayed a sense of competence and professional confidence in their work. The space for taking students was built into the operational structure of the agencies. The social workers' attitude was that they had the resources in their own teams to do the job well and the expectation that regular supervision and evaluation are required was met in large measure.

Comment

This research had a specific focus in looking at how managers and practice teachers assessed the policies and support provided by their agencies for the education of the social work students placed with them. No assessment of the quality of the placements themselves was attempted but there is an assumption underlying the research that good quality placements will more generally be achieved in agencies which provide a favourable and supportive climate for those placements. The debate generated by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, through its proposals for a new Qualifying Diploma in Social Work, poses the question for agencies as to whether they are prepared to resource practice teaching adequately. (CCETSW 1987; Evans *et al.*, 1987). Whatever the exact shape of social work education in the future, the moves towards the accreditation of practice teachers and agencies and towards close collaboration between agencies and colleges have already acquired a momentum and are likely to continue.

The agencies — where students spend fifty per cent of their course time — and their practice teachers, along with the colleges, have been adversely criticised in past surveys of what actually happens on placement. The early surveys contained many criticisms of the quality of placements and of the process of assessment (Davies, 1979; Morrell, 1979), while recent surveys have criticised the acute shortage of placements (Collins *et al.*, 1987; Grimwood and Fletcher, 1987). The result is that recent CCETSW papers have been quite unambiguous in describing a discredited system (CCETSW, 1987,; see also Evans *et al.*, 1987, pp. 12-14).

But there is a paradox. 8,000 of the 9,000 placements provided annually are with the under resourced, poorly supported singleton practice teachers, who lack either influence or good opportunities to develop their skills (Evans *et al.*, 1987, p.44). Yet many good placements are provided, which is something that can be sadly forgotten in the face of the present flood criticising what is seen as a discredited system. Pat Bastian and Eric Blyth (1988, p.30) remind us of this when they say that "Currently in social work agencies there are many skilled practitioners who are competent practice teachers offering a world of experience to their students". Students themselves acknowledge this when they rate so highly their experience of placements (Davies, 1984, p.16; Faiers, 1987). The social workers and managers whom I interviewed could not but impress as they strove to provide a professional service in an often unsympathetic setting where the pressures of service delivery were taking precedence.

The resolution of this paradox, I believe, lies in the individual and ultimately small scale quality of successful social work: for social work is a profession in which such highly personal attributes as self-awareness, analysing and evaluating personal experience as a tool of learning, respond-

ing appropriately to major emotions such as depression and grief and understanding their impact on oneself, and the protection and promotion of the dignity, rights and responsibilities of clients and client groups are seen as core skills and professional values required of the newly qualifying social worker (CCETSW. 1987, pp. 60-1).

That good social work is so individualised allows the individual practice teacher to achieve successful placements with the student in spite of the surroundings, but the greatest consistency in quality will be achieved amongst the greatest number of an agency's practice teachers when the structure within which they work provides a favourable environment for learning: this is the challenge that faces the large statutory agencies as they seek closer collaboration with the colleges and more influence in the qualifying education of social work students. This is the issue that I intend to explore in a further article that partly arises out of this research, investigating the theories of adult learning and supervision in relation to practice teaching in the social work agencies.

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Putting Placements in Perspective

Richard Bryant and Mike Noble

One of the hazards of research is that findings, based upon limited evidence, can so easily be elevated to the status of a conventional wisdom and proven fact if they fit with commonly held

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I - INTRODUCTION

In these pages, I develop thinking that was stimulated by doing research into the experiences of practice teachers while simultaneously being involved in running support groups for practice teachers. However, the thinking is also rooted in the more general experiences of working in the field over a number of years.

I have not attempted to write a general introduction to practice teaching and, indeed, many such introductions exist already. Instead, I have tried to draw a synthesis out of the literature on social work education - and particularly practice teaching - that already exists and to place that synthesis against my own practice experience, my own research and my own system of values. Consequently, I assume in the reader a certain familiarity with the current literature. But I also hope that all that I have written is sufficiently elucidated to speak to all those who have had the privilege and enjoyed the pleasures of engaging with students in what, in my experience, invariably develops into a rewarding process of mutual learning about social work. Out of this enthusiasm comes my strongest impetus for trying to convey my thoughts in written form.

My argument starts with the need for learning to take place in a climate that is conducive to learning. The traditional social work definition of supervision - with its administrative, educative and supportive components - indeed allows for learning and will encourage it. However, I argue that in many agencies the educational and supportive aspects of supervision have been devalued in favour of the

administrative aspect as a part of the defence mechanisms against anxiety that operate in those agencies. This tendency has a direct effect upon staff supervision but, more indirectly, it affects student supervision through the failure to provide adequate structural support for practice teachers. In agencies, on the other hand, where there are effective defence mechanisms which allow for the full use of supervision, the practice teachers too find themselves supported. In these agencies supervision is an effective means of teaching and learning.

In such agencies, practice teaching can flourish and the close relationship between the social work process, which includes supervision, and the theories of adult learning is made manifest. Practice teachers have a right to this congruence between agency climate, supervision and learning not only because students need adequate preparation but also because practice teaching, like direct social work, is stressful for the practice teacher and learner alike. This stress will most clearly be displayed in the supportive function of supervision and yet it is in just this area that there is to be found a key to the practice teacher's assessment of the student: has the student the understanding and openness to develop as a social worker?

An assessment in this area cannot wholly be based upon objective criteria. The assessment will be largely intuitive and subjective. While much emphasis in recent years has been placed upon objective criteria of assessment, it is not necessary to be wary of the intuitive and subjective. Holistic and ecological viewpoints have equal validity with the mechanistic and quantitative, and practice teaching itself may be seen as an art which is concerned with the wholeness of the student and with an assessment of the student's potential to grow in

the art of social work. The student needs to be able to show competence rather than merely not to show incompetence, and a part of the evidence will be the student's ability to show a sensitive awareness of the subtlety of interaction between client and worker and of the demands this makes upon the inner self-awareness of the worker.

II - A CLIMATE FOR LEARNING AND DEFENCES AGAINST ANXIETY: THE ADMINISTRATIVE MODE

The author's experience is in casework, family and group work in the field setting, but in the residential sector and in community work, aspects of the same dynamic interplay between worker and client exist as in the field setting. The unitary approach towards social work will only have validity if social work has a set of values and knowledge that links the different settings in which social work takes place, whether in the field office, day centre, residential setting or in the community. The key to understanding the place of social work in this wide range of settings will rest on the transfer of learning by the student, which comes through the integration of what is learnt and the discovery of the skill of learning to learn (Harris, 1985, pp. 80-90; Sawdon, 1986, pp. 96-108). A way into understanding the transfer of learning and the means of learning is for the learning environment itself to be a model, so that the congruence between the environment and the skills being learnt becomes a lesson in the transfer of learning (James and Cooper, 1978; Knowles, 1984, pp. 97-8, 119-21). M.S. Knowles argues that:

> *In my own andragogical model, climate setting is probably the most crucial element ... If the climate is not really conducive to learning, if it doesn't convey that an organisation values human beings as its most valuable asset and their development its most productive investment, then all the other elements in the process are jeopardized. There isn't much likelihood of having a first-rate program of educational activities in an environment that is not supportive of education.*

Fifty per cent of a CQSW student's social work education takes place in social work agencies and consequently, for the practice teacher and

the student, the agency is a place for learning in which much is demanded of both. But the primary function of the agency is not the education of social workers: the agency exists for the client. Much of the energy of the agency, however, is going to be taken up in the conflict between the perceived needs of the client and the social and administrative context in which the agency itself exists. Practice teachers, therefore, are liable to find themselves attempting to create a favourable learning environment for their students in a complex setting that is not primarily concerned with educational goals.

Some of the difficulties that arise from this can be illustrated by some of the responses that I received to a research questionnaire (Elliott, 1988). The study consisted of a series of interviews with managers who held training responsibilities and with singleton practice teachers in the probation service, social services departments and voluntary casework agencies.

The information provided by the respondents in the research indicated that introductory training is widely provided for practice teachers and that supervision and consultancy - often in the form of support groups - are also frequently provided. In these respects, the picture for these respondents, if generally far from ideal, still looked more encouraging than that discerned by previous researchers in this field (Symons, 1980; Syson, 1981, pp. 44-50). But questions concerning other indicators of the value placed upon practice teaching provided less encouraging responses. Outside the agencies in the voluntary sector, work relief is rarely provided for practice teachers and, when it is provided, the impetus comes at the level of the individual and the team, while practice teachers receive very little in the way of evaluation and

comment on their skills in supervising students. Again, the impetus for this can come at the individual level, with practice teachers seeking out what they need rather than senior agency staff providing it as a matter of course.

The responses of the managers in the statutory agencies indicate also that there is often no perceived link between experiences in practice teaching and the promotion prospects of staff. On occasion the link has been deliberately severed and, if alternative means for showing supervisory skills are not made available to main grade staff who may subsequently seek promotion, the expectation that middle managers will supervise can be lost sight of. It can be cogently argued that managerial skills are not necessarily linked to teaching skills, but if that is the argument then the responsibilities of the middle manager team leader should not include staff supervision. As I shall argue below, this is generally not the case in social work at present in this country. Outside Britain other models exist and the managing aspect of supervision can be explicitly separated from the educative and supportive (Greenwich, 1987, p. 187; Payne and Scott, 1982, p. 43). If, however, the responsibilities of the team leader crucially involve skills in all aspects of staff supervision, then the overlap with practice teaching is very close.

Alfred Kadushin, in his authoritative study, defined staff supervision as involving administrative, educative and supportive functions and he quotes studies which reveal the close correlation between worker satisfaction and the quality of supervision that the worker receives (1976, pp. 1-2). This tripartite definition of supervision is generally accepted and writers on both practice teaching and staff supervision

invariably turn to it (Butler and Elliott, 1985, p. 65; Westheimer, 1977, pp. 16-21). D.E. Pettes, indeed, integrates the roles of practice teacher and staff supervisor closely enough to cover both in one book built upon the single tripartite definition of supervision, with skills in communication interweaving the other three (1979, pp. 4-6).

This model has derived from the practice of conventional one-to-one supervision, with the line manager or practice teacher, as the supervisor, carrying on behalf of the agency a responsibility for the quality of the work of the supervisee. That 8,000 of the 9,000 placements provided annually are with singleton practice teachers (Evans et al., 1987, p. 44) indicates that the great majority of students continue to receive one-to-one supervision while on placement. Other models exist and examples include group supervision, especially in student units, and the development of the supervisor's role as the co-ordinator of the placement whereby she does not hold direct responsibility for all of the student's practice. This model is most commonly, but not exclusively, found in community work placements (Ford and Jones, 1987, pp. 94-9; Sawdon, 1986; Webber, 1977). Whatever the method of supervision, however, the central functions still need to be attended to and one person is required to see that the learning on the placement is co-ordinated and that a proper and accountable assessment of the student's competence is made.

Michael Davies, in his study of staff supervision in the probation service, also found that one-to-one supervision through the structure of line management remains the most common method, although there is growing diversity, especially for main grade probation officers, in the styles of supervision that are developed (1988, pp. 80-4). The latter

can serve to distribute the component elements of supervision among different people and to broaden the supervising functions to include collective team development as well as individual development. But Davies found that the service is united on the essential components of supervision which reflect closely the traditional tripartite definition of supervision - that minimum standards are adhered to, that professional development is attended to and that support is provided (p. 113). Meanwhile, he found agreement that evaluation of staff is required and that this properly belongs to line management (pp. 144-5, 147). The message of his research is that, whether supervision is one-to-one or, in whole or in part, of another kind, these necessary functions still need to be fulfilled in a deliberate, planned and approved manner (see also Payne and Scott, 1982).

My focus, therefore, will remain on one-to-one supervision as the most common method used for both students and staff and as highlighting most succinctly the internal conflicts that can develop in the supervisor's role. However, I believe that the arguments I make are valid for all methods of supervision because the organisational pressures and the necessary supervising tasks remain essentially the same.

