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DECISION MAKING

IN

CHILD PLACEMENT

By James Kerr Stewart
October 1984
University of Kent
at Canterbury

Abstract

Decision Making in Child Placement

This study was undertaken in Kent Social Services Department and was designed to explore in detail the way in which a sample of fifty social workers formed decisions about where to place children who came into their care.

Data derived from structured interviews was analysed, using statistical techniques as appropriate, in order to establish which of a range of factors played the most important part in placement decisions.

Knowledge of social work theory and research was found not to be very influential. Personal attitudes, based on experience or belief, together with the prevailing ethos and tradition of the local office were found to be the most decisive factors in determining how decisions were reached and which resources were used. There were significant variations in approach between respondents from different local offices.

The orientation of qualified and unqualified respondents to professional and bureaucratic values was compared and no significant difference was found. However, qualified social workers did express a greater willingness to make independent case decisions and to act on them and a corresponding reluctance to recognise the managerial and supervisory role of their line manager.

This tendency was more pronounced amongst newly qualified staff; more experienced qualified staff were more likely to distinguish between their role in assessing client need and that of their supervisor in mediating between assessed need and organisational constraints.

These findings support the statement in the Barclay Report that there is "Confusion and ambiguity among social workers as to how far they were expected to act on their own judgement, and how far they were simply expected to carry out the orders of their department".

Overall 70% of the placements which arose from these decisions developed broadly as expected by the social workers concerned. The remaining cases were generally more complex and their outcomes correspondingly harder to anticipate, and of these, the majority consisted of teenagers.

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This research was conducted on a part-time basis over a period of six years and consequently stretched the commitment and stamina not only of its author but also of those who helped and supported him. The main burden in this regard fell on Professor Vic George who was generous with his time and clear and incisive with his advice. Although the views expressed in this thesis are mine alone, the shape of the project would have been very different had I not had the opportunity to discuss and modify my ideas in the light of his opinions, and those of his colleague at the University of Kent, Alan Swift.

I would also like to thank those managers within Kent Social Services Department who enabled me to approach their staff, and particularly those fifty Social Workers who subsequently agreed to be interviewed by me. My starting point was a belief that children in care may not receive the best help possible because Social Workers are expected to do an extremely difficult job with inadequate guidance.

My conclusion is that there are several ways in which available knowledge about the needs of children and their families could be put to better use. Yet my consistent impression in conducting the research has been of sincere and concerned practitioners who have formed their own philosophy of practice and are attempting to do their best for the children in their care. The disturbing feature is the great variation in such personal philosophies and the lack of unifying themes in the area of child care planning.

DECISION MAKING IN CHILD PLACEMENT

CHAPTER ONE

DECISION MAKING

In this chapter I shall review the literature on decision making theory, most of which relates to the general process of policy creation within an organisational context, and shall then attempt to relate this more specifically to the decision making process with regard to the placement of children in care.

Individual Decisions

Decision making has been described by Castles (1) as arriving at "a conscious choice between at least two alternatives". This power to exercise choice between alternative courses of action characterises all human activity and most real decisions involve a complex interplay of many factors and concern a highly specific set of circumstances. However the extent to which individuals are actually free to choose is inevitably constrained by such factors as inherited personality characteristics; socialized values and beliefs, including those acquired through training and experience; institutionalized laws and rules; and available alternative resources. For present purposes we are primarily concerned with the decision making processes of individuals working within formal organisations and the extent to which they remain free to exercise personal choice.

Decision Making in Organisations

N.P. Mouzelis (2) states that "Behaviour in formal organisations is not completely emotive or aimless. On the contrary, it is primarily purposive. People become organised in order to pursue a common objective. In doing so, they have to co-ordinate their activities in a conscious way. It is precisely this purposiveness, this conscious co-ordination of relationships, which mainly distinguishes formal organisations from other kinds of social groupings. This being the case, the concept of decision making should be central to any theory of administration. When people co-ordinate their activities for the attainment of a certain goal, they have continuously to take decisions, to choose among alternatives of action. A member of an organisation, more than an instrument or an autonomous agent of drives and emotions, is a decision maker and problem solver." However, as Smith and May (3) point out, "...while 'decision' is a common enough term, its components merit analysis, for as the already extended discussions of 'key concepts' such as prevent (4), need (5), justice (6), implementation (7), or control (8) have shown, common sense notions in every day usage tend initially to be rather blunt instruments when pressed into service as tools for research."

Wilfred Brown (9) has described in detail the hierarchical process by which decisions are made and implemented within large organisations. He and many other commentators see policy making as a form of decision making in which whole sets of decisions are considered and the contexts for specific local decisions are reviewed; policy making is thus seen as more generalised and, in this sense, more abstract decision making. Logically such decisions lead in turn to a further series of decisions extending down into the hierarchy and resulting

in the delegation of tasks which entail their own area of decision making discretion and in their turn become more detailed and circumscribed the lower down the hierarchy they travel. However I shall show how in practice the picture is very much more complex with regard to individual social workers. For, as Hills (10) and Stevenson (11) have demonstrated in relation to the Supplementary Benefits Commission, all welfare organisations dealing with complex problems on a personal basis, must allow a considerable degree of discretion and a capacity for differentiation to co-exist with the characteristics of responsibility and rationalisation which are epitomised in a Weberian conception of bureaucracy.

Decision Making in Social Work

Social Services Departments are local authority departments set up specifically to provide certain statutorily prescribed services. However, the personal nature of these services requires that the social workers who provide them retain considerable discretion in the way they interpret and respond to expressed needs. They inevitably exercise a significant degree of autonomy in their day to day activities, despite the fact that they are subject to supervision and to a chain of management accountability which renders them answerable for their work to their management superiors and in turn to a committee of lay councillors. As I shall later argue in more detail, social workers are in the position of semi-professional practitioners operating within a large, complex bureaucratic organisation. Two questions which will recur throughout this study will therefore be, "to what extent are social workers free agents; how far are their behaviour and decisions influenced by decisions beyond their control?" and "to what extent is the manner in which

they make specific decisions a rational process?"

In the field of child care social work specific decisions can have the most profound significance for the children concerned. Such measures as compulsory removal from home under a Place of Safety Order, applications for a Care Order which can last until the child has attained the age of 18 years, and the adoption of a child even against the wishes of the natural parents, are examples of some of the more extreme decisions that social workers have to make. It is at the point when practitioners make individual decisions on specific issues that a variety of factors - personal and social considerations, professional and ethical codes of practice, departmental policies and expectations - come together, and it is this which makes a detailed analysis of the process particularly important.

The social workers who perform these tasks themselves have different degrees of experience and preparation and different degrees of guidance and supervision in their performance. What I shall therefore try to do in the body of this research is to explore the way in which social workers exercise their power in arriving at one type of such decision, that of where to place a child in their care; I shall also try to establish the relative importance of a number of variables which may impinge on such decisions, and the accuracy or otherwise of the predictions on which such decisions are based.

This is a relatively unresearched area of study for while the social work literature (12) constantly acknowledges the importance of decisions about child placement, this is usually done by way of prescriptions as to the factors to be borne in mind; rarely with prescriptions as to the most desirable procedure to

follow; and never, to my knowledge, with descriptions of the exact process by which such decisions are or ought to be arrived at.

If, as I shall argue, all decision making should be seen in a social context, and since the difficulty of establishing cause-effect relationships is so widely accepted, it becomes very difficult to say to what extent social workers can decide what they shall do in a given situation and to what extent they are compelled to follow a course set by forces beyond their control. It is this broad question of how specific actors reach decisions while exercising a considerable degree of autonomy but operating within constraints imposed by a large, bureaucratic employing organisation that lies at the heart of this piece of research.

Three main models of organisational decision making exist, each giving different weight to the conscious choice of the decision maker. Rationalistic models assume a high degree of control over the decision making situation on the part of the decision maker. The incrementalist approach presents an alternative model, also referred to as "the science of muddling through", which assumes much less command over the environment. Finally Amitai Etzioni (13) and Dror (14) suggest two middle roads, containing elements of the previous two, which are described respectively as "mixed scanning" and "the normative-optimum model for policy making".

THEORETICAL MODELS OF ORGANISATIONAL DECISION MAKING

The Rationalistic Approach

Bryan Wilson (15) states that "The dilemma of knowing what rational procedures can yield, and yet being aware of what they also eclipse has been central to sociology since Max Weber saw the blossoming of rationality in the west as simultaneously the blight of mans' capacity for a different type of comprehension of the world, and of the realization of his potential within it". Since Weber an essentially rationalistic approach to decision making has predominated in the study of organisations and in organisational theory.

Max Weber (16) was among the first to provide a systematic approach to problems of organisational design. His "ideal type" models prescribe structural and behavioural requirements for efficient task organisations. At their core are such concepts as rationality, impersonality and continuity and many people see hierarchical organisations as their central feature. Mouzelis (17) paraphrasing Weber, says "The ideal type of bureaucracy is a conceptual construction of certain empirical elements into a logically precise and consistent form which, in its ideal purity, is never to be found in concrete reality". Bureaucratic administration remains fundamentally the exercise of control on the basis of knowledge; this is the feature of it which makes it specifically rational, and Mouzelis emphasises that it is this rational basis of the organisational structure rather than the existence of a hierarchical span of control, which is one of its manifestations, which determines whether an organisation can be accurately described as bureaucratic. Whereas in a feudal situation the relationship between inferior and superior is personal and the legitimisation of

authority is based on a belief in the sacredness of tradition, "in the bureaucracy, authority is legitimised by a belief in the correctness of the rules and the loyalty of the bureaucrat is assented to an impersonal order, to a superior position, not to the person who holds it..... the decisive criterion is whether or not the authority relations have a precise and impersonal character as a result of the elaboration of rational rules." (18).

The people who inhabit these ideal type constructs are rational men. According to Audley (19) this implies two things. Firstly a rational man is "one who always makes the best decision in any given situation." Secondly, he does so partly by having laid out and ready for use "all relevant information about a decision that could be available." Logically the sole aim of a rational man must be always to maximise his subjective expected utility.

W.G. Scott (20), S.H. Archer (21) and H.E. Thompson (22) all subscribe to a rational model of the decision making process, a "classical" formulation of which is described by C.E. Lindblom (23) as follows:

- (a) Faced with a problem

- (b) a rational man will clarify his goals, values and objectives and then rank or otherwise organise them in his mind.

- (c) he will then list all possible strategies for achieving his goals.

- (d) investigate all important consequences that would follow from each alternative strategy.
- (e) compare the consequences of each strategy with his goals, and
- (f) choose the strategy with consequences which most closely match his goals.

If the decision maker is willing to consider alternatives other than the one he was first inclined to choose, if these are shown to be superior, he is said by Alexis and Wilson (24) to be exercising subjective instrumental rationality. Objective instrumental rationality is defined as the scientifically determined best course, and the more rational the actor the more similar his choice will be to that made by scientifically trained observers. As Etzioni (25) says "Rationalistic models are widely held conceptions about how decisions are and ought to be made. An actor becomes aware of a problem, posits a goal, carefully weighs alternative means, and chooses among them according to his estimate of their respective merit, with reference to the state of affairs he prefers". This framework is therefore seen as both explanatory and normative.

The rationalistic approach has however been widely criticised. Smith and May (26) in their note on the debate between rationalistic and incrementalist models of decision making, say that the rationalistic model has been criticised for being too narrow. "It neglects the range of political variables which limits the extent of choice available in the light of the power of relevant vested interests." In practice policy makers are constrained by a number of factors which means that they cannot consider all possible options and may be compelled

to seriously consider options that could not be justified in terms of a simple means-ends approach. There is a considerable body of literature on the influence of pressure groups, well summarised by Hall et al in "Change Choice & Conflict in Social Policy", and in relation to the social services P. Hall (27) among others has in her book "Reforming the Welfare" vividly demonstrated the significance of pressure group politics with regard to the formation of public administration and social policy.