In practice, at the level of staff supervision, there is a blurring of the three part role of supervision; there are internal conflicts in the task that mirror the conflict between the agency administrative functions, as expressed by higher management, and client need, as expressed by social workers. Here lies the greatest source of stress for the supervisor of social work staff (Kadushin, 1976, pp. 257, 264-8; Pritchard, 1985, p. 37). Davies, for example, found a tension between main grade probation officers, who expressed a need for some

casework consultancy in supervision (which particularly involves educative and supportive functions) and senior grades who, increasingly, if sometimes reluctantly, saw supervision in terms of resource management and policy development and monitoring (which particularly involves the administrative function). This becomes a nagging tension that threads its way through the whole study (1988, pp. 54-7, 67-72, 77-9, 145). The persistence and intensity of this conflict arises in large measure, I believe, from the social work tendency to resort to administrative and bureaucratic mechanisms as the defence against anxiety.

This tendency is reinforced by current political and public pressures on social work agencies - and notably the probation service - to be more accountable in their actions: there is a call for the expenditure of public money to be justified in a more measurable and accountable manner than previously. Improved management and information systems are seen as means of achieving these ends. But these pressures are often decried in social work circles because the implied or actual changes that can result from them, particularly in the form of enhanced and more rigid central control, are seen as inimical to the ethos of good practice and the complexities of social work (Hadley, 1986; Parry-Khan, 1988). What is of concern to me in these pages is that the power of these developments, and the power of the response that they generate within the social work world, arises in no small measure from the way they mesh with the social workers' tendency in any case to defensive flight into administrative and bureaucratic structures.

This concept of the defence against anxiety may be described as a clinical theory that arises from the observation of behaviour. While

the theory does not lend itself to empirical measurement, it still has its own legitimacy. Janet Mattinson and Ian Sinclair (1979, pp. 63-4) state that:

> *Research in the field of the natural sciences and of some parts of psychology has traditionally been concerned with measurement, prediction and control. It is useful to people who are concerned with what can be measured and with the control of events ... it is less obvious that such theories can be useful to those concerned with understanding persons and liberating more creative behaviour. Typically, clinical theories, as we use the term, do not set out to predict what will happen in every instance. Rather, they alert us to what to look for and provide ideas to help us understand events when they do occur.*

In such fields as social work and medicine, there is an inevitable need for defences of some form. The staff in all organisations that deal on an intimate and daily basis with human suffering and unhappiness will find defences against too much exposure to that suffering and unhappiness and the inner reverberations which that exposure generates in the workers (Menzies, 1970; Mattinson and Sinclair, 1979). Mattinson and Sinclair, in their study of a social services department, found that (p. 252):

> *The concern with the practical, the statutory and the procedural could conceivably divert attention from the underlying emotional issues with which the workers are also concerned. ... it is clear that the organization and its culture offers the workers a chance to take on a bureaucratic role in self-protection and to blame others. It is also clear that it could allow or encourage practices whose primary purpose was to protect them against the demands and attacks of the outside world.*

This dilemma can be discerned in recent reports on the deaths of children for whom social services departments, in conjunction with other agencies, held a responsibility. I believe that it will help if this dilemma is illustrated by looking in some detail at the reports prepared following the deaths of Jasmine Beckford, Kimberley Carlile and Tyra Henry.

In the case of Jasmine Beckford (Brent, 1985), the comments of the magistrates, addressed to the parents (p. 287, Appendices p. XII), combined with the unhappy histories, the poor housing conditions and the (p. 100) 'very appealing' quality of the Beckford parents led the case to be pigeon-holed such that everything had to be seen as (p. 137) 'going smoothly ... and nothing that could detract one iota from that rosy picture should be allowed to intrude' into the process of rehabilitation. Martin Ruddock, the worker with Kimberley Carlile, on the other hand, never lost sight of the case as one of alleged child abuse. But the very system of multidisciplinary responsibility became like cotton wool that absorbed his efforts to mobilise help for the child and reinforced what is described in the report as the desultory drift that became a feature of his work (Greenwich, 1987, pp. 114, 142): 'Thus Mr Ruddock was like a puppeteer, where none of the parts responded to the strings he was pulling.' In the Beckford case, therefore, the checks and reviews built into the child protection system still allowed the overall assessment and direction of the case to become predetermined, while in the Carlile case the complexity of the multi-disciplinary system allowed a narrow interpretation of responsibility to be adopted by some of those involved.

The workers in all these cases would doubtless recognise the description in the Carlile report of workers (p. 198) 'puzzling over the reasons for their falling from their own standards'. Yet the way the emotional intensity of such cases can 'contaminate' several layers of management (Brent, p. 252), the way emotions are 'beamed out' from the family (Greenwich, p. 193), the way workers, in directly receiving such emotions, are liable to burn-out (Brent, pp. 217-8; Greenwich, pp. 196-200), leading, as Jean Moore says (1988, p. 26) to negative assessments

of oneself, the job and the client, to stereotyped responses, to the failure to follow things through, to sheer tiredness and worry, all of which is reinforced by the 'victim/victimiser syndrome' by which the victim acts like the opposite of a victim, all make such bureaucratic options as the pigeon-hole or the cotton wool only too tempting. Such options unconsciously allow the daily, burdensome impact of at least some of these cases to be lifted somewhat for the worker, to be recategorised, to provide some relief from the rigorous focus on an endangered child. Using the phraseology of the Carlile report (p. 193) it is only too easy for a social worker's antennae not to be in working order so that signals of child abuse are not picked up or are denied, while the child protection system itself can serve to validate this tendency.

All these reports are clear that rounded, focused and regular supervision, assisted with the independent chairing of case conferences, is a clue to breaking this cycle. The words of the Carlile report (p. 216) can speak also for the reports on Jasmine Beckford and Tyra Henry: 'We think that the absence of supervision of the two field workers was a crucial feature of the mishandling of the case.' In these pages, I attempt to describe such supervision and its interdependent elements. The educative and supportive elements include the room to explore and challenge the worker's feel for the case, emotional responses to and interaction with it and how these factors influence the decisions made by the worker and the exercise of the authority vested in the worker (Lambeth, 1987, pp. 110-6). The administrative aspect, meanwhile, covers the realm of accountability, especially in terms of the procedural and statutory responsibilities of the agency and of the process of communication between the different agencies involved. The authors of

the Tyra Henry report make some recommendations for procedural improvements. However, they are explicit that too much reliance on the administrative management of a case, which will be reflected in the supervision that is offered, carries considerable risk (p. 102):

> *Regulations spelling out particular elements of a procedure can never be comprehensive, yet frequently have limiting, and sometimes a mesmeric, effect ... Whether they contained minimum standards or comprehensive guidance, regulations could not have injected the necessary sensitivity and imagination into the management of her case.*

The authors later argue that (p. 115):

> *Our underlying view is that supervision and chairing* (of case conferences) *are the specific, empirical points in the management of a case like Tyra Henry's where errors are most open to detection if the watchers are alert; and that a multiplication of paper procedures ... is a fallible and bureaucratic second-best.*

This tension between the defence system of the agency which relies so greatly upon emotional distancing through bureaucracy, and the inescapability of the social work client, becomes placed most acutely in the team leader who is the supervisor of the social work staff. The administrative function of the supervision becomes compelling and agency structures convert it into the primary aspect of supervision. This process is intensified as administrative and management functions take over, squeezing out the room for any supervision, let alone the reflective supervision that is called for in the recent child abuse reports (Lambeth, 1987, pp. 111-15; Moore, 1988, p. 27: these references plead the serious resource implications of this argument). The emotional demands of the client and the social worker, however, are still there, but the supervisor has to contain these alone at her level as best she can or ignore them. The tension, therefore, is barely relieved and indeed the ultimate ineffectiveness of such defence mechanisms was observed by Isabel Menzies (p. 38):

> *defence mechanisms ... facilitate the evasion of anxiety, but contribute little to its true modification and reduction.*

The supervisory task is potentially pivotal to the defence system of the organisation. This tension is exemplified in the split between the administrative function on the one hand, and the educative and supportive functions, on the other, of supervision. But the split is rarely addressed because to do so would be to expose the defence mechanism to scrutiny.

Modelling is, at present, the main means by which knowledge about supervision is handed on (Kadushin, 1976, pp. 191-2; Payne and Scott, 1982, p. 13). In practice, therefore, staff supervision will be the model for student supervision and vice versa. In the agency, the same pressures that are experienced by the staff supervisor will be translated into the experience of the practice teacher in her supervision. The necessary support of that student supervision - in terms of providing time through work relief, recognition of the value of the task and the importance of evaluation - will not be forthcoming. The practice teacher will be left with a supervisory model that is not conducive to creating a climate for learning. Success in creating such a climate is only achieved in isolation, and by the individual and the team, and against the odds, which is an experience many of the practice teacher respondents whom I interviewed would indeed recognise.

III - THE CONGRUENCE OF TRIPARTITE SUPERVISION AND ADULT LEARNING: THE EDUCATIVE MODE

In my research study (Elliott, 1988), it was notable that the experiences of the respondents in the voluntary casework agencies differed in significant respects from those of the respondents in the statutory sector. Although they are under umbrella organisations, the voluntary agencies retained much autonomy at the team level. In many respects, the teams stood as agencies in their own right. Introductory training and supervision were routinely offered to practice teachers as was the case for most respondents in the statutory sector, but work relief, evaluation and comment on the quality of the placement were also common. In these agencies, staff saw the supervision of students as one of the main functions of the agency. In this respect, outside pressures from the umbrella organisations crept in because, in the voluntary sector, students also bring with them an income, but it was clear that supervising students, allowing for this task in overall workloads and assessing this task in regular evaluations, all went together with valuing the importance of educating social work students.

In the voluntary sector, the experience of supervising students and the road to becoming a team leader were seen as being linked. This involves a recognition that the three elements in supervision are all significant regardless of whether the supervisee is a student or a qualified social worker and consequently skills in both student and staff supervision are related. Supervision in the full sense of encompassing all three elements in an integrated manner becomes the productive defence mechanism for all agency staff through the means of

containing worker anxiety. Meanwhile, the agency overtly supports this by locating this task clearly at the level of the team leader. This practice then provides a model for all team members, including practice teachers. I do not think that it is coincidental that much power in these agencies resides at the team level; the wide separation of the lives of the clients and the life of the agency is not made and it was striking, in the interviews I held, that staff were able to speak with confidence because they were working from a sound and shared social work base.

All these factors are interlinked. If the full range of supervisory responsibilities is readily accepted for the team leader, a more favourable atmosphere is created for the supervision of students and a congruence develops between the learning environment and the education of social workers. Smale and Tuson (1988, pp. 41-54) elaborate on this theme when they explore the interdependence that needs to exist between supervisory practices, team and staff development, and student learning on placement whereby the agency 'becomes a learning environment for its staff and for students alike'.

It is appropriate that there should be this congruence because the roots of social work, supervision and adult learning all stem from the same soil. They are all to do with facilitating change and growth in people. This involves the creation of a supportive environment that is conducive to living with the anxiety that the prospect of change will always invoke.

Writers on the androgogical approach to learning use a language which is familiar to social workers. Freire refers to 'problem-posing

education' (1972, p. 52). Rogers describes the attitudes in the facilitator that are effective in promoting learning thus (1983, p. 133):

> *First of all is a transparent realness in the facilitator, a willingness to be a person, to be and live the feelings and thoughts of the moment. When this realness includes a prizing, a caring, a trust and respect for the learner, the climate for learning is enhanced. When it includes a sensitive and accurate empathic listening, then indeed a freeing climate, stimulative of self-initiated learning and growth, exists. The student is <u>trusted</u> to develop.*

Rogers describes the features that are required of the facilitator of learning, while Knowles describes the characteristics of the adult learner (1984, pp. 56-61; also 1972). Adult learners

> *need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it* ... (they have a) *self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives ...*

They have experience, so that, compared with children,

> *in any group of adults there will be a wider range of individual differences ...* (which) *means that for many kinds of learning the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves ...* (and adults are) *life-centred (or task-centred or problem-centred) in their orientation to learning.*

In the placement setting, these skills for creating a learning environment for the student are within reach of the experienced social worker. The close connection between this range of skills is acknowledged by Pettes, who said that (1979, p. 4)

> *the knowledge and skills needed for supervision are basically the same as those on which the supervisor will have relied as a social worker ... However, the way in which he uses his knowledge is different, and the skills upon which he calls must meet rather different demands.*

The social worker who becomes a practice teacher, then, needs to use skills closely related to her profession. But some elaboration is required here because, to be a successful practice teacher, she needs

to have experience in her work as a social worker and as a learner of social work skills herself, to have confidence in her competence, to be able to articulate what it is she does in her work and to feel that she has skills and enthusiasm which she is able to convey and to offer to a student. Finally, she needs to acquaint herself with the theories of adult learning. She will find in these common roots with the social work theories and values with which she is already familiar; she will find a similar language, but she will find a different application because the relationship is now with a learner undertaking an educational programme. In summary, it may be said that there is a need to develop and refine known skills in new directions, but the source of the skills of social worker or practice teacher is the same.