The rationalistic approach has also been seen as utopian. As Smith and May put it "Most policy decisions have numerous unanticipated consequences which are neither as inconsequential nor disposed of nearly as readily as the model tends to imply. The model represents, perhaps, the planner's dream but in the real world it is argued, ends are not so clear, decisions are not that neat and evaluation is not that systematic." D.M. Hill (28) and M. McCleery (29) also argue that most policy is characterised by a degree of ambiguity. McCleery and Lindblom therefore both suggest that the rational model can only be applied to relatively simple situations and is appropriate only to those limited kinds of bureaucracy where the executive is given very precise guidance.

Bryan Wilson (30) disputes this assumption. He points out the extent to which the sociologist has an inbuilt bias to rational procedures which he feels to be the best available in his own culture, and the danger (especially in the case of anthropology) that in using rational standards alien to the social group he investigates he makes an implicit judgement as to the inadequacy of the explanations which these groups offer about their own beliefs and activities. "If the sociologist were to insist on imposing categories of rationality explicitly to judge belief systems, he might from certain points of view blind

himself to the social and psychological operation and potency of non rational propositions." Certain actions may be "understandable empathically, poetically, mystically and could not be communicated in a set of rational propositions." Weber (31) also refers to the "irrationality of rationality" in relation to the tendency of some organisations to ritualise some bureaucratic rules which were created as a means towards the attainment of a particular goal but continue to be adhered to long after they have helped achieve their stated end. This reflects the danger particularly in an organisational context of equating rationality with the smooth running of the organisation or of favouring management and senior professions at the expense of low ranking staff, clients and patients, whose perspectives are neglected. In the field of social work Mayer and Timms (32) effectively illustrate this last point by demonstrating that the help offered by a group of social workers to their clients may be seen by those clients as quite inappropriate or irrational.

A fourth criticism is that rationalistic models are seen as too rigid in drawing sharp distinctions between ends and means, values and decisions and facts and values. Smith and May state that "What counts as "fact" is notoriously subject to the interests and values of the parties involved", and they quote Hyderbrand (33) to the effect that "Traditional conduct, like other forms of unreflected social process does not differentiate between means and ends, nor between the criteria for truth and good conduct. What is good and what works must be true". Lindblom states that means and ends are often chosen simultaneously within the administrative process. "While the conventional view of problem solving is that means are adjusted to ends (policies are sought that will attain certain objectives) it is a significant aspect of policy analysis as actually practiced that, in certain specific ways the reverse adjustment also takes

place. Since the reverse adjustment is superimposed on the conventionally conceived adjustment of means to ends, the net result is a reciprocal relationship between means and ends or between policies and values that is different from that envisaged in the synoptic ideal. Although there is a fundamental sense in which ends govern means, there is an equally fundamental sense in which the proximate ends of public policy are governed by means. We can aspire to fly without mechanical aids, to eliminate boredom, to prevent pain and the occasions for it, to bring democracy to the Soviet Union next year, or to safeguard the atmosphere against radiation while simultaneously testing nuclear weapons. None of these is our policy objective, however, because we have neither means to its achievement nor any likely prospect of finding them. Clearly what we establish as policy objectives we derive in large part from an inspection of our means."(34) Cassidy and Turner (35) illustrate the way in which means often, in practice, precede ends or even cause ends: they suggest that rates of apprehension and charging may be a function of the proportion of those charged found guilty in the courts, rather than vice versa. Smith and May suggest that "Ends become means as one decision merges into the next. Values may rationalise rather than determine decisions and certainly actors are often unable to rank their values independent of specific choices. The ambiguity of means, ends and their relationship is substantially greater than rational models allow."(36)

A fifth criticism is that rationalistic models are impractical. Simon (37) indicates how unlike real professionals and administrators the ideal type rationalistic decision maker is and challenges the basic assumption that decision making can be based on perfect knowledge since man is not capable of storing or digesting all the complex information available, and lacks the

necessary time, information and intellectual capability to examine all the relevant consequences of the various alternative courses open to him in a given situation. Even at a policy level and with the aid of computer technology a review and evaluation of all possible answers to a problem in order to select the optimal solution is seldom possible, and the cost of the search may well exceed the savings achieved by the solution eventually discovered. The Seeborn Committee (38), is a good example of a situation in which a Government committee set up to examine the organisation of the present social services in Britain decided that the delay in producing their report, which would result if an appropriate programme of research was undertaken, would not be justified.

A final criticism of the model as applied to individuals is that it rejects or denies basic human characteristics in adopting simplistic assumptions about human behaviour. A rational approach is equated with emotional detachment, and so assumes that an actor must, ideally, remain neutral and calculative and overcome or suppress all "irrelevant" tendencies towards a particularistic or affective commitment to the object of his deliberations. Yet, as Etzioni (39) points out "Rationality is not a linear process in which the greater the detachment of the actor, the more rational is his decision making. While some detachment may lead to a greater rationality, further detachment may blur and eventually erase the goal for which the chain of calculations and means was composed. In psychological terms, the commitment to any given goal is emotional and, in that sense, non-rational; the greater the detachment (i.e. the more emotions are suppressed), the greater seems to be the danger that commitment to goals will be suppressed as well."

In addition Simon (40) contends that man's rationality is both bounded and circumscribed by motivational stamina, so that he will not in practice attempt to maximise his utilities or satisfactions. Simon believes that man "is a satisficing animal whose problem solving is based on search activity to meet certain aspiration levels rather than a maximising animal whose problem solving involves finding the best alternative in terms of specific criteria." He states that models of satisficing behaviour are richer than models of maximising behaviour because they treat not only of equilibrium but of the method of reaching it as well. He suggests that psychological studies of the formation and change of aspiration levels support propositions of the following kinds:-

1. When performance falls short of the level of aspiration search behaviour (particularly search for new alternatives of action) is induced.
2. At the same time, the level of aspiration begins to adjust itself downwards until goals reach levels that are practically attainable.
3. If the two mechanisms just listed operate too slowly to adapt aspirations to performance, emotional behaviour - apathy or aggression, for example - will replace rational adaptive behaviour.

Simon consequently feels that, despite the fact that most literature on decision making, policy formulation, planning and public administration formalyses the rational approach, most decision makers do not actually try to optimise but settle for "satisficing" solutions - those which provide a relatively satisfactory realisation of their principle objectives.

The Incrementalist Approach

Braybrooke & Lindblom are the most influential exponents of an incrementalist approach and in their book "A Strategy of Decision" (41) they attempt to incorporate some of the apparently contradictory aspects of previous analyses, to adapt decision making strategies to the limited cognitive capacities of decision makers and to reduce the scope and cost of information collection and compilation.

Substituting the concept of "disjointed incrementalism" for the rational model they suggest that, as in case law, individual problems are resolved on merit and in their own unique circumstances, but within a framework of past principles and practices. Using this strategy, decision makers do not attempt a comprehensive survey and evaluation. They do not investigate all alternative policies but only those which differ incrementally (i.e. to a limited degree) from the existing policies. In addition, only a relatively small number of means are considered. This greatly reduces the scope and, therefore, the cost of the necessary information and compilations. In the same vein "ends are chosen that are appropriate to available or nearly available means".(42) This allows room for creative incremental change at the margins but within established limits. As Jean Hardy (43) explains "because similar social movements tend to be taking place in different parts of a society at the same time, the incremental changes will tend to be similar in different places, but will be "disjointed" in fact, because they are not co-ordinated. This is also, of course, a theory of evolutionary social change. And principles spring from action rather than the other way round - an inductive model rather than a deductive, starting-from-first-principles paradigm used as a basis of the rationality idea."

Elaborating on this idea in a famous article entitled "The Science of Muddling Through", Charles Lindblom (44) describes in detail the stages a "rationalistic" decision maker would have to go through to formulate policy with respect to inflation, bearing in mind the range of values such as full employment, reasonable business profits, protection of small savings, prevention of a stock market crash, which might apply. He concludes that the rational decision making model "assumes intellectual capacities and sources of information that men simply do not possess". He then goes on to point out that public administrators would anyway be unable to practice this method because their prescribed functions and constraints - the politically or legally possible - restrict their attention to relatively few values and relatively few alternative policies among the innumerable possible alternatives. This suggests to him that an incrementalist approach is both inevitable and preferable, and Lindblom contends that the sin of omission to which incrementalism may be open is preferable to that of confusion which he feels is the outcome of attempts to be rationalistic.

Assuming that it is impossible to achieve unanimous agreement about values or to rank and weigh all possible values, Lindblom maintains that "one need not try to organise all possible values into a coherent scheme, but instead, can evaluate only what is relevant in actual policy choices". The incremental approach is thus deliberately exploratory and the decision makers do not focus their attention on a clearly defined problem but continually re-define the problem. In contrast to the conventional view which sees means adjusted to ends, incrementalism promotes the opposite, allowing for a continuous and reciprocal relationship between means and ends. It is argued that in this way the problems of decision makers are rendered more manageable for what counts as

"the problem" is constantly subject to redefinition in the light of available means to solve it. Thus the very subject of the decision may be transformed and re-interpreted through the analysis. Evaluation is thus seen not as a separate activity but as taking place in series with decision making.

Braybrooke and Lindblom (45) state that "Since policy analysis is incremental, exploratory, serial, and marked by adjustment of ends to means, it is to be expected that stable long term aspirations will not appear as dominant critical values in the eyes of the analyst. The characteristics of the strategy support and encourage the analyst to identify situations or ills from which to move away rather than goals towards which to move."

Rather than attempting to foresee all of the consequences of various alternative routes, one route is tried and the unforeseen consequences are left to be discovered and treated by subsequent increments. Even the criteria by which increments are evaluated are developed and adapted in the course of action. Thus the administrator pursuing his policy for inflation might adopt as his principle aim the goal of keeping prices level. This objective might be compromised or complicated by only a few other goals, such as full employment. He would in fact disregard most other values and pursue those relatively simpler goals by outlining the relatively few policy alternatives that occurred to him, following which he would compare them and try to predict their likely consequences. In doing so he would be guided less by a precise body of theory than by past experience and would make only small policy steps to predict the consequences of similar steps extended into the future. In empirical support of this view Jansson and Taylor (46) while commenting upon the virtual absence of studies which assess the effectiveness of planning procedures in social agencies, rank only one third of the sample of agencies which they studied, as

undertaking extensive search activity for new policies.

This approach is seen by Lindblom and others as a characterisation of the way in which post-modern pluralist societies, especially the United States of America, make decisions. Because power is distributed among a large variety of actors, all exerting some degree of influence in their own particular way, and based on their own systems of values, policy results from incremental, ad hoc decisions in which issues and values, ends and means are hopelessly confused; it is thus the product of give and take among numerous societal partisans, the measure of a "good" decision is the decision maker's agreement about it, and "poor" decisions are those which exclude actors capable of affecting the projected course of action.

Like the rationalistic model, the incrementalist approach has also been subjected to serious criticism, the most important of which is its conservative, non-radical emphasis on remedial and short term change. Dror (47) suggests that its main impact is "as an ideological reinforcement of the pro-inertia and anti-innovation forces prevalent in all human organisation, administrative and policy making". He therefore feels that it is a valid approach only if the results of present policies are generally satisfactory, if the nature of the problem is relatively stable and if means for dealing with that problem are continuously available. In conclusion he states that "The rational-comprehensive model has at least the advantage of stimulating administrators to get a little outside their regular routine, while Lindblom's model justifies a policy of 'no effort'. Taken together the limited validity of the "muddling through" thesis and its inertia-reinforcing implications constitute a very serious weakness." This view is given some support by Booth's (48) description

of the factors in the machinery of local government in Britain which have inhibited the introduction of alternatives to residential care in the personal social services, in spite of a strong "rational" case against the extensive supply of residential provision.

A further criticism of incrementalism is that "good" decisions are not judged by some objective criteria of merit but by expediency - their acceptability in a given situation. This approach will inevitably favour powerful interest groups at the expense of less powerful and less well organised interests. Similarly it takes a body of fundamental "macro" decisions as its basic framework, and since it offers a means of approaching only detailed decisions within this framework, its focus is much narrower and more restricted than that of rationalism.