The facilitator of learning, in common with the social worker who engages with a client, is concerned with enabling change and the learner, faced with the need for change, is in a situation on placement in which the realness and the relevance of the task is immediately apparent. It should be no surprise that many students, when asked to assess their courses, rate their experiences in placement very highly (Davies, 1984, p. 16; Faiers, 1987). The development of skills training in the college setting is indicative of the need to bridge the perceived gap between theory in college and practice on the placement and to find ways of generating a sense of realness and relevance in the classroom which is both task-centred and problem-centred (Hargie et al., 1978; Lewis and Gibson, 1977; Smale, 1987).

When an agency is supportive of practice teaching and practice teachers are given the time and encouragement to attend to the task properly, then many of the factors which contribute to the success of

placements will, in turn, receive attention. The factors are all to do with taking care and thinking clearly, which are as important in how one approaches the social work encounter as they are in how one approaches the learning encounter.

There will be time and confidence for attending to how discriminatory attitudes - in relation, for example, to race, gender and age - may enter into the supervisory relationship so that these issues may be explicitly acknowledged at the beginning and returned to subsequently: for, as the placement develops, discriminatory attitudes or practice that are potentially within the supervision are likely to find echoes in the wider social work practice and organisational life of the agency. This is an area where powerful, historical and institutional processes of prejudice and power, stereotyping and labelling are in conflict with the subtle and individual processes of empathy, respect and self-awareness (Ford and Jones, 1987, pp. 10-14; Smale and Tuson, 1988, pp. 31-2, 37-8).

Then there is a range of other factors, relating to the practice and management of the placement, which are also known to contribute to the success of placements. These include careful pre-placement planning; purposeful three-way meetings between student, tutor and practice teacher; clear agreement on the aims of the placement, the allocation of work and the roles of all those involved; and some close or direct observation of practice by means which have been agreed in advance. This last factor will allow the assessment to be partly based upon direct evidence drawn from the student's practice on placement and this contributes to a mutual sense of satisfaction in student and practice teacher that real practice skills have been observed and assessed.

Such an approach to a placement will also contribute to clear thinking about the assessment process through the placement - which will be continuously shared with the student - and acceptance of the assessment responsibility of the final report at its end. These factors are well known and well documented but they are not readily achieved unless the practice teacher receives help and support, within the agency setting, to facilitate their achievement. (Bamford, 1981; Davies, 1979; Kerr, 1988; Morrell, 1979; Syson, 1981, pp. 165-7)

Social workers, meanwhile, can also discover about the stages of learning, the blocks to learning and the different patterns of learning that will be encountered in all placements. Support groups can play a significant part in assisting practice teachers particularly in this respect by running alongside the placement and giving attention to the problems that arise as the placements progress through their different stages. The group itself, in its organisation, needs to be a mirror of the learning climate created between practice teacher and student in their supervision (Bogo, 1981; Reynolds, 1942; Somers, 1971; Westheimer, 1977, pp. 49-77).

But these standards will only routinely be reached where the task is valued and integrated into the value system of the organisation and the practitioners are supported. Where this is not the case, placements will be liable to go wrong, anxiety will be created and social work will fall back on its familiar bureaucratic defence mechanism. Indeed, I would contend that the 'seductive promise' that M.F. Richards (1978, p. 12) describes of using skills and task analysis to discover what needs to be taught contains within it the bureaucratic defence mechanism as a factor in its allure. Richards describes how

> *for each specific piece of desired behaviour one is lured into producing endless lists of 'necessary knowledge and skills' which become impossible to handle, let alone begin to teach*

or - in the case of a placement - for the student to show competence in.

The whole needs to be greater than the sum of the individual, listed parts and, in my experience, I have found that lists which are intended as helpful guidelines can be produced that go beyond the point of helpfulness to the point of obscuring the real progress of the placement. Meanwhile Morrell (1979, p. 27) found that in only five out of nearly eighty final reports that he reviewed did the words 'pass' or 'fail' appear. This finding suggests that practice teachers were suffering from more than a simple absence of adequate guidelines, and that they were also avoiding the responsibility and the anxiety of their role as assessors who may be required to reach a decision that is painful for practice teacher and student alike.

Without adequate support, it can be easy to disguise or deny the anxiety and responsibility of the practice teacher's assessment role and to use detailed placement guidelines - whose purpose is to lend clarity and focus to the placement but whose effect instead can encourage a pigeon-hole approach - in fact for obfuscation. In the last resort, if serious problems develop, a cotton wool bureaucracy, that extends into the further reaches of the college and the agency alike, beckons in tempting manner. Such devices are not deliberate. They are natural responses when the anxiety and responsibility of the social worker's or practice teacher's roles - which are so centred on the subtlety of human behaviour and interrelationships - go unrecognised. Hence the central role of supervision: acceptance of the anxiety and responsibility and time for reflection upon them, in a manner that

is validated through the structure and value system of the agency, are required if good practice is consistently to be achieved and if the flight to defence mechanisms, that can become so powerfully institutionalised, is consistently to be avoided.

IV - LIVING WITH ANXIETY: THE SUPPORTIVE MODE

Rogers and Knowles, in their descriptions of the effective facilitator of learning and the successful adult learner, emphasise the crucial nature of the relationship between the two as one which enables self-directed learning. It is the interaction of teacher and learner that generates the potential for learning. The central role of this relationship and the need to re-emphasise it, is indicated in the preface to Educating Social Workers (Harris, 1985, p. XI):

> *This book ...* (contains) *some very old ideas which we think may be in need of rehabilitation. Into this last category come issues of group process, the nurturing of creativity, a focus on the climate of learning and the management of anxiety - notions jettisoned by many courses over the last decade as part of a broader purge of psychodynamics or clinical casework. Yet the discovery - if such it be - that notions like this lie at the very heart of the theories of adult education may perhaps encourage readers to return to the question of how to provide an appropriate, sensitive yet challenging learning environment for students, while still acknowledging the existence of a boundary between personal and professional, and respecting the student's right to privacy.*

This quotation refers to education in the colleges, but the same dilemmas face the practice teacher. So far, I have argued that social work and learning are congruent. Where an agency stays close to its social work base there will be found a favourable climate for learning. Within this climate, the practice teacher needs to generate her own relationship with the student that is favourable to learning. This favourable relationship may be found in the traditional concept of supervision and the contribution of its educative element has now been explored. Meanwhile, the administrative element, as well as the educative, has a vital function to play in agencies providing a public

service, but I have argued that it has to be watched as it can become over mighty as part of an organisational defence mechanism against anxiety. But when properly integrated with the other elements of supervision, it is supportive and containing of the worker or student because it serves to delineate the proper bounds of his appropriate intervention and range of responsibility.

My experience of running support groups for practice teachers, however, suggests that the pivot of many placements rests with the supportive function of supervision. Here lies the boundary between support and caseworking the caseworker or, as it is put in the preface to Educating Social Workers:

> *acknowledging the existence of a boundary between personal and professional, and respecting the student's right to privacy.* (Harris, 1985)

It is in this area that the assessment as to the student's ability to survive and grow as a social worker is most severely tested. What is at stake is the student's ability to integrate and internalise an understanding of the purpose of social work and, with it, an ability to find the boundary and the inner awareness to contain the unhappiness and confusion brought by the client.

I would contend that, regardless of the social work methods used and regardless of whether the relationship and interaction with the client are directly used in a therapeutic manner, the impact of the client's history, problems, situation and behaviour can still be powerfully felt by the worker. It is not necessary, for example, to work deliberately with the client's transference still to be affected by it and for this to affect the response back to the client. Such interactions can be as powerful in the group or family setting as they are in work with the

individual: indeed, they may become more complex as the roles and interactions within the group or family develop, become evident to the worker and eventually, perhaps, encompass her and the organisational context within which she works as well. The practice teacher, therefore, has a fundamental question to ask: Can the student find the distance from the client - and stay sufficiently open to the interactions with the client that are experienced at the level of feelings - to be free to work with the client without being torn apart inside?

This assessment is largely subjective and evidence concerning it will emerge from the relationship between the practice teacher and the student. Syson found that (p. 111)

> *perhaps the most significant aspect of supervision was not the length, frequency or content of each session but the relationship between student and practice teacher.*

On this topic, Syson encountered some confusion, but it did appear from her study that (p. 114):

> *the role of <u>therapist</u> was not acceptable to nearly all practice teachers. However, while the use of therapy might relate to the student's own problems and be considered outside the scope of a placement, discussion of 'feelings' was regarded by most practice teachers and many tutors as a legitimate and desirable focus of discussion.*

Mattinson (1975) has shown how, through the reflection process, students will be exposed to the power of the client's life and behaviour and how students will, on occasion, bring this power into the supervision session. If the student is open to the social work process, this will at some stage be inevitable. It is particularly at such times as these that support will be required, often through a shared exploration of the dynamics involved in the manner described so vividly by Mattinson. It is also at such times as these that the opportunity for learning about

social work is most clear because what is happening is immediately real and close to the learner. Westheimer says (p. 20):

> *The worker also needs to be sustained through the strains and stresses that arise from the nature of the work and from seeing others suffer. Support is needed especially when the clients' problems ring particular bells for the worker, mirror current feelings or reactivate past experiences.*

It is this ability to be open to and ready to attempt to understand what is happening between the worker and the client, which then so crucially informs the worker's assessment and understanding of the case, that is one of the peculiar skills in the art of social work. The student will be exposed to the pressures but without having yet assimilated an understanding of the process because this is largely what the student is on the course to learn. Towle, in her writings, was especially clear on this point. She argued that the student needs support but, as a student, he carries the responsibility to learn and master the conflicts that arise (1968, p. 133-4):

> *The need for help, therefore, is created by the discrepancy between demands and capacity to perform. Furthermore, it is created by the discrepancy between demands and personality development implicit in performance capacity. When the integrative task exceeds integrative capacity, the learner often erects defences against anxiety which impede rather than support learning ... Until he can make the new knowledge his own, the student is not free to use it effectively.*

But Towle goes on to say that (p. 137)

> *the fact remains that the social limits of the profession dictate that the client's welfare be put first.*

Therapy operates at the pace of the client, but the student is not in therapy but has instead a responsibility to the client and so is required to show the ability to learn. The student must show (p. 135) a

> *capacity to experience change in feeling and thereby change in thinking through an intellectual approach.*

In supervision, the practice teacher assesses this ability of the student. There will be blocks to learning, periods of regression and periods of standing still as the student struggles to integrate the learning in the light of the challenges of the placement and his own learning style. This can involve the practice teacher in a complex and demanding process. Selby refers to situations where (1968, p. 162)

> *the supervisor finds himself deeply involved in an interaction process which can lead both him and the student astray if he is not sure of his own role and responsibility.*

While running support groups for practice teachers, I have indeed found that the issue of boundaries and the personal resonances that clients can create in students will nearly always arise at some stage. It is easy to be led astray, especially as this aspect of the placement can emerge slowly and then reach a peak that can generate a crisis in the placement. However clear and useful the written contracts and the listed expectations for the placement are, this human interaction will also intrude and time has to be found for dealing with it.

The crisis is liable to come through a relationship with a client that is touching the student personally and which is consequently challenging the student's integrative capacities. Learning involves change and that also involves letting go, and frequently what is being lost may be based upon many years' experience and may be valued by the student. The adult learner's self-image is intimately linked to this past experience, while the very act of assuming the role of learner re-awakens memories of former relationships, issues of dependency and the associated ambivalent feelings. What has to be taken on as new, meanwhile, and is being manifested in a particular area of his work is centred on the very areas of personal and professional boundaries - the processes of transference,

for example, or powerful client behaviour and interactions that push people into certain types of response, the re-awakening of personal pain, or the shared experience of the effects of racism or sexism - that lie so close to the heart of the social work the student is learning about. This process can become complex for the practice teacher: she too will find her personal and professional boundaries challenged and may experience personal and painful resonances in herself. The practice teacher may be confident in moving in this grey borderland with clients, but the relationship with the student is qualitatively different and often less familiar, while the student's challenge may re-awaken earlier questioning in the practice teacher which she thought she had resolved.

The way out of this situation - which can become an impasse - lies through some explicit exploration and acknowledgement of the processes involved. Some acknowledgement of what it is in the student's past or current experience that is leading to the resistance and pain in the interaction with the client, the process of reflection and how this is affecting the practice teacher may be required to release the tension and to allow the student to move forward. A simple acknowledgement of the block in the student may be the trigger to releasing the student, but I have also occasionally known times when a more dramatic response has been the trigger that is required: a failed piece of work or a moment of quite painful confrontation have served to free the student and allowed him to resume the process of assimilation.

After this experience, the practice teacher, I have found, can find herself standing back and the student can find himself standing more independently, having found some internal measures for assessing the

quality of his work. This process of letting go of the past and of taking on hesitantly and for the first time new skills and a new awareness is, in Reynolds' (1942) terminology, the move into the third stage of learning. This third stage, as summarised by Westheimer, is described as (1977, pp. 66-7) 'understanding the situation without power to control one's own activity in it'. The progress to this stage involves a

> *release of energy from preoccupation with the self to freedom to study the situation as it is. The suddenness with which comprehension seems to come is a matter of surprise to learners and teachers alike*

and the move carries with it the dilemma that the student's 'conscious intelligence' is initially in advance of the experiences and process of integration that are required for informing his practice. The learning and teaching task during this stage, therefore, involves the careful handling of this discrepancy.

The student should be expected to make this move into the third stage of learning with a reasonable level of sureness at least during the final placement and at such a time as to allow him to begin to build on it before the placement's close. The practice teacher, meanwhile, will acquire a satisfaction with her assessment of the student when this move into the third stage of learning is experienced between her and the student. She will see that the student has experienced how the dynamic of an interaction with a client can affect his understanding of and response to a case and the nature of his social work intervention that results from this.

The student, meanwhile, equipped with this awareness, which includes a new self-awareness, is then freed to develop his social work skills.

These skills include his assessment of the client, his awareness of the boundaries, responsibility and authority of his role and of how this role is perceived by the client, and his need to define clearly the essential task and aim of each case and each encounter. These skills will be seen by him as related because, in spite of his understanding of his formal role in the agency, the application of these skills is fashioned anew by him through the unique experience and understanding of the case which he acquires from his interaction with each client. His perception of this inter-relatedness then allows him to assimilate his learning. It is at this point that the student is free effectively to work on the transfer of learning to different settings and to different client groups and client experiences. Through the close interdependence of the supervision, especially in its supportive and helping mode, and the unfolding of the student's social work intervention with the client, therefore, the congruence of the learning environment and the application of social work practice will at last make sense to the student.

V - CONCLUSIONS: ASSESSMENT

Much attention in recent years has been devoted to developing objective, which include sometimes quantifiable, means of assessing student competence. These developments have arisen from an internal debate in social work about the variable standards that are applied in assessing students' competence and about the possibility that a small but steady stream of social workers are receiving their qualifications who are not adequately equipped to practise. The need to find ways of applying consistent and comparable standards is advocated (Akhurst et al., 1980; Curnock and Prins, 1982; Goodall and Lenn, 1984; Minty et al., 1988; Sheldon and Baird, 1978. These articles describe placement curricula, the development of task analysis and, resulting from this, improvements in the focus and comparability of student assessment that have been adopted in a range of courses. See also CCETSW, 1987, pp. 57-65 for the Statement of Minimum Requirements of the Social Worker at the Point of Qualification.)

This debate, however, has inevitably touched upon the relative weight that needs to be placed upon quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective methods of assessment and the extent to which social work is rooted in the social sciences. The social sciences themselves have struggled to develop more sophisticated approaches to the use of quantitative information as exemplified in the debates concerning the formulation of causal links between data and the interpretation of statistical correlations (Elliott, 1978; Robinson, 1971; Wootton, 1959, pp. 301-28. See Capra, 1983, pp. 22-3, 32, on the extension of this issue to the physical sciences, where he argues that 'holistic and

ecological views are also scientifically sound' in addition to traditional reductionist thinking.)

Christine Hayward directly addresses this subject. In her exhaustive study of the methods of educational assessment that are available and of how these may be applied to social work education she does not devalue the richness of human judgement (1979, p. 178):

> *To aim for objectivity in assessment suggests that personal and biased human judgement should be removed as far as possible. However, human judgement is also rich and capable of incorporating and dealing with a wide variety of ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting. To perceive that human judgement is by definition imprecise and consequently attempt to develop more objective approaches while not equally perceiving the benefits of its richness and breadth implies biased vision in itself. ... the subjective/objective debate seems less likely to be resolved by polarising the two even further than by drawing them closer.*

Subjective judgement - based upon the practice teacher's experience in social work and her ability to make critical judgements concerning the quality of the student's work - will be the principal means by which the practice teacher assesses the student's competence, particularly while they are engaged in areas requiring the supportive mode of supervision. Yet I have argued that it is in this arena that the student will make some of the key steps in the process of awareness, understanding and assimilation that frees him to enter the third stage of learning. It is here that the wholeness of the worker and the wholeness of the client are perceived.

Hugh England has translated Capra's 'holistic and ecological views' into the language of social work. He argues that the social worker (1986, pp. 6-7):

> *does not separate the world experienced by those in need of help into component elements. Such experience is always a complex, composite experience, it is always a unique synthesis.*

He goes on to argue (pp. 34-5):

> *The role of the worker's 'defined' knowledge is to inform his understanding: he will understand more or understand quicker because of his professional learning. Thus the worker who is familiar with the theories of loss and change will be more quickly sensitive and responsive to problems of loss and change ... But this is the use of such knowledge - to anticipate experience; and it is useful only in as much as it is incorporated into the worker's general ... knowledge and available to inform his intuitive knowledge and intuitive behaviour.*

England defines social work as (p. 39)

> *to do purposefully and deliberately that which is primarily intuitive.*

The difference between a social worker's help and that of a lay person is that (p. 38)

> *the worker has to do deliberately and with maximum effect what others may do spontaneously and without responsibility.*

Social work, England concludes, is an art because it is about bringing critical faculties that are nevertheless rooted in subjective and intuitive perceptions to bear on the (p. 105) 'fluid reality' of the wholeness of the process of interaction between the client and the worker. (See also Berlin, 1969, pp. 91-6, whose observations on subjectivity, judgement and the exercise of exacting critical faculties in the study of history and in literature are apposite to the practice of social work; Jordan, 1987, pp. 206-9, on how the social worker engages the client and mediates within the context of the client's own reality of language, culture and networks; and Smale and Tuson, 1988, pp. 13-23, on how the social worker operates within the public role, policies and finite resources of an agency and its surrounding network, which together form a complex and interdependent milieu.)

The practice teacher, in her interaction with the learner, therefore, needs to be able to observe how the student struggles towards understanding the meaning of a particular interaction with a client. It may be that even at an unspoken level, the student sees how this interaction had an internal resonance for him which reveals the subtlety of the personal and professional boundaries and how this affects his assessment, his behaviour in relation to the case and his use of helping skills. From her observations and from the quality of the interaction with the student, the practice teacher is enabled to make an intuitive assessment of the student's ability to understand and use these processes and so to grow in the art of social work.

Other, more objective and comparable criteria need to be deployed for assessing the student's competence over a range of necessary skills within specific agency settings. This aspect of assessment has properly received attention in recent years and attempts have been made to define the range of skills required. But, as Hayward argued, the richness of human judgement also needs to be recognised. In recent years, there has been a risk that this perspective of Hayward's could be lost sight of and, with it, there is a risk of losing sight of the concept of rounded supervision that holds all three of its elements in interdependent balance. The need to develop objective methods of assessment and the organisational pressures that operate in social work agencies threaten to combine and to squeeze out the educative and supportive elements in the manner described in these pages.

Hence, and through drawing on my own experience as social worker, teacher and learner, I consider that there is a need to re-emphasise that in the assessment there is also a vital intuitive insight. It is

this insight which allows the practice teacher to be confident that the student will be able to move freely across the range of social work settings and client experiences which he will encounter in his working career: there is a core of awareness and understanding, whose development has been enabled partly through the learning environment of the placement, that the student can take with him and that will allow him to develop his social work practice.

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London, British Society of Criminology in association with the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency, 1992, £10.95 for each volume (1 - 9 901541 27 3; 2 - 0 901 541 28 1), available only from ISTD, King's College London, Chelsea Campus, Manresa Road, LondonSW3 6LX

These two volumes consist of twenty-six papers selected from the British Criminology Conference held in 1991. The editors have grouped the articles according to theme, with volume one having four sections: re-thinking criminological debates, international comparative studies of self-reported delinquency, drug offending and policy, and policy responses to the victims of crime, with articles on women victims of domestic violence and child victims. This last section includes a particularly strong article by Morley and Mullender (I: 197-219) concerning developments in the portrayal of and response to violence against women in the home which are serving to work at the expense of the feminist perspective and the victim. Volume two also has four sections on the penal crisis and dispute settlement, policing, probation and community measures, and imprisonment. The volumes are international in outlook and prominent themes include the feminist and postmodernist critiques, the interest in applied criminology, and the state of the prison system. In my comments in this review article I shall reflect these themes.

The four opening papers all take strongly critical perspectives on criminological studies, with feminist and postmodernist critiques featuring prominently. Jefferson, Sim and Walklate (I: 1-19) find that there are areas

of common ground in the work of both the left realists and the new right in the concept of the citizen and service users as consumers. Jefferson *et al.* argue that the promotion of the consumer disenfranchises the most vulnerable - those who have 'no power to count as consumers' - and through its emphasis on the individual's supposed access to choice serves to disguise state coercion. I think those involved in social work can take heed of this since social work practice has also become preoccupied with the idea of the consumer and choice, especially in the development of community care, and this could also serve to disguise the unequal distribution of resources, the use of coercive power, and the limitations of resources in the public sector (see Jordan, 1990: 47-50).

This is clearly illustrated in the discussion of prison regimes and the prisoner as consumer, with the prisoner, in the terms of Woolf and Tumin, having choice and responsibility articulated through contracts between prison and prisoner. Jefferson *et al.* rightly affirm that this serves to neutralise and disguise the issue of power. This argument is taken up again by Sim (II: 273-300) in the paper on the case for prison abolition. In a critique on the Scottish equivalent of the report by Woolf and Tumin, entitled *Opportunity and Responsibility*, Sim analyses further the concept of the responsible prisoner in the context of power. To see prison staff as 'facilitators in the process of change and personal development', as this paper states, 'fails to take account of the inbred conservatism of their occupational culture'. Woolf and Tumin moved the argument about prisons away from the highly positivist nature of the orthodox account - as Cavadino (II: 1-22) characterises it: place the pathological prisoner 'in such a physical environment, agitate, apply heat, and an explosion is the automatic result' - to include issues of the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of prisoners and their experience of justice within it. But the reality of unaccountable power and control is liable to create an entrenched block to progress.

Young (I: 62-79) develops a postmodernist critique focusing firmly on the profession of criminology itself and leading to a call for a postmodern feminism in criminology. This includes a critique, from a postmodernist perspective, of feminist criminology to date, including the preoccupation with identifying discrimination in the criminal justice system. Discrimination is set up in contradistinction to equality - equality with 'Man as norm' - and she argues that this is a misguided project. As a practitioner in social work and probation, such a project does not strike me as so misguided and Young loses sight of this applied perspective. Practice is better for our awareness and response to the discrimination against black people and women - however complex the processes involved may be - that exists in the criminal justice system. In formulating a postmodern manifesto, Young

presents a concise definition of postmodernism, characterising it as nihilist and activist. In reading these papers, however, I find that we are all locked into the disciplines of study, discourse and assessment of quality, and that our understanding, while located in place and time, is also incremental.