For this reason there is a danger that by failing to explore radical or new alternatives to existing policies incrementalism may lead to short term savings at the risk of incurring much greater long term costs. It therefore represents a false economy as compared with such techniques as cost-benefit analysis (49) and planning strategies such as corporate management, which attempt to provide real alternative policies whose costs can be taken into account as important variables when their merit is considered. Williams and Anderson (50) feel that this is an important line of argument, although Kakabadse (51) illustrates the fact that specific case studies do not necessarily show the theory being borne out in practice. Hyderbrand (52) concludes, "the question remains whether gradual incremental change is only a form of adaptation which leaves basically intact what ought to be changed".

An Alternative Approach

Both rationalistic and incrementalist approaches have come under strong criticism and clearly neither can survive intact in either the normative or prescriptive sense. Both Etzioni (53) and Dror (54) have attempted to avoid the weaknesses of rationalist and incrementalist models by combining the strongest features of the two. Each offers a "third" alternative; Etzioni by way of the "mixed scanning approach" and Dror outlining the "normative-optimum model for policy making".

Etzioni suggests that whereas the incrementalists do describe accurately the way in which decisions are made in post-modern pluralist societies, they do not provide "a full representation of societal values and interests and a perspective that runs deeper than the next few increments"(55). His mixed scanning model assumes a decision making process which proceeds in two phases. The first stage entails fundamental "contextuating" decisions: policy options are reviewed at a general level and assessed against stated values. Within this broad framework detailed "bit" or "item" decisions are then made incrementally. Etzioni suggests that "each of the two elements in mixed scanning helps to reduce the effects of the particular shortcomings of the other; incrementalism reduces the unrealistic aspects of rationalism by limiting the details required in fundamental decisions, and contextuating rationalism helps to overcome the conservative slant of incrementalism by exploring longer run alternatives"(56).

In fact this claim cannot be substantiated without a detailed examination of how the model works in practice. Both the unrealistic and the conservative shortcomings could persist in some form in what remains a complex decision making process, which cannot guarantee the absence or reduction of these inherent difficulties. Etzioni can also be criticised for having failed to resolve the issue of how decision makers should summarise and rank their values; in practice any ordering of values is usually seen to reflect no more than personal choice.

At the heart of the problem, as Smith and May (57) point out, is the attempt to distinguish between two different kinds of decision. "It is essential to differentiate fundamental decisions from incremental ones. Fundamental decisions are made by exploring the main alternatives the actor sees in view of his conception of his goals, but - unlike what rationalism would indicate - details and specifications are omitted so that an overview is feasible. Incremental decisions are made but within the contexts set by fundamental decisions (and fundamental reviews). In the same way that the distinction between means and ends is flexible, so fundamental decisions in one context may appear incremental in another. Decision makers may define decisions according to their particular needs and interests".

Dror's alternative model seeks to "increase rationality content" in decision making while acknowledging that "Extrarational processes play a significant role in optimal policy making on complex issues" (58). His model is broadly similar to rational planning but with qualifying statements to the effect that "some clarification of values" or "preliminary estimation of pay offs" or "explicit arrangements to stimulate creativity" are sufficient instead of more final and

inflexible formulae. Lindblom (59) criticises this approach and says that Dror offers no more than a series of discrete statements which do not connect and cannot be said to constitute a "model" for decision making. He attaches great importance to "intuition" and "experience" which, as Smith and May say "are disconcertingly vague variables and hardly more than residual categories for non-rational sources of information. The whole model borders on the tautologous as an extended restatement of the opening commitment to both rational and non-rational elements".

Smith and May suggest that the debate between rationalist and incrementalist models of decision making and the attempt to construct a third model of decision making as a compromise between the two represents an artificial debate since the models may in fact constitute different elements of the decision making process. Etzioni, Lindblom and Dror all explicitly state that their models constitute both descriptive and prescriptive accounts of decision making. Smith and May feel that it is anomalous to attempt both to describe and explain a process, and also to describe how it could be improved, within the framework of a single model; they say that to attempt to do so is to risk what Bittner (60) has termed "ambiguities that defy clarification".

They point out that most commentators accept that rationalistic models accurately describe an ideal process for decision making; they are criticised mainly for being unrealistic and empirically inaccurate. Similarly incrementalist approaches are widely seen to be empirically accurate descriptions of how policies are made; criticism is largely aimed at the suggestion that such a model could be normative. In other words it is suggested that the two models describe on the one hand ideal states of affairs

and on the other real; being about different social phenomena they should not be expected to agree. Secondly Smith and May suggest that the debate "does not consider seriously the issue of what it takes to act in accord with any set of decision making rules and thus neglects the way in which policy makers and administrators may use "decision making" as a gloss for a range of practices".

For present purposes there are two particular questions which require further consideration. The first is the extent to which models of decision making which have derived primarily from an examination of the process of policy making can be applied to individual decision makers in an operational context. I shall argue that it is possible to apply the same type of analysis to individual decisions as to joint policy decisions. The second is the issue posed by Smith & Hay as to the extent to which different ideal-type models can be applied to real situations. My purpose will be to compare the apparent process by which practitioners reach decisions with two specific models of decision-making, the rational and the incremental. To the extent that it is possible to categorise actual decision-making styles in terms of these models I shall further explore the consequences of such differences in approach.

THE APPLICATION OF THEORY TO PRACTICE

The difficulty in attempting to apply these three models of decision making to the field of social work practice lies in the fact that they are all attempts to provide the "complete" decision making model which Alexis and Wilson (61) say is unattainable, since it would have to be universally applicable, prescribe behaviour in the most complex as well as the simplest cases and be capable of

reflecting all dimensions of choice situations. Simon (62) describes how such rationalistic procedures as operations research, statistical decision theory and systems analysis are characterised by clarity of objectives, explicitness of evaluation, a high degree of comprehensiveness of review and, whenever possible, quantification of values for mathematical analysis. However, these advanced procedures remain largely the appropriate techniques of relatively small scale problem-solving where the total number of variables to be considered is small and value problems restricted. The complexity of the problem and the number of variables to be considered will vary at different levels of a large organisation, and it may be that some actors whose activities are clearly circumscribed by explicit policy and procedural guidelines could apply an extremely rationalistic approach to their decision making. Whether this could be said to apply to individual social workers in relation to decisions about children in care is a moot point and one which I shall shortly explore in more detail.

Roland McKeen (63) has described how no organisation can possibly "fully optimise" its activities, since this would require the simultaneous consideration of all possible allocations of its resources. He goes on to describe a process of "sub optimisation" which results from the fact that an essential aspect of government or business operation is that decision making is decentralised in varying degrees. Thus, different administrative levels allocate the resources at their disposal among the uses under their supervision. The allocation, for example, of government funds within departments and programmes among different projects and among different operations within each

project, are accomplished by the administrators at "lower levels", and at successive levels the actors involved face narrower problems. Whereas the broad decisions are made at the top, each department and division must choose among narrower alternatives. The complications of size and the differentiation of tasks may make it virtually impossible for departmental heads or individual actors to compare the alternatives facing them in terms of the criteria that would be appropriate for an entire firm or government or particular organisation. Sub objectives may consequently develop that are incompatible with overall objectives, and the larger the organisation and the more discretion is delegated, the more likely this is to occur.

The fact that different levels of task performance may allow different approaches to decision making, together with the fact that different descriptive and prescriptive models of decision making have focused on different actors and different levels within complex organisational structures means that any theoretical constructs can only be applied to the analysis of the behaviour of individuals with great caution.

The Individual Decision Maker

The Human Relations school of management (64) emphasised the importance of social psychological factors in the behaviour of individual members of purposeful and predominantly rational organisations, and the fact that rationality will always be restricted by man's human limitations and his non-

rational instincts and needs. When focusing on the individual decisionmaker it is consequently possible to see his environment as a set of premises upon which his decisions will be based. Simon (65) distinguishes two kinds of decision premises. These are factual premises such as knowledge of alternatives and of consequences, which are subject to empirical testing for the establishment of their validity; and value premises which are not subject to such tests. The latter are generally concerned with the choice of the ends of action and the former with the choice of means. In practice the decision maker has to search out these premises rather than accept them as given, and in doing so he is limited by a variety of factors which reduce the quality and quantity of the premises on which he will have to base his final decision. Simon reduces these limitations to three categories.

The first is the skills, habits and reflexes which are more or less unconscious and which determine automatically an individual's performance and the decisions which precede it. The second is the motivations, values and loyalties of the individual to either internal or extra-organisational groups or to values, beliefs and ideals which diverge from organisational values. And third is the amount of basic knowledge and information available. Individual choice will consequently always be exercised with respect to a limited, approximate and simplified model of reality. Individual behaviour will be rational not in an absolute sense but according to one person's definition of the situation.

In "The Social Construction of Reality" Berger and Luckman state that "sociological interest in questions of "reality" and "knowledge" is ...

initially justified by the fact of their social relativity."(66). Their analysis is influenced by a wide variety of thinkers including Marx, Weber and Durkheim and the symbolic-interactionist school of American sociology which developed the work of G.H. Mead (67). They suggest that the sociology of knowledge constitutes the sociological focus of a much more general problem, "that of the existential determination of thought as such". Although here the social factor is concentrated upon, the theoretical difficulties are similar to those that have arisen when other factors (such as the historical, the psychological or the biological) have been proposed as determinative of human thought. In all these cases the general problem has been the extent to which thought reflects or is independent of the proposed determinative factor.

The central contention of Berger and Luckman is that "everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by man and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world", and Bernstein (68), Cicourel (69) and Mayer and Timms (70) reflect the same belief that an individual, in approaching a specific problem, can only do so through the filter of the history and experience which constitute his unique consciousness. This subjective frame of reference will allow him to consider only a few of the available decision premises and in consequence, as mentioned earlier, Simon believes that most decision makers will not attempt to optimise but will settle for "satisficing" solutions - those which provide a relatively satisfactory realisation of their principal objectives.

R.G.S. Brown (71) describes how individuals, quite apart from having of necessity to work within a simplified picture of reality, are constantly being

subtly moulded by personal forces and forces within the organisational structure. For from an individual's point of view joining an organisation entails a considerable restriction on his decisional autonomy, since the organisation must try to co-ordinate the decisions and activities of all participant members by exerting influence over their behaviour. This is achieved by a variety of means.

Firstly by the division of labour which, by assigning an individual a certain task directs and limits his attention only to problems which are relevant to its attainment. In addition the imposition of standard procedures to be followed in the performance of specific tasks ensures a degree of conformity. A second mechanism is the authority system which is established in such a way that broad and crucial policy decisions are taken at the top of the hierarchy and transmitted downwards to provide the guiding criteria on the basis of which individual decision makers will take decisions of a more detailed and procedural character. Mouzelis (72) suggests that "By this process the organisation can be viewed as a means-end chain, on each level of which the superiors' decisions constitute the major value premises in the decisional environment of the inferior, (whose decision making consists simply in finding the means for achieving the imposed goals)". Thirdly the information necessary for establishing factual premises for a decision is transmitted via the organisation's communication system which therefore assumes considerable importance. Brown (73) describes how information about policies, resources and objectives is progressively structured and simplified in its progress through an organisation by the process of "uncertainty absorption". This may mean that an

individual decision maker will see himself as having little choice in a given situation since complex problems have to be simplified to fit into rigid organisational requirements, or, alternatively, that he will feel free to use a large degree of imagination and discretion within the wide and simplistic framework of guidance.

A last powerful device for influencing individual decision making is training and indoctrination, since knowledge, values and decision rules are internalised through them. Individuals will bring their own intellectual baggage with them and may employ selective perception and rationalisation as two means by which experience can be structured in ways that are consistent with their previous background, beliefs, prejudices and values. Within an organisation this will inevitably lead to individuals developing a repertoire of programmes and responses for dealing with different situations and attempting to fit new situations into these, if necessary by rejecting features of new problems which do not fit. However the organisation, quite apart from controlling the information supplied to its employees, will also be influencing them by structuring their environment and, through training and other means, conditioning the way they react to it. They will try to control the framework of experience which their members bring to problems through such instruments as recruitment, training and career policy and by departmentalisation which, in the view of Brown, Barnard (74) and Burns and Stalker (75) is the most effective instrument of all. If officials are grouped so that they are constantly exposed to the same kind of information and value system, and interact with others in the same position, all findings about selective perception and group resonance point to the emergence of a characteristic departmental philosophy.

Brown sees this as such a potent force that he is led to conclude that, according to this form of analysis the decision maker emerges as "a sort of human computer, with limited storage capacity and a partially random input. Up to a point he can be programmed".(76) One way in which these pressures can be challenged or resisted, however, is through an identification with alternative sources of values and authority systems such as are provided by membership of an established profession.

Professionals in Organisations

Just as organisations can be said in some senses to programme their employees, so "professions" socialise their members. And as work in general is becoming increasingly organisationally based, among both the established professions and the professionalising occupations, so, Richard Hall (77) points out, a distinct characteristic of the labour force in Western society is its increasing professionalisation as occupational groups that have held the status of "marginal professions" are intensifying their efforts to be acknowledged as fully fledged professions.

While there is no clear consensus as to the defining characteristics of a profession, four elements appear in most definitions, including the detailed description given by Wilensky (78). These are (1) possession of a body of knowledge which can be acquired through training, (2) an ethical code supervised and enforced by an autonomous body, (3) a service orientation and (4) autonomy of practice. T.J. Johnson (79) in "Professions *and* Power" states that according to this "trait" analysis "Certain professions such as social work, teaching and

accountancy, are not highly advanced in the process of professionalisation, while others, such as law, medicine and architecture, are closer to the end-state of professionalisation". However he feels that this approach is based on a rather unquestioning acceptance of the rhetoric of those "professions" involved, and ignores the power element in their status. "In attempting to reconcile the inconsistent interpretations of the social role of the professions, the theory of professionalisation has excluded the one element which was constant in earlier approaches: the attempt to understand professional occupations in terms of their power relations to society - their sources of power and authority and the ways in which they use them." (80)

Professional associations and corporations can be seen in this light as bureaucratic mechanisms for enforcing monopolistic practices. Clearly many occupational groups see the acquisition of "professional" status as a desirable goal and professionalisation is the movement towards correspondence with the professional model characterised by the above traits.

The essential problem for employed professionals is that of role strain engendered by possible incompatibilities between the bureaucratic and professional roles they will be expected to occupy. For commitment to an extra-organisational source of authority or values will mean that such professionals may at some point be willing, or feel obliged, to question the organisational authority and refuse to comply with directives with which they disagree.

Kornhauser (81), Glaser (82), Marcson (83) and Cotgrove and Box (84) have all analysed this problem in relation to the professional scientist in industry. Similarly Ben David (85) has studied role conflict with regard to "The Professional Role of the Physician in Bureaucratic Medicine". For present purposes two of the most important contributions are the study by Gouldner (86)

of cosmopolitan and local orientations, and the analysis by Blau and Scott (87) of conflicts between professionals and "line" managers.

Blau and Scott (88) point to four fundamental differences in orientation between the professional and the bureaucrat. The first is that the professional is bound by a norm of service and a code of ethics to represent the welfare and interests of his clients, whereas the bureaucrat's primary responsibility is to represent and promote the interests of his organisation. Even in the case of service organisations, where the ultimate objective of serving clients and serving the organisation coincide, specific immediate objectives often conflict; for a service organisation is oriented to serving the collective interests of its entire clientele, which means that the interests of some clients may be subordinated to those of the majority or of future clients, while the professional orientation requires that each client's interests are paramount and must not be sacrificed for the sake of the welfare of other clients. Secondly, whereas the authority of the bureaucratic official rests on a legal contract backed by legal sanctions, that of the professional stems from his acknowledged technical expertness.

A third difference is that the bureaucrat's decisions are expected to be governed by disciplined compliance with directives from superiors, whereas the professional's are governed by internalised professional standards. Finally whereas decisions of bureaucrats can be reviewed by line managers, those of professionals can only be reviewed or criticised by his professional colleague group. Blau and Scott state that their work, together with that of Gouldner (89), Everett and Hughes (90) and Francis and Stone (91) all demonstrate that

the conflict between professional and bureaucratic orientation is a fundamental issue in relation to the employment of both professionals and semi-professionals in formal organisations. They suggest that some bureaucratised professionals retain a strong identification with their professional colleague group, are highly committed to their professional skills and look for support to professional colleagues outside the organisation as well as within; this involvement in a larger network of professional relations that cuts across organisations is taken to indicate a "professional" orientation. Others have less commitment to their specialised skills; come to identify with the particular organisation by which they are employed and its programmes and procedures; and are more concerned with gaining the approval of administrative superiors inside the organisation than that of professional colleagues outside: these are said to have a "bureaucratic" orientation.

Gouldner (92) studied the conflict between professional and organisational commitment in a small private liberal arts college. He measured loyalty to the employing organisation, commitment to specialised professional skills, and reference group orientation, by way of Guttman-type scales and found that high commitment to professional skills and an orientation to outside reference groups were associated with low loyalty to the college. He concluded from this that "professionals" tend to assume a "cosmopolitan" orientation, manifesting itself in a lack of loyalty to a particular organisation and a willingness to move from one employer to another, whereas only those less committed to professional skills are actually "locals" with strong feelings of loyalty to their organisations.

These two broad patterns of orientation towards either "professional" or "organisational"^{values} have been found to exist among a variety of professional workers in the federal and state civic services (L. Reissman [93]), in labour unions (Wilensky [94]), and among such specialised professional workers as school teachers (Becker [95]), nurses (Bennis [96]), and probation officers (Ohlins [97]).

Leonard Reissman (98), among others, has described two additional sub-patterns between the extremes of professional and bureaucratic orientation. He considers that all professional workers in formal organisations are bureaucrats. However, he distinguished four types of bureaucrats. The functional bureaucrat, according to his findings, is orientated exclusively towards the profession. He seeks his recognition from the professional sub-system, rather than from the organisation in which he works. The other polar type is the job bureaucrat who has adopted value standards that supportⁱⁿ ambiguously the supremacy of agency policies and practices over those of the professional. The two other types of bureaucrats have commitments to the profession and to the agency which are more elaborate. The specialist bureaucrat is primarily oriented towards his profession but is also identified with the organisation. For him professional status must be achieved through organisational performance. Finally the service bureaucrat is primarily oriented towards the organisation, but also has a professional identification.

The Application of Decision Making Theory to Social Work Practice

The manner in which individual social work practitioners arrive at decisions is inextricably linked with the amount of autonomy and discretion they exercise and

this in turn is directly related to their sense of identity and belief in the standing of their "profession". Using the "trait" criteria of professionalism Nina Toren (99) brackets social work alongside other "semi-professions" which either lack one or more of the professional characteristics or do not possess one of these qualities in a fully developed form. She arrives at this conclusion on the basis that social work has a relatively underdeveloped knowledge base on which practice is built, no distinct monopoly of skills and competence, and "relatively little professional autonomy within formal organisations". While noting that one of the core attributes of a profession, namely their code of ethics, is strongly emphasised in social work, she concludes that "a highly developed service orientation, when not combined with esoteric knowledge and competence, does not endow the profession with an established, prestigious position".

Toren goes on to suggest that social work is a "heteronomous" profession in that, lacking a sufficiently sound professional base, members of the profession are guided and controlled not only from "within" by way of internalised professional norms, expert knowledge, and the professional community - but also by administrative rules and by superiors in the organisation hierarchy. "Because professional authority rests basically on expert knowledge and technical competence, and because the semi-professions entail a shorter period of training, it follows that their members have less knowledge and less intrinsic commitment to professional norms. In short, they are less well "socialised" to perform their role without outside supervision. They will therefore be less able to insist on complete freedom from control whether by the public, special groups of laymen, or their administrative "superiors".

Noel and Rita Timms (100) arrived at a similar analysis, concluding that social work qualifies as a profession "only in certain limited respects and within a special kind of (agency) setting". This unique setting is a point expanded on by David Howe (101) who argues that social work as an activity cannot be separated from its agency function. He examines attempts to distil out the inalienable elements of social work and concludes that there is no specific social work task: "There is no discernible and permanent entity, social work, although there is a particular way of doing some things". He is therefore inclined to view the social worker as an agent, that is as "someone who carries out a function or produces a commissioned effect, often on behalf of other people. His activities and those of others like him constitute the agency through which the effects are produced".

This view of social work appears very plausible, and is not significantly at odds with that of Toren, who indicates that, at least in the USA, it is the employing organisation rather than professional training which is the greatest determinant of social work values, and argues that while social workers may be guided by internalised norms and values, they are invariably guided by administrative rules and superiors within the agency. However the assumption that fully fledged professions are autonomous is to a large extent based on a comparison with an idealised picture of the "independent" physician in private practice. In reality doctors in hospitals or clinic settings will be subject to a degree of oversight in their daily conduct, just as lawyers employed by a large law firm will inevitably be subject to some control by their superiors.

On the strength of such considerations Fielding and Portwood (102) suggest that all professions are related to the state, although the form of this relationship varies considerably, and they analyse a number of occupations on the basis that they are all "bureaucratic professions". These, they suggest, have all achieved "a working relationship between the general, ideologically-based "rational" goals of the state, which aims to provide services efficiently, i.e. cost-effectively, and the more specific value-based goals of the profession which stress their idealism and unique ability to perform a particular social service. On the one hand the state "guarantees" the profession a clientele both in terms of provision and subsequent payment for service and the profession, on the other, accepts limitations on its professional autonomy".

This suggests that the amount of freedom that an individual social service practitioner exercises will lie somewhere towards the middle of a continuum from the totally autonomous individual at one end to the completely controlled agent at the other: the precise location will depend on the degree of influence exerted by "professional" norms and values as compared to the employing organisation. The position of social work is therefore not clear-cut for, whereas social workers, in common with teachers and nurses, are more subject to bureaucratic rules and regulations than doctors, lawyers and scientists, they share the fact that direct supervision is only carried out by senior or ex-professionals who have attained more senior positions. The work of Packman (103) and Davies (104) has demonstrated the degree of regional variation which occurs in the provision of social services, and the more recent work by Stevenson et al (105) has demonstrated that the nature and extent of supervision is not exempt from this tendency. Since social work is still

largely based on the dyadic casework model, which means that individual practitioners retain ultimate control over what passes between them and their clients, there consequently exists great scope for variation between practitioners in the extent to which they approximate to broadly "bureaucratic" or "professional" models of behaviour.

This is all the more so because, as mentioned earlier, Hills (106) and Stevenson (107) have shown that there is a need in all welfare organisations which deal with complex problems on a personal basis, for a capacity for differentiation and the exercise of discretion. Davies (108) has described discretion as something which a public official has "whenever the effective limits of his power leave him free to make a choice among many courses of action and inaction". The nature of social work is such that wide areas of discretion must necessarily exist. This is so firstly because the orientation towards the client is "holistic" - seeing him in his entirety and taking account of all his needs - physical, psychological and social; and secondly because each client is unique, so that there will always be "special circumstances" and "exceptions to the rule".

A tendency for some practitioners to attach greater importance to the needs of clients than to the requirements of their employing authority is apparent in some research by Blau (109) into the orientation towards clients of social workers in a Public Welfare Agency in America. In this Blau suggests that inexperienced and unqualified social workers start out with a positive if somewhat idealistic attitude towards their clients and a corresponding resentment of organisational rules and procedures. However their uncertainty

about these procedures consistently leads them into a preoccupation with eligibility criteria which the "old timers" who were seen by newcomers as compliant and rigid, were paradoxically more flexible in interpreting. Nevertheless, the greater ability to help clients which this developing flexibility created was not matched among experienced staff by their interest in doing so. On the strength of these findings Blau speculated that a professional training which would (1) inculcate a client orientation and (2) leave the worker less prone to ego-defensive reactions such as leaving the agency or becoming hardened (or preoccupied with agency procedures and limitations), and would thus have the effect of rendering qualified social workers more flexible in their interpretation of client needs and solutions to them than their unqualified counterparts.