This is illustrated by Cain (I: 20-44) as, through criticising but also drawing upon past practice and debates, she develops a feminist criminology for comparative studies that is not bound by the limitations of hard statistical data but is guided by more fluid, non-determinist methods which allows those who are studied to influence the study. She talks of non-causal theories and configurations of relationships. The alternative approach is found in the series of articles on the international, comparative self-report delinquency research project. The paper by Junger-Tas, Klein and Zhang (I: 83-103) opens in bullish style. The project stemmed from a workshop involving fifteen countries and thirty universities and research centres; it was established for the purposes of advancing scientific knowledge and the identification of comparative information and causal factors for use by policy makers. While several articles show the care over methodology that is being taken, nevertheless the sort of critique mounted in the first four articles of this volume could usefully be directed at this ambitious enterprise.

I also had my reservations about the paper by Davies (II: 166-87), which has a Durkheimian account of crime and the criminal as a concrete example of society's moral boundaries, with the customer again appearing: in this case the public as the customer of the criminal justice system. This gives punishment a denunciatory-retributive justification. Along with the chief probation officer in Los Angeles, whom he quotes, Davies sees little place for the rehabilitative idea in probation, emphasising instead punishment and surveillance: 24-hour reporting, electronically monitored home confinement, intensive supervision. Intermediate or community sanctions should have multiple purposes, he argues, of punishment, surveillance and rehabilitation, but the latter has low chances of success. I would argue - from a social work perspective of the necessity for collaboration if people are to be free to be helped - that, given Davies's priorities, rehabilitation has no chance of success. My reservations arise because I can only read this paper in the light of all we know about the differential enforcement of the law and exercise of sanctions between different groups of people. The experience of black people is missing and, more generally, I found the black perspective to be absent on a number of occasions, and at some key moments, in the two volumes under review.

Davies's article is something of a cautionary tale about the road down which community sentences could travel. Nellis's important article (II: 135-65) about the future of probation training in this country may be read in the light of this cautionary tale. It is good that this paper, through publication in these volumes, may now receive a wider audience than hitherto and I think it is required reading for all those interested in social work education and the future of probation practice. He recounts the criticism to which probation training has recently been subjected: the Coleman report, the Davies and University of East Anglia research, and the Green Paper proposals. The generic Dip.S.W., with its nod in the direction of areas of particular practice, is not sufficient, he argues, for the demands of a probation syllabus or the preparation of probation officers to work in the changing, complex and, in policy terms, potentially hostile world of criminal justice. He mounts a telling critique of CCETSW's role, which has ignored friendly criticism of probation training in the past and, while progressive in some respects, has not been so with respect to the penal area. CCETSW's role has been characterised by neglect.

In making proposals for the future, Nellis quickly dismisses the prospect of reforming the Dip.S.W. This would require a transition of social work education to a 'federation of specialised interests', with only a small common core (social work methods?) but the appeal of genericism remains too strong, he believes, for this to succeed. His proposal, therefore, is for a Diploma in Crime Management which could be placed within higher education criminology and social policy departments. He states:-

> It seems to me that there is a *prima facie* case for arguing that, in terms of a common knowledge base, an inter-related policy framework and an overlapping of interpersonal and managerial skills, probation officers, juvenile justice workers and crime prevention workers have more in common with each other than with the diverse occupational knowledge bases crunched unhelpfully together on existing generic courses.

He concludes by sounding the warning that the Dip.S.W. may in due course be seen to fail for probation, social work will thereby lose probation, and probation training, having missed an opportunity to become located elsewhere in higher education, will become instead de-professionalised and agency-based. I could see the encroachments of NVQ providing a spring-board for this process.

For Nellis, the most telling argument against his thesis is one presented by Parsloe, which he quotes, that it is vital for probation staff to be

educated alongside other social workers so that they can develop an understanding and a skill in implementing social work values. Nellis counters that this rather patronising argument excludes the possibility of acquiring such understanding in other settings. In my estimation, however, Parsloe's argument remains an important one. The whole of social work is at risk of fragmentation and I think that there is strength in genericism and the process of cross-fertilisation between different settings: united we may stand, divided we may fall. Perhaps the greatest threat to success lies, rather, in the combination of the shortness of the two year course with growing restrictions on resources. The cautionary tale in Davies's paper can cut both ways: the chief probation officer from the USA, a country where social work has never successfully claimed probation, strikes me as speaking for a service that is adrift. In this country, the National Standards, over which professional probation interests had much influence, manage to retain an integrity that preserves social work values. As Boswell's research (1989: 73) indicates probation officers do hold to a 'basic philosophy of probation', derived from a common social work ethos, and there is strength in this. And the magistracy too may not be as averse to such views of the role of probation as is sometimes assumed. As Holdaway and Mantle found (II: 204-25), magistrates, when asked to consider what are the main purposes of the probation service, failed to make any reference to punishment.

There are other papers of value in these two volumes. One paper to note is that of Morgan and Zedner (I: 238-60) on child victims in the criminal justice system. It deserves a wide readership amongst those who may be involved in helping and supporting children who are required to go through the criminal justice process. The subject matter of the papers in these volumes is consistently relevant to practice and will repay study by social work practitioners and educators.

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College Reflections on Practice Theory

NIGEL ELLIOTT

This article was written shortly after the author had moved from a practice setting in the probation service to a college setting, where he teaches on the DipSW programme. It arose out of the experience of encountering again, through reading and teaching, the body of social work theoretical literature. This led to reflections on the concept of theories of practice and practice theories, the latter being very alive for the author as a recent arrival from practice but subject to some recent criticism in the literature. At a time of rapid development in the social policy context of social work and increasing specialisation - and consequently risk of fragmentation in social work - the author argues in favour of the legitimacy of both theories of practice and practice theories. A cross-fertilisation between them serves to produce core concepts of good practice, which stand as an essential reference point for practitioners. These first principles are a necessary bulwark against social work's imposing, oppressing and coercing tendencies. All three tendencies are examined: the imposing in terms of positivist practice traditions, the oppressing in terms of racism and the coercing in terms of recent policy and legislative developments in the probation service. The latter receives the most extended examination because of the risks arising from the extremely coercive agenda held by government. The article concludes by finding in probation a strong social work core philosophy which, to date, is sustaining a professional integrity in the service's response to the new legislation.

Practice Theory and Theories of Practice

After eleven years in field, in-service training and management posts in the probation service, I found that returning to social work education entailed some reappraisal of my understanding of social work. I found myself doing this at a time of rapid policy and legislative change for social work, including in my own area of probation practice, and so my reappraisal involved thinking through the first principles of practice in relation to this changing environment. My starting point was the

practice theory that I had developed over preceding years and I was concerned with how this related to the range of social work theories of practice to which I was again exposed.

Curnock and Hardiker (1979, pp.159-60) identify the distinction between theories of practice and practice theories as follows:

> The first term refers to knowledge which is borrowed in a relatively unmodified form from the social sciences; the other indicates the implicit knowledge base of social work practice which is rarely codified as discrete 'theory' as such...We think that 'practice theories' are an assemblage of signposts which social workers have accumulated in the course of their work. These signposts are made up of a combination of explicit theoretical knowledge, practice wisdom, experience, feelings and observations.

My working - or practice - theory had been drawn from my own experience as a social work student and subsequent practice experience, bolstered by the supervision I had received and my own post-qualifying training. I could see that it was rooted in the 'common elements' identified by Curnock and Hardiker (p.172) but it was fashioned by the particular agency setting in which I worked and by my own attitudes and beliefs.

I found that the college setting enables one to think about the theoretical base of social work in a way that the practitioner is rarely free to do. Even in-service training tends to have a specific focus that does not lend itself to helping the practitioner take a broad view of the social work enterprise. It is the college milieu that allows this through the dialogue in the classroom between the students, with their previous experience and current experience on placement, and the lecturer, who mediates the text - the theory - through her own experience of practice. It is out of this chemistry that this article arises. (See Toombs, 1991, for a study of the experience of students on a course, particularly with reference to the status of social work as a profession, pp.12-25; Harré Hindmarsh, 1992, for the development by students of a social construct of 'good' social work, pp.8-9, 19-21.)

Howe, acknowledging his debt to his students as others also have done (Howe, 1987, p.VII; Pincus and Minahan, 1977, p.73), adopts just such a sweeping theoretical outlook. His analysis of social work theory is based upon four paradigms which, on the face of it, are mutually

exclusive (pp.49-51). The paradigm in which one works determines the approach to the work that is adopted (p.15):

> To do their job well, social workers want to know what is going on and, once they find themselves in that position, they are in the realms of theory. They are looking for patterns and pathways through the flux of events that besiege and confuse them ... The understanding reached is not self-evidently in the problem itself. What is seen and done will depend upon the explanatory framework held. Shift the framework and its grid of understanding and the situation is perceived anew.

A theoretical base to practice is inevitable, Howe argues, even if the existence of such a base is denied. Referring to the relevant theoretical and research literature, he goes on to present the argument that the (p.17):

> ...tempting formula, which identifies a 'theory of practice' and a 'practice theory', may prove to be more seductive than actually helpful...the distinction is guilty of championing practice and in effect encouraging social workers to neglect more formal thoughts about social and behavioural theory. If the distinction is maintained, we are dangerously close to confirming *ad hoc* common sense as acceptable occupational theory. This simply maintains the confusion that befuddles clients and social workers alike.

Howe concludes (p.169):

> Quite simply, there is nothing better than a clearly held theory to give the worker a good idea of place and a strong sense of direction.

Howe's argument throws light upon how one builds a career in social work. Different agencies act within varying statutory and policy frameworks and consequently allow different styles of practice that are broadly located within different paradigms. One will find one's niche in an agency and a paradigm with which one is in sympathy. Some will push at the boundaries and find them elastic but there comes a point when one's personal beliefs become incongruent with what the agency

will allow. Then it is time to move on. The 'grid of understanding' of a community worker is different from that of someone who works in a setting where individual casework - which is often reactive and not preventive - is the norm and community workers in statutory organisations are not unfamiliar with being in conflict with or challenging their own organisation. A worker who trusts those in need of help to find their own understanding of their problems and, with facilitative help, to reconceptualise these has a different view of human nature from a person who believes that research and expert knowledge can provide an understanding of a person's behaviour and experience of problems. The four paradigms described by Howe are indeed - as indicated by these examples - bounded by notions of order and conflict, subjectivity and objectivity.

But I found that my practice theory crossed different paradigms. I would describe it as primarily having a base of psycho-analytic understanding to interpret behaviour and to provide guidelines to practice, mediated by a client-centred approach that is responsive to how clients perceive their problems. The client's perception frequently brings to the fore their experience of their social context and especially their experiences of discrimination. This can be reflected in the relationship between us: a male worker with a woman client, a white worker with a black client. The power differential between us reflects the oppression - and the existence of opportunity or its denial - that exists in society. But this formed only a base to my practice: what I was prepared to practise or practice by others that I would happily work alongside ranged, in method and outlook, more widely than this. In line with Howe's critique, I asked the following questions: Is this practice theory too eclectic, ostensibly choosing (Howe, 1987, p.165) the 'best bits from different theories' really to suit my purpose and so providing only 'an illusion of free movement'? Is there no true 'unity and coherence' in this so that it leads only to the confused practice of which clients complain? For, as the research findings summarised by Howe and conducted by others (see, for example, Packman, 1986, pp.187-90) indisputably show, the clients of social workers (Howe, 1987, p.2):

> Firstly...prefer social workers who know where they are with their clients. Secondly, as clients, they like to know where they are with their worker.

A Core Concept of Social Work?