I am taking this idea as the basis of my hypothesis that there will be a difference in their approach to decision making and problem solving between qualified and unqualified staff, and am suggesting that this difference, if it exists, may be related to an inclination to adopt a rationalist as opposed to an incrementalist approach to such activities *on the part of the trained staff.*

Lindblom (100) has suggested that a rationalistic approach can only be applied to "relatively simple problems" in which the options are limited and within man's capabilities to assess. In addition Etzioni has asserted that the objective range of options is usually significantly greater than the number of alternatives of which any actor is aware. Interpretation of these statements will vary and the extent to which they can accurately be applied to a given situation may be a relative rather than absolute matter. However I am assuming that a rationalistic approach can be applied to a problem if its analysis and

the range of possible solutions is theoretically within the scope of an actor; and that an important indicator of whether he has a primarily "professional" or "bureaucratic" orientation will be the willingness of that actor to consider a range of options as opposed to settling for the most obvious or administratively convenient solution.

Blau states that "a trained professional is a specialised expert qualified to deal with problems in a strictly limited area". He is therefore likely to have fairly comprehensive knowledge about a situation falling within that area of expertise and to be fully aware of the range of available options. I shall therefore explore the proposition that ^a "professional" practitioner, who feels able to focus exclusively on the needs of a client, without having to consider such issues as the relative priority of his needs in relation to others, or to attach undue significance to procedural, financial or eligibility considerations, is more likely to adopt a rationalistic approach, examining the problem from first principles and considering a wide range of means for achieving the most desirable solution, than somebody whose primary loyalty is "organisational".

The practitioner with a primarily "bureaucratic" orientation, who identifies himself as an agent of the Social Services Department as opposed to a professional practitioner affiliated to it, will, in contrast, be more concerned with such issues as whether the client is eligible for help, and if so, whether his apparent needs can be matched to the most readily available repertoire of services and resources to which he has access. His approach will be less imaginative, will give more conscious weight to departmental practices and

procedures, and will approximate more closely to an incrementalist style of decision making.

In testing this hypothesis it becomes necessary to classify social workers as either "professional" or "bureaucratic". The important issue here is the self-perception of the individual; whether he perceives himself as the agent of an organisation which both limits his activities and restricts his choice, or as a more autonomous practitioner who in his work applies an internalised set of values and skills and relies on the organisation less for control and guidance than for the provision of information and resources which will allow him to arrive at a decision and to implement it once reached. While such self-perception may be significantly influenced by professional training, it does not follow that all qualified social workers would qualify as "professionally" oriented, nor that all unqualified would be categorised as "bureaucratic". Other criteria will be necessary, and I shall examine these in more detail in the next chapter.

However some indications as to the appropriate indicators are available. On the one hand Toren (111) suggests that as social work did not start as a "free" profession with "independent" practitioners, and as private practice in social work is only a recent development and still quite marginal, "the common distinction between "locals" and "cosmopolitans" is somewhat obscure in this case (in the sense of the employed social worker orienting towards an "outside colleague community" as a reference group and target of aspirations)". Blau echoes this feeling firstly on the grounds that, like the nurses surveyed by Bennis (112) social workers would be dependent for feedback on their competence on a small local colleague group; and secondly on the basis that their local

orientation would be enhanced by their dependency on their employing organisation for advancement in the absence of better professional opportunities outside.

On the other hand however Blau did find in his own research, that (1) a commitment to high professional standards was directly associated with a tendency to criticise agency practices and procedures for interfering with service to clients; this could include criticism of legislation, departmental practices and eligibility criteria; (2) that knowledge and skills acquired through training rendered workers less anxious and thus less rigid in their outlook; (3) that "an orientation to the profession as a reference group makes a worker somewhat independent of organisational pressures and thus more inclined to deviate from administrative procedures in the interests of professional service to clients"; and (4) that workers oriented to professional service were also more independent from peer group pressures than workers not so oriented; the former were more likely than their bureaucratic peers to differ from the majority of their work group in their judgement of their superiors.

Summary

When such a variety of factors may be exerting some influence on the outcome of any decision making process it becomes very difficult to answer such questions as how do individuals or groups within an organisation reach decisions, how much information is necessary, who or what influences the outcome most, how are disagreements resolved, what procedures are used and how are choices made?

However these are the sort of issues I shall be addressing, though more *specifically focussing*
the comparative importance of personal and professional factors as compared to

organisational influences, and testing the hypothesis that "professional" identity is associated with a rationalistic style of decision making while a "bureaucratic" orientation is associated with an incrementalist approach.

It will clearly be necessary to establish the nature of the specialist knowledge and skills acquired by social workers through training and to explore the part such knowledge and skills are likely to play in the specific context of decision making in relation to child placement. These are the questions I shall address in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO

CHILD PLACEMENT - SOME INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

What has been argued in the preceding chapter is that all activity involves decision making, although the basis on which decisions are made and the degree of freedom in the decision making process will vary greatly. It has been further argued that in social work a considerable amount of discretion is delegated to the individual practitioner, and one of the issues to be explored is the extent to which this discretion is exercised in the light of identifiable "professional" values, or is constrained and moulded by predominantly "bureaucratic" considerations. One idea to be explored is the assumption that insofar as a coherent body of professional knowledge and values exists, trained social workers will be more likely than their untrained colleagues to adopt a "professional" approach to their decision making.

Within this broad assumption are 4 subordinate assumptions. These are:

- (1) That identifiable "professional" social work values exist.
- (2) That there is a core knowledge base underlying social work practice.
- (3) That such values and knowledge are effectively conveyed to and adopted by social work practitioners (primarily through training).
- (4) That social workers - especially trained social workers - who become aware of such values and knowledge are influenced by them in the decisions that

they take.

The last 2 assumptions are ones that I shall pursue in the course of my research though first I must establish whether a value and knowledge base does exist in social work. This I shall try to do by way of an examination of some of the literature on social work practice and research utilisation. However I shall start by exploring the literature on decision making in child care practice, under the summary headings of decision making in child placement, decision making in fostering, decision making in residential care, and decision making in adoption.

THE LITERATURE

Decision Making in Child Placement

Margaret Adcock (1), writing in 1980 says that "most people would agree that happy outcomes for children in care and their parents are rarely achieved by social workers postponing decisions or waiting upon events. Not making a decision is in fact a decision in itself which can be detrimental to both children and their parents". This echoes the views of Rowe and Lambert (2), whose work however indicates that decisions nevertheless continue to be postponed, with devastating implications for the children concerned. Professor Tutt has stated (3) that social workers "have failed to grasp that national trends are merely aggregates of individual decisions by practitioners". Parker (4) in analysing the lessons to be learned from the enquiry into the death of Maria Colwell (5), did so in terms of "the three main decisions which affected what subsequently happened". In short, the crucial importance of the

decision making process in relation to child care cases in general and with regard to child care placements in particular, has been established beyond doubt in recent years. The term child placement is here used in its broadest sense, of being concerned with making arrangements for children and young people once they become the responsibility of the local authority, and covers the whole spectrum of alternatives such as foster care, adoption, family placement schemes and residential care.

Simon (6) has argued that the premises upon which such decisions are based involve both factual and value elements. He saw large organisations as "a hierarchy of decisions" and, as Michael Hill (7) points out "Simon sees organised leadership as having as a primary function the setting of the context within which subordinates will make minor decisions". In practice social work decisions are not always minor, nor are they intended to be closely circumscribed. As Hey (8) says "Social Services departments were expected to be social work departments in the sense that 'the need for services, intended to be of universal access, was to be determined by the exercise of professional judgement rather than by fixed criteria embodied in a rule book'". The BASW working party report on The Social Work Task (9) refers to this fact in the following way. "There is continuous tension between the view that the social worker is an autonomous practitioner providing services to clients using the resources and authority of the agency when appropriate, and the view that the social worker is simply an agent of the agency. The tension is exemplified by the conflict felt by many social work practitioners between their employment as a local government officer (an employee) and their self-perception as an independent professional". The nature of this distinction and its influence upon decision making by individual practitioners is a major concern of this

piece of research.

The decision making process in social work is something about which we know very little since existing research has sought to establish the importance of decision making, or the factors to be borne in mind, rather than the manner in which decisions should be arrived at. The earliest explicit attempt to explore the first 2 aspects - the importance of decision making and some key factors - was made by Roy Parker.

Writing of decision making in fostering in 1966 Roy Parker (10) had noted that while those working in the field of child placement were striving to reduce the number of foster home failures,...."there is little to which they can turn for guidance. There is a great deal of literature on related topics, such as casework theory and practice, the psychology of the family, the etiology and manifestations of maladjustment and so on". The little material available which did specifically focus on foster care consisted largely of books or articles based on case studies, and this state of affairs was strongly criticised in the USA by Simon (11) on the grounds that "what we have running through the entire literature (of child placement) are statements of belief presented as theory, documented with cases. Or else certain points are made and illustrated to enlighten the reader without measure or estimates as to validity or reliability". This comment accurately described the situation in England when Parker wrote his seminal book "Decision in Child Care". Since then the broad body of casework theory has been supplemented by some detailed research findings, some of which I shall review. Since Parker specifically aimed to make available knowledge more readily accessible to social work practitioners for decision making purposes, it is worth outlining his thinking

in some detail.

Parker assumed that the initial placement decision was crucial to the outcome of any placement as no amount of subsequent supervision could adequately compensate for a poor initial placement. He then suggests that such placement decisions amount to attempts to make accurate predictions. Predictions, he says "are made on the basis of experience. Better predictions, and hence better decisions, can only be made by taking account of wider and more systematic knowledge of past events". Parker then describes in detail the techniques which have been devised which allow this to be done. These involve collecting information about numerous previous cases and analysing it to determine which factors best distinguish between one outcome and another. "A knowledge of the items which predicted certain outcomes in the past can then be used to estimate how other people, embarking upon the same activity, are likely to behave". This approach has been used in a number of spheres, one of the most firmly established being that of criminology. The history of criminological prediction was comprehensively reviewed by Mannheim and Wilkins (12). From this study Mannheim and Wilkins derived a prediction table based on a systematic summary of a large amount of past experience for use in forecasting the future. From the past experience of boys passing through the Borstal system they attempted to predict which were likely to benefit from it and which were not. They used the well established criterion for success of remaining free of conviction for 3½ years after discharge. By weighting a range of factors from "evidence of drunkenness" to length in any one job each boy can be given a score. By referring this score to a further table derived from past experience, the chance of success or failure of a particular boy can be estimated. Those boys scoring less than 10 points were found to have an 87% chance of success while those

scoring over 40 had only a 13% chance.

Parker's assumption was that by devising similar predictive tools for social workers it would be possible to make more accessible a "storehouse of experience" and so minimise the margin or error in their decision making. He quotes in support of this belief Baylor and Monachesi (13) who suggested that in child placement "the problems cannot be solved - in fact in many instances cannot even be recognised - without research which aims at making readily available the experience of the past".

Parker states that "this is a function which statistical enquiries and particularly predictive studies can perform. They can present the combined experience of many workers with many cases in a condensed and tested form. What casework methods of decision making lack in the range of past experience that they can consider, statistical studies can provide: and the intensive knowledge of a case and the awareness of its particularly individual features which statistical methods are ill-fitted to deal with is amply provided by casework methods. Thus one of the contributions which a predictive study can make to casework practice is the provision of information, tested for its relevance, and based upon numerous cases".

In addition Parker suggests that predictive techniques can provide the practitioner with a yardstick against which to measure her own "mental equations". This is a point, which was emphasised by Meyer, Jones and Borgotta (14) in their predictive study of whether unmarried mothers would relinquish their babies for adoption. While knowledge of previous findings in no way removes the onus of responsibility on the caseworker to exercise judgement in

making a number of crucial decisions, "it does, however, challenge the worker to formulate more deliberately the basis for diagnosis and for planning, particularly in cases where the judgement and plans are at odds with the statistical probabilities of the case" (15).

Lastly Parker suggests that prediction tables can help to indicate those cases where the risk of failure is proportionately greater and so enable caseworkers to channel their limited time and resources into the situations where it is most needed. There is clearly a possibility that this might have the effect of "disproving" a prediction of failure, since prediction tables would become a new variable in the whole boarding out situation which could not have been considered in the study which led to their creation.

Nevertheless in such a situation the social worker would at least be able to say that certain factors were consciously considered in reaching a decision and the possibility of an impact on subsequent events could be allowed for. The most important points in Parker's work which provide a basis for my enquiry are that predictive factors can be established and that their use can improve the quality of placement decisions. These are two key ideas which I wish to pursue. I believe their pursuit will be aided by a little further study of the way in which Parker approached his task.

Decision Making in Foster Placement

Having explained the purpose of the exercise Parker then set out to analyse a sample of foster placements from case records in order to be able to predict the probable success or failure of future placements. He studied the case records

of 209 placements made in one area 5 years before the study started. All the children fostered were 13 years or under in order that the 5 year period studied would not over-run their date of leaving care. Length of placement was adopted as the criterion of success, those which lasted for 5 years being deemed successful, those that did not, unsuccessful. Cases where the child was discharged from care before the end of the 5 years were excluded from the sample.

By the criteria he had established, 52% of placements proved successful. Of the failures, over 70% occurred within the first 2 years. Younger children, especially those under the age of 3, had a greater likelihood of success than older children. Mental handicap was associated with failure, but not physical handicap. Those children with behavioural problems had more fostering failures than those without them, but enuresis did not show any significant relation to failure. Length of time previously spent in institutional care had an adverse effect on the outcome of fostering if the period in residential care exceeded 2 years. However the number of institutional experiences did not affect the outcome. On the other hand children who had spent 1 or 2 years in institutions did as well as, or slightly better than, children who had never been in an institution.

Children who had been previously fostered were more successful than those who had not. But these successful children had not usually experienced "failed" previous placements, but short-term or private placements. A succession of moves of whatever nature was not associated with failure. Parker found that introductory contacts with the foster home slightly increased the chances of success if the number of such contacts was more than 5; when there had been

fewer than 5 such meetings between child and foster parents prior to placement the success rate did not vary. As the age of separation from the mother increased the rate of successful fostering declined. The death of the natural mother was also found to be very significantly associated with failure.

On the other hand Parker found a range of factors which did not affect success or failure. These were the sex of the child; illegitimacy; committal to the Council as a "fit person"; visits by the NSPCC before committal; parents living together or apart; and separation from siblings.

With regard to the foster home Parker found that the presence of foster parents' own children in the home was significantly associated with failure, especially if they were very young or close to the foster child in age. However the presence of own siblings or of other foster children did not affect success or failure. Socio-economic class was inversely related to success, the lower the class of the foster parents the greater being the likelihood of the placement being successful. There was also a slight association between the age of the foster mother and success. Despite the fact that older foster children, who failed more often than younger children, were more likely to be placed with older foster parents, these were more likely to prove successful placements. Childless couples were more successful than those with children, while the small number of homes without a foster father were averagely successful.

It proved difficult in retrospect to establish the significance of selective placement policies, but Parker did find a levelling out process to be in operation, by which the more difficult children came to be placed with the more successful foster parents, and vice versa.

In analysing these results with a view to identifying those factors which together best distinguish one outcome from another and thus draw up a prediction table, Parker warns...."social behaviour is very complex and if the relationship between each factor and success or failure is examined as if it were independent of all others this complexity is ignored and no really efficient prediction table could be developed. Many factors related to success or failure in a foster home will in turn be related to each other. For instance, although the death of the child's mother seemed to have a prejudicial effect upon foster home success, bereaved children were also older at placement and this too was seen to be an unfavourable factor. Hence the importance of the one cannot be judged without considering its relationship with the other" (16).

In making the most efficient use of the available material it was necessary to exclude those factors which were almost alternatives for one another (eg "age of separation from mother" and "age at admission to care") and those which overlap (eg "age of the foster mother" and "own children living at home"). For "to include an item largely accounted for by another which has already been chosen will almost certainly mean that the additional error outweighs the extra discrimination". Parker sought to consider these inter-relationships and to select the most efficient combination of factors by a form of multi-variate analysis. The 30 or so factors were reduced to 14 by the application of significance tests. Those which reached a 5% level of significance were used in the subsequent construction of a prediction table.

Since the factors thus identified as most efficient for prediction of success or failure were not all of equal importance, multi-variate analysis also provided a measure of the weight to be attached to each. This weighting was incorporated as a "score" for each item in the final table, which was as follows:

Prediction Table

If the following applies at placement add the appropriate score.

	Add
There is a child of the foster parents under 5	33
The child's own mother is dead	28
The child is 4 or more years old	23
The child has exhibited behaviour problems	17
The child has not been previously fostered	15
There is a child of the foster parents whose age is within 5 years of that of the child to be placed	14

By applying the table to the original sample Parker was then able to build up a subsidiary table which indicated that those placements scoring less than 15, in which none of the 6 adverse factors were present, had a 94% chance of success, while those with a score of over 80 had an expected success rate of only 16%.

A validation sample of 108 cases provided results almost identical to those obtained from the main study.

In order to establish the potential value of these findings for present practitioners it is necessary to see how well they have stood up in the face of subsequent research.

G. Trasler (17) and V. George (18) conducted similar pieces of research to that of Parker, and although their focus was different, and specific aspects of their findings will require closer analysis, a common feature was their equation of success with a lack of breakdown. Consequently Harry Napier (19) adopted this approach when in 1972 he set out to test their findings by way of a repeat study of foster care.

Napier found there to be general agreement in all the studies that the "factor of age" is a crucial one. Generally speaking the younger the child at placement, the better the chances of success; after the age of 4 the chances of success gradually diminish, with a particularly marked increase between the ages of 5 and 7 years. This coincides with starting school and Napier speculates that the dual pressure of school and boarding out often prove too much. The degree of risk appears to increase considerably over the age of 11, when Napier found only 1 in 9 placements to be successful. However he does note that, in a 5 year study, any child placed after the age of 13 would be excluded from the successful group as he would have left care before the completion of the final year. Also a proportion of children would return to their parents around age 15 or 16 or may have gone into the services or residential work, and although they may have been successfully fostered, they would not be included in the figures. For these reasons he concludes that it is likely that the success/failure rate for children placed after the age of 11 would in fact prove to be nearer 50%.

In relation to behavioural problems Napier concluded that this concept had proved consistently hard to define, and that in consequence there was no conclusive evidence as to its impact on placement success. On the question of prior experience of residential care Trasler had found an association between this and subsequent failure which was most pronounced if it occurred during a child's formative years. Parker however only confirmed this to a limited extent and found that children who had spent a relatively short period in institutional care were likely to be as successful, if not more so, than those who had had no institutional experience. It also appeared that the residential experience was least damaging during infancy. However neither Parker nor Trasler knew sufficient about the early life experience of those children received into care after the age of 5 and who had had no institutional experience, to draw any firm conclusions about its effect. Napier found no difference in success rates between those with and those without such experience.

What the studies of both Parker and Trasler showed clearly was that there was a significant rise in the failure rate of those children who had spent a considerable length of time in institutional care while under the age of 5 years, and that the longer the period in care the greater the risk of failure. However Napier found that children under the age of 5 who had spent less than 18 months in residential care were slightly more successful (87%) than children who had not been in residential care (77%), and speculated that this might reflect a fuller period of assessment and of subsequent selection of and introduction to a suitable foster home. His additional finding that children placed directly from their own homes or assessed in a day nursery as opposed to a short stay

foster home have a greater likelihood of success indicates the possible danger of using short stay foster homes for assessment purposes. It may be that a strong attachment on the part of a child to a temporary substitute mother figure increases the difficulty of making a satisfactory relationship in the subsequent longer term foster home.

Trasler (20) had expressed a generally accepted opinion that each rejection experienced by a child makes it more difficult for that child to make good relationships for fear of further rejection. In view of this Parker's finding that second placements were fairly successful (21) and that a large proportion of successful placements were made with children who had been previously fostered, was surprising. In his study Napier confirmed the generally accepted view, with first placements proving more successful than subsequent placements. The net result was therefore in line with George's finding (22) of no significant association. However Napier found that an important consideration was the reason for the termination of a first placement. If this resulted from a breakdown leading to removal rather than a planned transfer, it significantly increased the likelihood of subsequent failure, which was further exacerbated by the inevitable increase in the child's age at the time of subsequent placement.

On the question of age of separation from the natural mother, Napier's study strongly supported Parker's finding by emphasising that early separation from the child's mother does not militate against successful fostering. This indicates that the deprivation caused by early separation can be more than compensated for by the ease with which foster parents can accept a younger child

and form a good mother-child relationship. There was some confirmation of Parker's suggestion that children whose mother had died were less likely to succeed in placement (23), but since such children were usually placed at an older age, this is as likely to be attributable to the crucial age factor as to the fact of mother's death.

Most studies have shown that foster parents having children of their own whose age is within 3 years of that of the foster child will inhibit the success of a placement. Parker also found that foster parents with children under the age of 5 years were significantly less successful than foster parents with no such children (24). Neither factor was confirmed by George (25), and little difference between the 2 groups was found by Napier. In addition Napier found that whether or not the foster parents had a child of their own within 5 years of the age of the foster child was of no significance. This was in line with George's findings, about which he expressed surprise, in view of the almost unanimous support for the belief that the presence of the foster parents own child whose age is similar to that of the foster child militates against a successful placement. Foster parents with no children were found to be more successful than those with, but as they took generally younger children, no clear conclusions were justified by this fact.

The previous experience of foster parents was not found by George (26) to be a significant predictor of success, but Parker found that those foster parents with over 7 years' experience were the most successful. The question of their age produced similarly inconclusive or contradictory conclusions. Trasler and Parker found that foster mothers over the age of 40 were slightly more

successful than their younger counterparts. George reversed this finding. However Parker felt that the fact that the older foster parents in his study took older children increased the chances of failure and thus correspondingly increased the significance of the difference in their rate of success. Parker felt that the same argument applied to the fact that older foster parents rarely had their own children; Napier however did not find this to be so, nor did he find older children predominantly placed with older foster parents.

Parker, George and Napier all confirmed the fact that the first 6 months of a placement are especially critical and that the majority of breakdowns occur within the first 2 years of placement.

In conclusion Napier's study failed to validate Parker's prediction table. The single factor which his findings confirmed was the importance of the age of the child at placement. He stated that "All that could be deduced from scoring was that if a child is under 4 years old and has no behaviour problems, and if there is no interference from the natural parents, and no rivalry from the children of the foster parents, the placement has a high chance of success". He adds that these are exactly the sort of children who are easy to place and in relation to whom it is therefore possible to be very selective in choosing foster parents. In practice such placements are akin to quasi-adoptions, in view of which it would be surprising if they should fail.

Napier adds as a rider the comment that it is interesting to see that in his study the 2 children who scored highest on Parker's prediction table, ^{and who would therefore have been deemed most at risk of breakdown} would have been chosen among the most successful placements had the criteria been the adjustment of the foster children, their relationship with the foster family and

the way in which the foster home had met their needs. This does not, of course invalidate Parker's study so much as underline Charnley's (27) caution that "There are times when following all the rules yields failure, and others when breaking them brings success. A social worker may balance all the factors into a neat equation only to find that the child and foster family don't belong together at all. And she may, in desperation, break all the rules and discover that she has made a successful placement".

Consequently, while these findings have indicated some guidelines for deciding which children may need most support, and at what stage of the placement they are likely to be at most risk, they also indicate that in almost every case, regardless of the child's circumstances, there was at least a 50% chance of success. Or in Napier's words, in most cases "we are still dependent on the skill of the child care officer with the selection, introduction, support and encouragement necessary for the success of the placement".

How do these conclusions tie in with research into other aspects of fostering success or failure?

Cautley and Aldridge (28) state that "Although the mere continuation of a placement is of undeniable importance and is regarded by Klaus (29) as the 'ultimate criterion', it does not seem sufficient". They believe that the quality of the care given is equally important and the primary purpose of their research was to determine whether characteristics of the applicant foster parent could identify those most likely to be successful.