Howe's critique therefore questions whether there is a core practice of social work and whether the search for a common practice theory is helpful. Were Curnock and Hardiker over-interpreting their material when they found 'common elements in social work practice' in their elucidation of practice theory? By their own admission, they sometimes struggled to find this, engaging in some 'mental gymnastics' in their analysis of the behavioural approach to social work (1979, pp.170-72). But they stood their ground that they had unearthed a common practice theory. There is, indeed, an abiding concern in social work literature to provide some coherence. The development of systems theory testifies to this, with Pincus and Minahan referring to a '*common core of concepts, skills, tasks and activities*' (1977, p.73), while, for the 1990s, the search for harmonisation across Europe has begun (Blonden, 1991; Rowlings, 1991).

I found that I shared in this preoccupation in writing a monograph on practice teaching in which I argued for (Elliott, 1990, p.35):

> ...a core awareness and understanding, whose development has been enabled partly through the learning environment of the placement, which the student can take with him and that will allow him to develop his social work practice.

In looking back at this monograph, I think it was written, in part, as a working out - a making articulate, with a search for its theoretical sources - of the practice theory that I had developed through my practice experiences, which included experiences as a teacher and learner of practice. This practice theory, I feel, was not just a personal synthesis, but represented instead something of a collective base of knowledge, values and skills that existed about me in the agency, and that acquired a strength through having a central core to it.

Most recently, Payne (1991, pp.2, 22-3, 37) has sought the same goal, writing a book so as:

> ...to resolve theoretical turmoil for myself, and in doing so perhaps to help others think about their own resolution' and his 'fundamental position is that social work theories share common features, which are far more important than the differences between them.

He states (p.38), however, that this 'argument that all theories are in practice collected together in the basic paradigm of social work may...be considered to be controversial'.

Controversial or not, in moving from field to college, I found that in my teaching I continued the search for a common core and underlying principles that do give unity and coherence to social work endeavour. I found that this was important partly because students will disperse to many different settings, so that they are entitled to expect from qualifying training some common body of knowledge that is applicable in all those different settings. This is especially so at a time of growing specialisation and, potentially, fragmentation in social work practice and organisational structures. It is also so because the social policy contexts of those settings could potentially wrench social work in any direction if there are no central principles to which its practitioners can remain true. Coming recently from the probation service, I am very aware of this latter issue, while the current primacy of case management potentially poses similar dilemmas for those in other social work settings. The Central Council of Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW, 1991, pp.13-20) reflects this concern, in its rather exhaustive listings, by combining a particular area of practice with generic requirements for competence in knowledge, skills and values.

In the remainder of this paper, therefore, I wish to contribute some comments on whether such common ground can be found and to place this against the pressures that can come from the social policy context and elsewhere.

Reflections on Common Concepts in Social Work Theory

Howe himself acknowledges that there have been useful borrowings between different theories. The psycho-analytic caseworker, 'steeped in Freudian psychology', was probably never more than an Aunt Sally, a myth which suited the critics' purpose (1987, p.79):

> Yet it must be observed that social workers have never pretended to be peripatetic analysts, serving Freud to the poor in undiluted fashion...On the whole, social workers have taken what is useful from psycho-analysis and its derivations and adapted it to their own situation.

Payne (1991, p.38) argues that psycho-analytic theory carried out within a humanist ethic is the source of the basic paradigm of social

work, although Coulshed (1991, pp.110, 114) refers to its recent unpopularity. But she treats it sympathetically, referring to its benefit in supervising other people's work or offering consultancy because of the insight it can give into possible explanations of client behaviour.

Such a use of a theory need not necessitate a change in the worker's methods of intervention, if those methods are competent, but rather allows a furthering in the understanding of the impact those methods are liable to have. It creates a responsiveness to the client which may or may not require a change of approach. This indicates that different approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and, indeed, it is possible that contrasting means of analysis can be used to describe the same intervention.

This can be illustrated by a case example provided by Raynor (1985, pp.117-23). It is an example of practice in probation that stems from the premise of negotiated agreement between the worker and the client in the management of a probation order. He is concerned with how the order can be operated on the basis of informed consent rather than coercion. In his example, the client knows the ground rules and is able to exercise responsible choice within understood constraints. S was a man who carried many labels, including that of 'aggressive psychopath', and Raynor says that the probation officer put it to him that, if he wanted to shed the labels he carried, then (p.119):

> ...he needed to adopt a different and more rational pattern of problem solving, including making appointments, *not* losing his temper (which never achieved anything anyway), and not deliberately manufacturing emergencies to put pressure on people...he needed to demonstrate the capacity and competence which people claimed he lacked.

Certain ground rules were agreed, based upon regular appointments and work around problem-solving skills. Although the agreement was severely tested, S learned to abide by it to the extent that, even in the eyes of other agencies, he was able to shed his labels. This was achieved not by coercion but (p.122) 'by accepting the client's offer to assume control of his own affairs and behaviour and helping him to do this'. Explicit agreements replaced a response to the client's 'immaturity' with its consequent 'treatments'. This echoes the client-centred approach of Bottoms and McWilliams (1979, pp.168-75) in their non-treatment paradigm for probation practice.

The practice described in the case example could equally as well be understood in terms of the psycho-analytic concept of containment (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970, pp.142-46). What the probation officer offered was consistency and controlled availability. S's previous experience had been of supplementary benefits officers who avoided contact and social workers who visited (Raynor, 1985, p.118) 'infrequently and left quickly' and, he said, pushed messages through the door and drove off rather than discuss matters with him. The officer, however, stayed with the client in spite of the pressure and anxiety that S placed upon both the officer and himself. The officer was not beaten by the anger and the pain of the client and the client learned through this - through the consistency and care of the officer - to live with it himself and then to diminish it.

If the principle upon which the order was based has roots in psycho-analytic theory, the problem-solving methods that were used could quite appropriately have been drawn from either learning theory or task-centred work. The quality of the officer's relationship, based upon negotiation that accepted the client's offer to assume control of his own affairs and behaviour, was drawn from client-centred theory, and a client-centred process of reconceptualising his problems was an outcome of the work for S and, indeed, for others in their attitude towards him. And the awareness of the individual and organisational network that S needed to address was informed by systems theory. As Bottoms and McWilliams (1979, p.173) put it, the client was undoubtedly *helped* through a process of shared assessment and collaboratively defined tasks as the basis for social work action.

What makes these different approaches consistent with each other is the spirit in which they were employed. Firstly, the client knew, in Howe's phrase, where he was with his worker and the worker knew where he was - at least for most of the time - with the client. Secondly, the work was characterised by a lack of coercion. These qualities are found in a description of social work by Jordan (1979, p.129), in which he is prepared to employ different methods. Jordan's position has been described as client-centred (Howe, 1987, p.112), but this does not restrict him unduly:

> I have described a number of different methods of helping based on what are usually considered as rival schools of thought. I have suggested that to be most effective, a social worker needs a range of responses that come fairly

naturally to him, that enable him to be flexible and imaginative in his reactions to his client's problems. All these depend on an intuitive grasp of the essentials in the client's predicament, communication of the purposes of the methods suggested, and the creation of an atmosphere of trust and goodwill...The worker needs to be seen as a credible and helpful person, not as a mere technical expert.

Such an approach is validated by consumer reports which highlight the importance of the client and the worker understanding and actively participating in what is going on. As Packman (1986, p.187) says in her review of decisions about care proceedings for children, parents felt satisfied if:

> ...they felt involved and were consulted; the social worker listened and appreciated their point of view; the social worker visited frequently and was able to offer tangible help as well as emotional support; the social worker was honest and a 'real' person, and not a faceless official.

It is around a core such as this that I have built my social work teaching, using a classic text - Biestek - and that of Egan as foundation stones to build upon (Biestek, 1957; Egan, 1990). This approach is consistent with Payne's (1991, pp.37, 44, 246-9) position that social work theories share common features and have some real stability. This stability is acquired, he argues, through a process of naturalisation of new theories and cross-fertilisation between practice and theory.

Imposing, Oppressing and Coercing

This core approach involves working facilitatively and openly with the client. It also involves the worker in refraining from certain activities that are inconsistent with the core approach. The worker does not impose, oppress or coerce. Certain social work methods lend themselves to imposing, certain dominant groups - individually and institutionally - lend themselves to oppressing and certain agencies, by virtue of their statutory role, lend themselves to coercing. Social work practice, as recent publicity underlines, can employ all three, and can legitimate the first and third through its theory, while all three can be involved in a single interaction (For a consideration of some of these issues as they relate to residential settings for children, see, for example, Neate, 1991, pp.16-17; Cross, 1991, p.10). I shall, therefore, look at each of these

tendencies in turn. But I shall reserve my most detailed comments for the coercive tendency because social policy and legislative developments in social work have been rapid recently and the struggles within the probation service, which are continuing, illustrate some of the key issues with an unusual clarity.

The imposing qualities of certain social work theories are well documented and fall within Howe's positivist paradigm of the regulating, objective fixers (1987, pp.50-59). It can be seen in the objective expertise of the psycho-analytic tradition and it was what involved Curnock and Hardiker (1979, pp.170-71) in their 'mental gymnastics' when they analysed behavioural social work. Students, in their essays, however, have illustrated to me how the behavioural approach works best if it involves imaginative flair and collaboration.

Hudson and Macdonald (1986, pp.9-21), in the light of criticism that has been made against the ethical basis of behavioural work, address the issue directly. They mount a defence of the ethics of behavioural work, primarily in terms of its proven effectiveness, while also acknowledging that there are particular ethical considerations relevant to any 'interventionist profession'. They acknowledge that behavioural methods can be powerful - which is consequent upon their effectiveness - but this concern is not peculiar to these methods and behavioural work has the advantage of working to an overt agenda (pp.13-14):

> It is the case that behavioural methods are technical and directive. However, unlike many other approaches, behavioural social work requires that one works *overtly* towards goals stated and agreed on between clients and between clients and workers...the behavioural worker indicates to the client what improvement or change will look like, thereby increasing the client's ability to assess the effectiveness of the help given - and to choose to withdraw!

A range of ethical issues common to social work is discussed and it is argued that, if abuse occurs, it is not the methods so much as the 'goals of the controllers' that require examination.

Bottoms and McWilliams (1979, pp.168-73), meanwhile, make an effective critique of the treatment and casework orientation in probation practice, although Rumgay (1989, pp.182-85) warns against taking too much of a sweeping stand against that tradition at the expense of

learning lessons from it and seeing its potential for development. This, in fact, accords with the developmental model of Bottoms and McWilliams, in which the imposing qualities of the casework tradition are removed: treatment becomes help, diagnosis becomes shared assessment and the client's dependent need as the basis for social work action becomes a collaboratively defined task as the basis for social work action.

The oppressive practices that operate in social work have also received much attention in the theoretical literature and CCETSW, in its Rules and Requirements for the Diploma in Social Work (1991, pp.8, 46-7), takes a forceful position regarding anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, although it has been criticised for a certain rigidity in its formulations (Graham, 1992, pp.48-64). Nevertheless, oppressive practice, at the individual and organisational level, remains persistent. As a white person, racism has a particular potency for me and I will, therefore, focus my comments on anti-racism.

During my qualifying training in 1976-78, I learned about individualisation and about racist practices in society. But I was not required to confront racist practice in social work or my own racism. During my years in practice this situation changed, and the focus became personal racism and the racism immediately around me in my own agency and in those with which I had professional contacts. The task became one of integrating anti-racism with my own practice. But it was a process of integration with and adaptation of what I already had in terms of a value and practice base for my work, rather than a replacement of it. I was being presented with new ideas and information that I needed to incorporate within myself as part of a process of growth and progression.

My practice was primarily, but not exclusively, of one-to-one casework. Specific schemes for black groups have their place (Green, 1988, pp.180-93; NACRO, 1991), but the challenge for the probation service was to integrate anti-racism into mainstream practice. This was illustrated by NACRO (1986, pp.15-17) when they showed that it was the detail of daily practice that needed changing. The issue for casework practice is raised in Dominelli's critique of it (1988, pp.47-50):

> Defining the social work task in casework terms is a barrier to white social workers confronting racist practice because the social context of social work is ignored. Looking at the inter-personal dynamics within client-worker

relationships is important because workers reproduce racist practices through their behaviour and collude with racist policies through their silence on the matter.