To this end they studied the characteristics of 963 applicants, including such demographic data as age, educational achievement and occupation; reasons for wishing to be a foster parent; ways in which being a foster parent might be difficult; which spouse was first interested, and the attitude of the other spouse towards foster care; how the couple functioned, their attitudes towards their own children, and the family background of each spouse.

This study supported earlier findings in relation to the foster child. Cautley and Aldridge say that "If the foster child has many characteristics that seem to be unfavourable for success, it is even more important to make sure the child is placed in a promising situation". Such unfavourable characteristics were found to be a period of institutional care; rejection in the longest previous placement; a legal status in which some responsibility has been transferred from the parents to the agency; or a history of poor physical care, which seems a general indicator of social neglect as well. They comment that "Most of these characteristics may also be general indicators of the foster child's inability to relate to parental figures, and this may well be the reason for their affecting the eventual success when behaviour ratings do not".

Cautley and Aldridge also focussed on 3 other items. The first they called the Constellation in the foster home. They concluded that it is desirable to place the foster child in a family where he will be the youngest child, but also say that if he is the oldest child this is not necessarily negative. They suggest that the presence of a pre-school child is a negative factor and if there are several pre-school children this negative effect is increased. "It is probable that this effect is primarily related to the amount of time required to care for young children".

Secondly they concluded that the social worker was an important factor as the amount of time the social worker can spend in preparing the foster parents is important. "Several contacts are desirable, and at least one should include the foster father". The social worker's experience is also a factor and they concluded that the more years of experience the social worker has the more likely the placement is to succeed.

However their main emphasis was on the characteristics of the foster parents. 4 factors found useful in predicting success were termed "degree of familiarity of the applicant with child care". Foster parents who had siblings were more successful than those who did not; among foster mothers, being an older child was positively related to success, while among foster fathers the relationship was negative. Foster fathers with warm and affectionate memories of their own fathers were more successful than those without such memories. Foster fathers whose own parents were reported to have a high formal religiousness were less successful. The couples' reporting of the influence of each in making major decisions and decisions about the use of money, which were totalled, did not agree highly and clearly represented perceptions rather than accurate descriptions. The husband's report that he and his wife together made such decisions was not correlated with success, whereas the wife's attributing more influence to her husband is so correlated.

A number of predictive items related to the prospective foster parents' responses to various behavioural situations likely to occur in most families with school-age children and to problem behaviour most likely to occur with foster children. Generally and unsurprisingly the apparent ability to handle problems promptly and appropriately without harshness or excessive discipline

and an ability to understand the likely reasons for certain behaviour was related to success, as was the ability to understand and cope with defiant and withdrawn behaviour.

3 final characteristics of foster fathers were found to be related to success. The first was his attitude towards social workers' supervision and willingness to work closely with the social worker. The second was flexibility and self awareness; and thirdly, was the degree of concern for the needs of the foster child as opposed to his own convenience, privacy and time.

A further crucial factor which Parker was unable to take into account in his own research was that of the child's relationship with parents. Heinecke and Westheimer (30) in their study Brief Separation showed that a mother's ability to respond appropriately to a young child depended very much on picking up cues from the child through actual physical contact and care. When the mother was separated and then later resumed contact with the child she no longer knew instinctively how to respond appropriately and had to relearn this, often very painfully. As Margaret Adcock (31) comments "If a mother has never had an experience of a satisfying relationship with a particular child she is not likely to have much motivation to undertake the intensive visiting that is a necessary prerequisite for getting to know the child and respond to his cues". The DHSS "Guide to Fostering Practice" makes the same point in more detail (32).

"In many ways the parents' view of themselves as parents predetermines their subsequent performance in the parental role. Parents separated from their children very early in the children's lives will not have had opportunity to build up the shared experiences and learned competence that are necessary for establishing the parental role: these are also the parents most likely to leave the children in care. Where parents have established their role but later relinquish or hand over the day to day care of their children for prolonged periods of time, they may become less and less parents both in their own eyes and in the eyes of their children".

George (33) mentions that the social work literature stresses the need to actively involve natural parents in the placement of their child with foster parents, and Gluckman (34) suggests that such involvement can help to ameliorate the pain of separation, maximise the chances of success through parental co-operation and prevent the danger of parents drifting away. However George also emphasises the differences in perception which can occur between social workers and foster parents as to the nature of the fostering role, and the danger of some foster parents adopting too readily the role of substitute parents. Natural parents are frequently not equipped economically, socially or emotionally for what Kelly (35) describes as "a task that would stretch the most capable in our society" and it is therefore scarcely surprising that some fail to visit or that when they do their behaviour is difficult in the extreme. Thorpe (36) concluded "Sadly many of the parents interviewed felt that from the time their children entered care they were *tacitly* if not directly, excluded from involvement in their lives...not only did many not feel encouraged to maintain contact with their child or the social worker but some also felt judged

and condemned as bad parents and did not experience social workers as potentially helpful".

Holman (37) has explored this issue in some detail and identified 2 contrasting concepts of fostering. In exclusive fostering an attempt is made to contain the foster child within the foster family while excluding other connections. Holman (38), Adamson (39) and George all established that over 50% of foster parents regarded themselves as substitute parents and the foster child "as their own". Consequently they wanted to exclude the natural parents. Holman found that 35% of local authority foster mothers thought natural mothers should not be encouraged to visit while, in addition, a slightly smaller proportion thought this should be conditional upon suitable attitudes and intentions. George established that 56% did not think the real parents had even a conditional right to visit. Holman says that this negative attitude "is encapsulated in hostile opinions of the natural parents - such as 'she's disgusting'. 'She doesn't deserve to have children' - and is revealed in an unwillingness to accept or talk to the foster children about their background". The reluctance to see the children as other than their own was found inevitably to influence the way in which such foster parents viewed the social worker, reflected in George's finding that almost 50% described their social worker only as "friends". Holman summarises the exclusive fostering concept by saying that it "minimises the foster aspect. The natural parents, knowledge of them and contact with social workers are excluded in order to promote security and continuity" (for both the foster children and the foster parents). "The foster parents may be able to completely exclude the natural parents and knowledge about them while contact with social workers depends on the latter's initiative" (40).

By contrast "inclusive fostering" is based on a readiness to draw the various components into the fostering situation. Such foster parents do not see the foster child as their own, or themselves as substitute parents. They are able to offer love, but on the basis that "I know he's not mine but I treat him the same". Along with this attitude goes a willingness to acknowledge, to include and to work constructively with natural parents and social workers who, George found, were correspondingly more likely to be seen as expert officials than as informal friends.

George (41) found that the majority of social workers hold an inclusive concept of fostering, but that many foster parents hold the opposite view. If foster parent shortage leads to children being placed inappropriately with exclusive foster parents George found that social workers generally colluded with the foster parents in order to safeguard the placement. George and Holman found that natural parents were rarely encouraged to see their children, and Thorpe (42) commented that "Many of the parents interviewed felt that from the time the children entered care they were tacitly, if not directly, excluded from involvement in their lives". George concludes more forcibly that social workers and foster parents "by their active hostility or passive inaction towards natural parents have forced or have merely allowed natural parents to alienate themselves from their children. This alienation has in turn been used as evidence for the natural parents' lack of interest in their children and for their inability to care for them adequately" (43).

Much of Holman's support for the inclusive model of fostering is based on an assumption that foster children benefit from continued contact with and

knowledge of their natural parents. In support of this he quotes Weinstein (44), Trasler (45), Jenkins (46), Holman (47) and Thorpe (48) to the effect that children experiencing regular parental contact rated better in terms of "well being", "emotional and physical disturbance" and "satisfactory adjustment". This contrasts with children in exclusive fostering situations where, Holman suggests, "foster parentsin regarding themselves as natural parents create situations of role conflict or confusion. For at times their conception must be challenged by the reality of social worker's visits, natural parents' contact or questioning from the children. The resultant anxiety and confusion can be conveyed to the whole family" (49).

Jane Aldgate (50) considers the maintenance of frequent contact between parents and foster children a crucial factor in determining the length of a child's stay in care; Ralph Davidson (51) echoes this correlation, and Fanshel states that the relationship between parental visiting and early discharge seems no longer in doubt (52). One explanation for this, suggested in the "Working Party on Fostering Practice" (53), is that just as a child typically passes through a number of phases, described by Bowlby (54) as protest, despair and detachment, in the process of grief work towards the resolution of "object loss", so the parent experiences an emotional response which progresses from anxiety to depression and finally to detachment. Kufeldt (55) suggests that "the significance of this knowledge for practice is that it is during the anxiety phase that the parents' energies may be most readily mobilised on behalf of their child. As they progress into the depressed stage energy is reduced and withdrawal begins to take place. Finally detachment will lead to disengagement and the re-arrangement of the parents' lives in such a way that it will become more difficult to re-introduce the child".

The child's reaction to losing his family can easily undermine a placement if it is not similarly understood. The classic and natural reactions to rejection or loss usually take the form of "acting out" or lack of response. In addition there are what Marris (56) describes as the "conservative impulse" and Dr. Littner (57) describes as a child's need to reproduce old family patterns in the new. Resisting change is here seen as a survival mechanism; in order to retain a sense of order or continuity in his interpretation of relationships, the child will try to replicate old relationships. Littner points to the consequent tendency of a disturbed child to engineer in each home the same kind of painful situation which led to his placement away from home.

However once a child has been in care for a sufficient period to establish deep affectionate bonds in his foster home, there is considerably less agreement about parental contact. Jane Rowe (58) points out that knowledge of personal and family circumstances which is essential to a sense of identity, is not necessarily congruent with continued contact. She suggests that both the openness of "inclusive" fostering and the commitment and continuity of "exclusive" fostering are needed in different mixtures.

In reviewing "New Developments in Foster Care and Adoption" edited by John Tresiliotis (59), Pamela Mann (60) says "John Tresiliotis also found in his research that the concept of "inclusiveness" needed modification in long term fostering. Furthermore the "professional" foster homes, described by Nancy Hazel (61) as beneficial for many delinquent adolescents, were experienced as less than satisfying by former long-stay foster children, who also lacked a nurturing base after care. Even in the Kent project many of the young people found their experience of family life was "too little, too late". Some of the

adolescents were casualties of the system: "often they came into care as infants, and it is difficult to see why they could not have been adopted at that time". This is the issue which was raised so forcefully and effectively in Jane Rowe and Lydia Lambert's book "Children Who Wait" (62).

Residential Care and Decision Making

Dr. Mia Kellmer Pringle, director of the National Children's Bureau (63) states that in the past 20 - 30 years "with regard to substitute care, there has been a shift in thinking away from residential care on the basis that living in an institution on a long term basis is not good for anyone". She attributes this shift in thinking in large part to the work of Bowlby, whose concept of maternal deprivation has proved very influential, and to whom I shall return later. However she also adds that the subsequent expansion of foster care led to an increased rate of fostering breakdowns and a shortage of suitable homes which at one point led back towards an emphasis on residential care. In "Foster Home Care: Fact and Fallacies" (64) she states that "It is unlikely that research will ever succeed in measuring precisely the risks of fostering breakdowns against the disadvantages of a residential environment". The evidence to date is conflicting and emphasises the need to establish more clearly what role the residential and fostering sectors are best equipped to play in the broad spectrum of child care provision.

On the negative side research points to a link between early prolonged residential care and later maladjustment or failure to make use of family life (65). There is also a positive link between length of time spent in residential care - especially in the first 3 years of life - and later fostering

failure and together these findings appear to endorse Bowlby's work and to indicate that, despite the complexity of the concept of maternal deprivation, even patchy care in an inadequate home environment may be superior to residential care. Many studies have demonstrated the impoverishing effect of a life in residential care; Ferguson's study (66) in 1966 confirms that school performance intelligence, employment record, delinquency record and character assessments are all poorer in such children than in a complementary group of working class youths. Unsurprisingly, those who have been in residential care also show high subsequent rates of convictions, illegitimate pregnancy and unemployment.