My instinct, however, told me that anti-racism needed to be consistent with individualisation and client self-determination. There was already a value base to my work and anti-racism could not replace this or be bolted on to it. That there should be a congruence between established practice and anti-racism has had wide circulation in the aphorism that anti-racist practice is good practice. Patel (1991, p.27) has given this more meaning, however, by turning it round: that good practice is anti-racist. Ahmad (1990, pp.34, 50 and passim) has also emphasised this point and illustrated how anti-racist practice may be incorporated - become part of - a number of well established methods of social work practice.

The process of change along with integration is vividly described by Kareem (1988, pp.57-71). As a black person, he describes his own experiences of racism from psycho-therapy and how one psycho-therapist broke this pattern. For Kareem, this experience was the beginning of intercultural therapy. The key lay in the therapist's readiness not to oppress with one's own cultural assumptions but to be ready to pay regard to differences in people's experiences and so, in the therapeutic exchange, to be ready to listen and to learn. Kareem himself developed a practice of intercultural therapy, which required flexibility and a readiness to acknowledge the other's experience. 'We cannot talk about intercultural therapy without talking about racism', he says, but this is incorporated into a value base which is already familiar (p.69):

> Therapy is a kind of bond and a contract between two people. It is partly a commitment of love and care, and I believe that kind of alliance cannot happen without acceptance of each other as equal human beings.

For me, therefore, anti-racism involved understanding and working to eliminate my own racism, addressing how my practice could be oppressive and being ready to acknowledge and validate difference and especially the other's experience of racism. These are prerequisites for me to be free to work with black clients and being free to do so includes confronting black clients where appropriate: something which white social workers are prone to avoid (Ahmad, 1990: 35-6). This approach could not be attempted with consistency without engaging with the

institutional racism about me. As Dominelli warns, collusion through silence is racist and active participation at my own level of influence and, imaginatively through the channels available to me, at a wider organisational level becomes the inevitable counterpart to addressing racism and being ready, in my work, to listen to my clients.

The same principles of practice need to be transferred to other areas of oppression and discrimination and a body of literature is emerging to give shape to our understanding of the commonalities between them, which leads to a more integrated approach (Thompson, 1993, pp.11-12, ch.2). I experience such an approach in practice within the college setting. An increasingly assertive gay and lesbian voice is being heard and sexual orientation is becoming clearly established on the curriculum, while the opportunity of a generically based qualification allows, for example, group care teaching to thread the themes of institutionalisation, oppression and anti-oppressive practice through an analysis of settings that is as wide as the range of interests held by students, whether in work with older people, issues of disability or mental health, or the experience of imprisonment. This broad based understanding is an important perspective which provides an argument for retaining and developing a coherent generic outlook in the face of the pressures towards specialisation.

Having a sense of core values and core principles of practice can serve, therefore, *in resisting the tendency of social work - in its* organisational apparatus and its methodological practices - to impose and oppress. But social work is largely funded by public money and the definition of many of its tasks is found in statute. It may be argued, therefore, that what we do as social workers is defined and may be changed by national social policy. Can, then, social work be changed into a primarily coercive activity, if that is what social policy dictates, and still be called social work?

The experience from within probation may serve as an example of this issue because there is a strong pull towards coercion that reflects recent social policy developments in general (Jordan, 1990, ch.2 and pp.81-84; Vass, 1990, pp.63-64). The examples of programmes of supervision given in the Appendix to the Government's Green Paper *Punishment, Custody and the Community* (1988, pp.19-20) certainly propose a range of interventions and controls over the life of a client within the community on a scale that has never been deployed before. The language of punishment has remained in subsequent publications

(Home Office, 1990a, 1990b) and the proposals have now reached legislation, expressed in terms of just deserts and a range of community sentences involving graduated deprivations of liberty (Criminal Justice Act, 1991). A precursor to these developments can be seen in the coercive regime of the Kent Probation Control Unit (Raynor, 1985, pp.46-54. For an alternative, non-punitive approach to working with serious offenders, see Singer, 1991, who analyses in terms of its outcomes an alcohol education group run for offenders in trouble through drink. See also Blagg and Smith, 1989, pp.117-18, for an appraisal of Raynor's set of 'principles and criteria which can inform and justify the enhancement of probation'.)

The key components of these debates can be found in a series of articles in the *Probation Journal*. Lacey (1991, pp.110-17), in tilting with McWilliams about the developments in the probation service, finds it (p.112) 'impossible to conceive of social work - at least in Great Britain - as anything else but the expression of social policy'. He is here responding to McWilliams's (1990, pp.60-67: 180-81) statement that 'the only thing to do when the worst of policy fashions appear on the scene is to hang on to the central core of the social meaning of the probation system'.

McWilliams's argument is that the 'management ideal', which is now so firmly rooted in the probation service, makes the service's professional autonomy and the integrity of the service hostage to any policy directives that emanate from above: management, he says (p.63), 'is a second-order activity', a conduit for implementing given policies. He goes on to say that 'the chief probation officer who is *only* a manager could not properly resist the innovations of policy no matter how radical they might be'.

Lacey responds in terms of probation management being about accountability in a public service that has responsibilities in the area of individual liberty. Lacey's position can be found in Government publications. Indeed, the centre of the argument in the Green Paper, *Supervision and Punishment in the Community* (Home Office, 1990b, pp.9-13, 30) is the need to reappraise and, where necessary, re-structure the probation service to make it more responsive to public policy.

This argument suggests that the shape of social work is decided by public policy makers and that probation officers, as trained social workers, rely upon policy makers not to do too much violence to the best of social work practice: we are in their hands. Lacey remains sanguine,

saying that (p.116) ' "social work values"...are shared by most people in liberal humane societies', but even he does contemplate the possibility of unacceptable change:

> Nevertheless, were the Government to make impositions so alien, so insupportable, on the Service that they were felt to be intolerable, then individuals may choose to leave or a consensus might be formed within the service to resist such changes through various kinds of concerted action.

This exchange reveals in a focused and urgent fashion a long-running debate which Jordan (1990) tackles imaginatively and directly. He argues (pp.81-84) that as 'Britain has drifted into deeper social divisiveness, and as the coercive and restrictive tasks in social work have assumed more prominent priority', social work practice becomes evasive because the evident needs of clients cannot be met:

> The evasive approach emphasises legal and procedural correctness - doing the job by the book. This disguises from the workers their clients' lack of opportunity or incentive for real change, their lack of real options. It gives them pseudo-choices...within a framework of highly conditional assistance...In this way it reduces much of the discomfort that comes from emotional proximity and mutual influence (for the worker vis-a-vis the client).

This is why the 'management ideal' becomes so corrosive: managerialism endorses this approach so as to rein in, manage and monitor social work practice in keeping with the directives of social policy and budgetary constraints. Such an analysis throws light on the tension that practitioners experience between evading the client's reality and engaging with it. This tension often finds expression in concern about supervision as practitioners see a shift from the supportive mode of supervision to administration and management (Davies, 1988; Elliott, 1990, pp.4-9; Parry-Khan, 1988). Writing from within the college setting, it is easy to forget how intently and urgently this concern is felt by practitioners.

It is not often that a clear line relating to practice can be drawn that serves to illustrate these debates, but perhaps one has emerged in the probation debate, with the Government to date conceding one point. The Government has not laid responsibility for the new curfew order, and for

electronic monitoring as a means of securing compliance, explicitly upon the probation service. Who will operate this order will be specified in an order made by the Secretary of State (CJA, 1991, S12, 13). Meanwhile, for this order alone, no date for implementation has yet been set. With regard to electronic monitoring, there is wide opposition among probation officers. The survey by Boswell (1989, pp.57-59) provides an insight into the range of opinions on this subject and it is notable that a third of the respondents in this broad survey of experienced officers said that they would resign: clearly there is a line when social policy can do too much violence to practitioners' sense of the integrity of social work practice. Currently, the Government is not going to put this line to the test. Hence, in spite of Lacey's optimism, the parameters of what is core to social work and what lies beyond the line have been and are being sounded and the bounds of public accountability, statutory duty and responsibility, and coercive practice are being actively negotiated. (See Fletcher, 1993, for a description of how professional interests have influenced and, for a while at least, served to reverse Government policy in some key areas, including that of electronic monitoring.)

More subtly, the process of negotiation has quietly proceeded with respect to other community sentences, pre-sentence reports, prison through and after-care and the national standards that lay down the requirements - often the minimum requirements - for practice. Lacey (1991, p.115), referring to national standards and systems for monitoring and inspection, acknowledges the 'clumsy way in which the Home Office has approached some of this, especially in the way they have ignored professional experience' but what has emerged from this lengthy process is clearly rooted in the tradition of probation practice in Britain. This is especially so with respect to national standards - which, in practice terms, put flesh on the bones of the legislation - and any reading of them reveals, to use Payne's term, that the process of naturalisation is already well under way (Home Office, 1992; National Association of Probation Officers, 1992). But the process continues - with practice competences and revised national standards all in the offing - and much will depend on developments in two areas. The first concerns the interpretation made of the practice discretion present in the standards, especially in relation to breach. The second depends upon how the punitive potential in the possible combinations of community sentences is used by the courts. The probation service, in how it operates orders and defines with the courts the seriousness of offences, is in a position to

mitigate the punitive element in favour of a rehabilitative ideal, which holds out the possibility of working collaboratively with clients.

This indicates a strong sense of core values and practice principles. Boswell researched the approaches to practice held by a large sample of experienced probation officers. She found an interesting mix of coherence and diversity in the probation service (1989, pp.73-74):

> It would appear, then, that the quality of the central ingredients relies to a large extent upon diversity and that it is, perchance, in its very diversity that the essential strength of the probation service lies.

This diversity does not lead to anarchy because probation officers hold in common:

> ...[a] belief about offering help, care and recognition to those whom the rest of society has rejected (which) are indicative of the qualities of patience, tolerance, integrity and liking of offenders.

This allowed her to find a 'basic philosophy of probation' but it is a philosophy that contains and requires autonomy and diversity if the mediating and helping roles are to be successfully achieved.

Conclusion

My reflections and reappraisal from College of my practice theory, therefore, do lead me to believe that there is efficacy in the idea of an informed and aware practice theory: that the cross-fertilisation of theory and practice experience helps me - and, in this, I believe that I reflect a wide experience within the social work profession - to find a model of working that can be both consistent in principle and free in its use of methods. I agree with Howe that we delude ourselves if we claim to be free of theory but neither need practice be constrained by it. Crossing the paradigms need not mean partaking of incompatible behaviours and, indeed, it has been argued that effective practice may involve a cycle that does just that (Holland, 1991, pp.44-61). But the working practice theory - and, with it, the use of a range of methods - needs to be consistent with certain core values. It cannot be about picking and choosing randomly because the practice methods need to be internally consistent.

This needs to be a deliberate, self-conscious process and it needs to

be done in such a way that clients know where they are with you. Without a core reference point, social work is only too easily diverted, at individual, organisational and policy levels, into practices which impose, oppress and coerce. The risks from these are surely as great, if not greater, than they have ever been, which requires of practitioners a readiness to articulate and defend the first principles of good practice. This is not to deny the authority, power and public functions that lie with social workers. But, as the development of the argument in this paper I hope illustrates, it is possible to fulfil these responsibilities in a manner that is open, based upon negotiation, and that engages and empowers clients.

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The Qualification of Probation Officers: Thoughts for the Future

Nigel Elliot, Probation Officer in the South East London Probation Service and formerly a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Croydon College, takes a critical look at recent proposals for the development of a new qualifying structure for probation officers. He identifies some of the obstacles to be navigated in achieving the right balance between the NVQ, external validation and an award at higher education level.

The Story So Far

The fact that the demise of the former government has left the Probation Service with no qualifying training in place, is a tribute to the unity of professional and educational organisations in resisting its plans for on-the-job training leading to the award by service management of Qualified Probation Officer status. These organisations developed plans for an NVQ, whose regulations require that any scheme is employer led with trade union support, and the support of the Home Office was acquired. The second string to the bow of the proposals was that the qualification should be at a professional level, externally validated with significant input from higher education, the aim being an NVQ linked with a Diploma in Higher Education (Dip. H.E.). Employers, management and NAPO, supported by the educational and other professional bodies, have been united in these core aims. Former government ministers were sceptical of some of the consequences of this approach. *NAPO News*[1] reported that Baroness Blatch, the minister responsible for probation training, prevented the planned consultation on the draft occupational standards, completed in early 1997, from going ahead on the grounds of the prominence given to anti-discriminatory practice, the use of the word 'individual' instead of 'offender', the lack of repeated references to National Standards and the insufficient emphasis on time-keeping, enforcement and discipline.

The draft occupational standards were drawn up by consultants working with practitioners and management, and Baroness Blatch's objections reveal the political agenda held by that government for the Probation Service. The move to a "community corrections" agency, which is overtly about punishment, required a change in the personnel employed by the Service and this could only be achieved by radically altering the recruitment base. The

government's interest in recruiting former military personnel was widely reported in the media at that time.

Developments Under Labour

With a new government in place, the development of qualifying training has been resumed in a more co-operative atmosphere. For the longer term planning, a head of steam has built up behind the innovative NVQ/Dip. H.E. proposal, which incorporates the potential for a range of routes to qualification and an integration with CCETSW's current Criminal Justice NVQs at Levels 3 and 4 and competence-based Post-Qualifying and Advanced Awards in Social Work. As Knight and Taylor[2] have stated:

> 'No-one seemed to be saying that moving out of the Diploma in Social Work was in itself a good thing; however, there was a growing realisation that the new framework could incorporate the best of what we have at present and, with care, could be made to include some necessary improvements.'

It is now agreed by government and professional interests that there will be a Diploma in Probation Studies and it is to this that the NVQ will be linked once it is developed. However, throughout this article I shall refer to the Dip. H.E. because this establishes precisely the level of attainment required by students, i.e. the Diploma in Probation Studies will be set at the nationally recognised Dip. H.E. level.

National Vocational Qualifications: Pros and Cons

Now that there is a commitment to the NVQ, some of the pros and cons of this system need to be rehearsed. The advantages are standardisation of methods of qualification across and within professions, easier employment-based access with a continuum of qualification - the crucial features for the Probation Service - and a claimed practice relevance providing clear evidence for assessment. But NVQs can also fragment practice into indigestible and unrelated parts, be static by reflecting only current perceptions of adequate practice in a particular role and they struggle to integrate knowledge and values into the assessment of observable competences, especially with respect to anti-discriminatory practice. NVQs have been seen as managerialist, that is management and employer led, a reflection of the controlling and centralising tendencies in public life during the years of Conservative government and, as a concomitant of this, as highly bureaucratised.[3] A root cause of these disadvantages is that the National Council for Vocational Qualifications has nothing to say about educational method. It is solely concerned with outcomes, that is the assessment of competences. Yet how learning is assessed - and qualifying training cannot simply be about demonstrating already acquired competence - will influence how learning is conducted. Detailed functional analysis - the probation officer competences familiar through appraisals are an example - can inhibit the holistic and reflective process of acquiring and challenging received knowledge. Hyland[4] refers to Kolb's model of a cycle of experiential learning, reflection and conceptualisation and to Schon's concept of the reflective practitioner in saying that:

> 'learning needs to be regarded as a means of creating knowledge rather than merely the regurgitation and reinforcement of existing norms and traditions.'

How well we already know this from our understanding of adult learning. The challenge of any NVQ development in professional education and training is that values and knowledge should not underpin competence, but should be integrated into it. I believe we should come back to social work education for our model, now that we are to be independent of it, and learn from

CCETSW's specific value based unit to promote equality for all individuals in the Criminal Justice NVQs and the flexibility of the six non-functionalist core competences in the Diploma in Social Work (Dip. S.W.). O'Hagen's work illustrates how the latter can be used creatively[5].

Assessment of NVQs

A further issue relating to NVQs is that of quality and parity in assessment. Assessment centres are localised and, while they need to be approved and have a system of second tier internal and third tier external verifiers, whose task is to ensure an adequate consistency in assessment, I have been struck by some of the looseness in the description of the role of the front line assessors, who do the bulk of the direct assessment of the candidates' competence. An assessor may also be the candidate's line manager. For the CCETSW Criminal Justice NVQs, for example, an assessor should:

> '*feel safe in inferring* from the knowledge the candidate demonstrates that they have sufficient knowledge and understanding to sustain performance in a variety of contexts to the standards as defined in the elements and performance criteria.' (my italics)

Assessment centres are 'well advised' to look beyond a person's qualifications and work experience in deciding who is suitable to be an assessor. Such permissive statements contrast with the strict criteria in the Dip. S.W. applied to unqualified staff who wish to be practice teachers and to the array of requirements for assessing students placed upon Dip. S.W. programmes.[6] It is to be remembered that the Criminal Justice NVQs go to Level 4, which is sometimes mooted as the level for qualifying probation officers.

Higher Education and Assessment

Such concerns about the NVQ structure, even it if is trying to adapt to the higher levels and professional qualifications[7], serve to underline the other key aims in the Service's proposals for qualifying training. These are that there should be external validation and a significant higher education input. I am of the opinion that the balance which is achieved in the link with the university Dip. H.E. awards is an essential feature, which I shall concentrate on in the remainder of this article.

CCETSW, in needing to address the universities as well as the social work agencies, has much to say in its requirements about educational methods. My experience of CCETSW's validation of Dip. S.W. programmes, reinforced by the university's or college's own validation procedures, is that it is as much about educational process as outcomes and is very rigorous. The educational process, incidentally, can include accreditation of prior learning and experience, distance learning, credit transfer and modular programmes, all of which will be key tools in linking an NVQ with a diploma. The Dip. S.W. requirements refer to 'an holistic approach' and make the robust statement:

> 'Evidence of conceptualisation, critical analysis, reflection and transfer of knowledge, skills and values is essential for the award of the Dip. S.W., and students must be required to provide this evidence in written work and in practice throughout the programme.'[8]

The Importance of an Academic Perspective

Besides the experience in higher education of rigorously combining learning and assessment at the required level, I believe that the importance of external validation and a diploma awarded by the universities lies in the principles of academic freedom and the operation of a pluralist society. NVQs are employer led and, in a managerialist age, management can be reduced, as McWilliams[9] put it, to 'a second-order activity', a conduit for implementing populist political policies, and there is a need for alternative power

bases that are not so directly beholden to their political bosses. Goatly[10], a proponent of the NVQ in probation training and in higher education more generally, voices a number of concerns including the risk, in the range of proposals that has been pursued, that 'higher education will be reduced to the role of provider in a purchaser-provider split.' The defence against this is to have a university based award using the principles of partnership with which we are familiar from the Dip. S.W. However, the partnerships will need to robust because the university departments will be relating to regional probation consortia which are 'purchasing' a dedicated qualification based upon national occupational standards as well as being substantial 'providers' in their own right through both traditional practice teaching and the operation of NVQ assessment centres. Given this situation, I believe the principles of partnership must include the protection of pluralism.

In running a probation stream at Croydon College, I know how dependent the course was on the support and approval of the local Probation Service and, indeed, this support helped achieve quality and depth in the practice relevance of the Dip. S.W. that was developed. But the probation stream was only one part of a wider, largely academically driven curriculum in which a range of subjects, notably sociology, criminology and social policy, had their own independent, intellectual identity. These are the disciplines, providing opportunity for a structural critique of society, including issues of poverty and oppression, which are most at risk in a practice agency dominated and competence driven system.

A fascinating examination of the manner in which a sophisticated psychological theory can be 'bowdlerised' in practice settings through political influence is provided by Downing[11] in respect of cognitive-behaviourism. He describes the tendency to take structural factors - discrimination, poverty, unemployment - out of the theory so as to account for offending in purely individual terms:

> 'Probation practice is being moved towards a system of intervention based upon, at best, an intellectual misunderstanding of cognitive development, at worst predatory selection of incomplete parts of cognitive theory to justify a shift in criminal justice policy.'

The external, critical perspective of academia is an essential counterweight to the preoccupations of practitioners and managers working within a profession that has acquired as high a political profile as the Probation Service. The 'What Works' debate[12] indeed takes careful reading and, while cognitive-behavioural approaches have good measurable outcomes, adopting a variety of theoretical perspectives is also advocated:

> 'Evidence from research on effective intervention shows that a diversity of practice is required to achieve the most successful outcomes',

as long as practitioners are clear in their thinking about the approaches they take. What does not appear to work in reducing offending is straightforward punishment:

> 'The notion that punishment can reduce the rate of crime in society is little more than an irrational and unfounded hope.'

Underlying all approaches is the need to develop a relationship in social work terms if people are to engage in a process of change and here again research is significant, namely the consumer appreciation studies of clients' own assessments of their contact with the probation service. These show an extraordinarily high rate of satisfaction. The qualities that emerge as valuable are based on the traditional social work values of treating people as individuals, with respect and in an anti-discriminatory manner. Beaumont and Mistry[13] see these as 'an essential, though not sufficient, condition for effective probation work.'

They state that:

> 'with probation officers under severe pressure to adopt more punitive approaches, it is good to be able to report that the established strengths of a social work orientation are still appreciated by the service's clients.'

From my experience of teaching, these principles cannot be bolted on, they are fundamental. The integrity of such intellectual approaches, rooted in independent academic circles, is essential to the future of probation education and training, at all stages of the training continuum, if bowdlerised versions of politically convenient theory and their infiltration into practice are to be resisted.

There is a strong case, therefore, for future probation qualifying education and training to stay close to our former social work hosts in the universities. Equally, as formal links with CCETSW lessen, new structures, such as the proposed 'National Training Organisation for Community Justice' which covers a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies in this field, need to be prepared to espouse and defend the central place of social work in effective probation practice: social work needs to remain our professional base.

The Needs of Students

Students also require academic freedom. The NVQ structure, in which students are trainee employees, potentially serves as a restriction on their freedom of thought and ability to question. An employment based route has the advantage of providing access, career progression and material security but there is a cost. This theme is developed powerfully by Sein[14], especially in terms of anti-oppressive practice:

> 'But if trainees are to be employed, trained and qualified by the Probation Service, there may be little leeway to challenge the Service's practices. Will there be space for critical reflection? .... will Services want bright, articulate, challenging officers who shake up the white, male-dominated hierarchy?'

The Dip. S.W. regulations state that a student in employment should undertake a period of practice away from her/his workplace and preferably away from the employing agency. There is no such luxury for the NVQ student unless the qualification is also linked to a Dip. H.E. as an integrated dual award providing a substantial educational programme managed under the aegis of a university. The potential isolation of the trainee/student also needs to be considered and a programme of this sort will provide the opportunity for some experience of the process of shared learning and all that goes with it: the stimulation of thinking and negotiating the difficulties of letting go of old ways and hesitantly learning new knowledge and its application. A final twist to the tail is provided by Ford and Jordan.[15] They describe how the Dip. S.W. has sanitised university social work education by:

> 'slanting teaching away from complex interactions, and from reflective learning, towards factors that could be listed, ticked off and recorded as "covered"'

and by tight, value-for-money managerialist control in the social work agencies. Even the radical agenda of anti-oppressive practice, they argue, has lost its cutting edge in an age when the 'notion of ideas as providing the basis for radical critiques of conventional wisdom is scarcely fashionable.' What is missing, they say, is real engagement with the complexity and the 'intrinsic messiness'.

In Conclusion

The complex structure of the Dip. S.W. has received much adverse criticism in recent years, especially among academic circles. It attempts to embrace a wide range of universities and a plethora of statutory and voluntary agencies and this can lead to a curtailed experience of teaching and learning. This should be a warning for the

Probation Service. This is so even if Ford's and Jordan's depiction tells only part of the story. We can be left to imagine how impoverished probation qualifying education and training could become if it was too heavily agency-based and insufficiently locked into a system of external validation and alternative power bases in the universities, exercised through the balance achieved in the linking of an NVQ qualification and a university awarded diploma. A pluralist fabric is the essential guarantor of the space to think freely. There is a new government now but past experience should warn the Service against complacency as it sets about negotiating new arrangements for developing education and training at all levels of the profession.

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