However some writers, such as Aldgate (67) would argue that the reaction against residential care has been too extreme and that potential advantages have been played down. Studt (68) has written about the therapeutic value of residential care for disturbed children and Timms (69) has reported consumer evidence that life in a children's home can be more conducive to the preservation of a clear sense of identity than that in a foster home. In addition Kellmer Pringle (70) points out that generalisations are dangerous in view of the enormous variation in the quality of residential care. However she argues that the fact that residential staff have poor status and a high turnover (up to 1/3 per year) militates against continuity of care and against establishing stable relationships within homes. She also asserts that as more children are fostered or returned home only the more emotionally and intellectually damaged or handicapped children remain in residential care, which inevitably reduces the likelihood of remedying the damage already done.

Nevertheless a fundamental danger in residential care, which has been given considerable prominence, is that of drift - of the child remaining in limbo for want of clear decisions being made about his future. In the words of Tresiliotis (71) "As for long-term plans, they mostly remain an intention". This is a danger which was brought home most forcibly in the work of Rowe and Lambert (72).

"Children Who Wait" was a study conducted on behalf of the Association of British Adoption Agencies with a view to answering the question "Are there children in care who need permanent substitute parents?" The aims were those of "counting, describing, considering and commenting on the children thought by their social workers to need placement". The study covered 2,812 children in 33 voluntary and statutory agencies throughout the British Isles. All the children had been in care for at least 6 months and were under 11 years old.

22% of the total group were thought by their social workers to need a substitute family. "When translated into national terms this means that there probably were about 7,000 children waiting to be placed in a foster or adoptive home". The study showed that there are still large numbers of children being brought up in care. 80% of the children were under 5 years old on last admission and over 60% were expected by their social workers to remain in care until they were 18 years old. The younger the child on admission to care the less likely he was to retain contact with his parents, and the longer a child had stayed in care the less parental contact he had. However children in residential establishments were more likely to be in touch with parents and to return home to them than were children in foster homes. Rowe and Lambert speculate that

this may indicate that it is more common for children with stronger family links to be placed in children's homes. Nevertheless the main impact of the study is in its indication that some of the children whose prospects of rehabilitation with their natural parents have become minimal are remaining in residential care, even though this is seen by their social workers to be unsatisfactory, for want of clear decision-making about alternative long term placement.

This tendency for children to drift into long term care had already been noted in the USA. Boehm (73) had referred to the temptation to "cling to unwarranted hopes of reuniting a child to his family". Maas and Engler (74) commented that "Agencies seem frequently to believe that a meaningful relationship between the child and his natural parents exists long after the parents have ceased to show evidence of genuine interest in the child". Allowing this situation to persist is against the best interests of the child, with his need for continuity of experience and relationships. Bryce and Ehlert (75) reflect this view in their statement "It is our conviction that no child can grow emotionally while in limbo, never really belonging to anyone except on a temporary and ill-defined or partial basis. He cannot invest except in a minimal way (just enough to survive) if tomorrow the relationship may be severed..... To grow, the child needs at least the promise of permanency in relationships and some continuity of environment".

Rowe and Lambert concluded that they gained a strong impression that decisions about the need for substitute family placement were often taken on an inadequate basis with judgements on an individual's view rather than well-documented evidence and a team approach. Proper psychological and psychiatric assessment

was often lacking. It seemed clear that there was a considerable element of chance in the decisions made. In addition it was suggested that, as such decisions about child placement are so difficult and delicate "It is a temptation for agencies to fall back on stereotyped policies or imperfectly understood themes, e.g. 'never separate a mother and baby' or 'foster homes are always preferable to group care'".

In a subsequent study to investigate the factors influencing the length of stay in a group of 445 children in the voluntary care of 2 local authorities in Scotland, Jane Aldgate (76) confirmed that "Over 60% of mothers and fathers had seen their children consistently since reception into care where the placement was in a children's home, compared with only 33% of mothers and 50% of fathers whose children were placed in foster homes. The reasons for this discrepancy included the less stigmatising impact of residential care which was seen far more as part of the services offered by the local authority. "By contrast, foster homes placed parents in direct competition with foster parents who some parents felt were far better equipped both materially and emotionally than themselves". Children's homes were felt to provide an experience that was completely different from the care that parents provided themselves and was therefore more acceptable than foster care: arrangements for visiting were seen as more flexible; there was greater scope for privacy. Parents also felt that their children were better off with other children in similar circumstances, and that residential care gave more scope for siblings to remain together. One of the crucial differences was that residential staff were perceived as more detached and "professional" than foster parents, and not as rivals for the children's affection.

Aldgate suggests that this combination of factors will increase the chances of parents retaining a sense of self worth, of their children retaining a sense of identity, and of a consequent promotion of a sense of family cohesion. The child may experience an opportunity to discuss and understand the reasons for being in care which will "promote for a child a sense of reality and will spare him from unfavourable comparisons between his own parents and foster parents". In view of this she suggests that residential care should be seen not as a second best alternative to foster care, but as providing positive advantages as a short term measure to facilitate rehabilitation, or a placement "for older children who need a flexible but long term placement in which they can maintain links with their natural family".

This is a view which is in accord with the statement by J.K. Whittaker (77) that "the real issue is not the relative merits of residential or community treatment: rather it turns on the question of how best to translate the most useful knowledge from clinical research and practice to a whole range of smaller, community based residential and day programmes for children. The basic purpose of residential and day programmes for troubled children should be to function as a family support system, rather than to treat the child in isolation from his family and home community". It is also an approach which is given added weight by the fact, mentioned by Parker (78) in an article entitled "Foster Care in Context" that important social, demographic and economic trends, such as increased employment among young married women, earlier completion of child bearing and the increased incidence of divorce and separation are together reducing the number of women at home who might be available to act as foster mothers. At the same time there are more children in care than at any time since the war and their characteristics as a population appear to be changing.

Fewer young children are coming into care and there are now more children in care over school leaving age than there are under school age. "Not only are there more older children in care but more of them are boys. On the basis of past experience both characteristics militate against foster home placement".

Adoption

Sarah Curtis (79) comments on Rowe and Lambert's findings that "once children have been in public care for more than 6 months they only had a 1 in 4 chance of leaving care before they were 18. Only 1 child in 10 had any contact with a natural parent after 6 years in care, and 41% had no contact with a parent at all" - that these have "In a curious way.....been diverted. They are not seen as showing to what extent we allow children to grow up without the permanent security of a family they can call their own. Instead they are interpreted as showing the need for children in care to be fostered rather than left in institutions". Curtis suggests that there is evidence that fostering often cannot give children the security required to grow up into well-adjusted adults and emphasises the fact that of the 117,000 children in local authority care in Britain in 1978 (80) 45% had been in care for 3 years or more, and "a staggering 27% for 5 years or more". She asks "Can a local authority, however responsive and imaginative, ever give more than a semblance of parental care except for a strictly limited period"?

Arguing that "fostering should have a clear aim, instead of becoming a catch-all for the indecisive" Curtis quotes the most recently published research comparing groups of children adopted, fostered, and restored to their natural parent, by Professor Michael Bohman of the University of Umea in Sweden. Bohman (81)

studied the 3 groups from birth to their twenties and found that it was the foster children who were most prone to alcohol abuse and crime. He commented that many foster parents had to live with feeling insecure for years and that this may have adversely affected their relationship with their foster children. Turner (82) reports a survey carried out in 1980 by 6 local authorities in the North Manchester Adoption and Fostering consortium, which looked at those children who had been in the same foster home for 3 years - in all 34%. 40% of this group were under 10 years old and $\frac{3}{4}$ of these children were the subject of either parental rights resolutions or care orders. The local authorities were therefore the effective parents of these children until they reached 18 years of age. Yet only 16% of the children saw a parent more than once every 3 months; and 70% saw their parents less than once a year. Over $\frac{1}{2}$ the children had been with their foster parents for 5 years or more and 17% for at least 11 years. There were plans for only 9% to be adopted.

Curtis argues from these findings that "Instead of care being a breathing space for all concerned, it should be a period for intensive, time-limited action. By waiting for an ideal placement, or an impossible change in parental capabilities, social workers could damage a child seriously".

This impetus for time limited care followed by the consideration of adoption stems largely from the requirement of the Children Act 1975 that the interests of the child "throughout childhood" are to be given first consideration, and that the child's right to a permanent new family should consequently prevail if the natural parents are unable to give "good enough" care.

However it is as yet too early to judge the impact of this movement. The increased use of the contraceptive pill and easier abortion facilities partly explain the fact that adoptions in England and Wales fell from a reasonably steady 20,000 plus between 1968 and 1976 to almost $\frac{1}{2}$ this level - 10,870 - in 1979. The lessening stigma attaching to unmarried motherhood has also played a part, as has the fact that the Children Act has discouraged the adoption by a woman and her new husband of the children of her previous marriage on the basis that this will reduce the chances of the child retaining close links with his other natural parent. As the National Children's Bureau "Patterns of Family Placement" states in 1978 "the traditional demand from childless couples for physically healthy white babies with a relatively favourable hereditary background continues, but the number of such babies who are free for adoption has sharply declined".

The British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which represents nearly all local authority and voluntary agency adoption and fostering organisations, has tried to fill the resultant gap by finding families for older, handicapped, black and mixed-race children. However their active and well publicised efforts only started in April 1980 and the long term results are hard to predict. Whereas such studies as "Growing Up Adopted" (83) and "Children in Changing Families" (84) indicate that the success rate of adoption is in the region of 80%, problems were encountered more frequently when the child was a boy, or was over 2 years old on placement, or showed serious behavioural problems. Only time will tell how successfully foster homes will cater for the needs of hard to place children. However, Chris Andrews (85) suggests that the late seventies have witnessed two major departures from prevailing attitudes in this sphere of family placement. "First, the notion that certain children are

unplaceable is now dead. The pioneering work of the Adoption Resource Exchange, Parents for Children and many other agencies, particularly in the adoption field, has exploded the myth that substitute families cannot be found for severely handicapped, hard to place children. Second, the taboo about publicising individual children in need of family placement has been shattered. The controversy which surrounded the featuring of children on television is now historical. With both voluntary and statutory agencies opening adoption and fostering shops, and with catalogues providing photos and details of children in need of a home, all the techniques of marketing are now being employed".

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL WORK TRAINING ON DECISION MAKING IN CHILD CARE

I am not attempting here to examine the issue of social work training at a general level, but to establish what general themes run through the average curriculum of a professional training course in relation to child care practice.

There is an immediate problem in that social work training has been in a state of flux for the last 10 years and the extent of its difficulties reflects the problems afflicting a "profession" whose role and task has recently been scrutinised by the Barclay Committee. A recent series of papers published by the National Institute for Social Work under the title "Social Work Education in Conflict" (86) castigates social work educators for their "piecemeal modifications of their curricula that may well incorporate a half-digested version of the latest vogue in social work practice yet always lag well behind the major social changes taking place outside their institutional walls". In his own contribution (87) Peter Righton criticises the teacher-learning process

for 3 reasons. Firstly there is lack of agreement on what should be taught; secondly there may be conflict in the teacher-taught relationship and lastly a question remains about whether social workers should be presented with an ideology that focuses on changing people or systems.

Clearly in such a changing and even volatile climate it is hazardous to make generalised statements about what a social worker's training implies. It is reasonably safe to say that the casework model has lost the primacy it once had, but, as Professor Martin Davies (88) recently noted, it has not yet been satisfactorily replaced. Community work and group work have gained increasing acceptance on most courses. Task centred social work and contractual models of work are taught, as is the unitary model as laid out by Pincus and Minahan (89). However there seems little agreement about the core content of training courses and an impression prevails that "training" continues to be perceived in "educational" terms, with social work students being introduced to a wide variety of texts and making their own choice as to what themes and interests to pursue.

This clearly makes any assumptions about the extent to which a trained social worker will be prepared for the task of deciding where to place a child in care very difficult. An examination by myself of the child care literature featuring on the reading lists of 10 professional social work training courses (90) indicated a general reliance on the well established texts, most of which I have already referred to, but a surprising lack of unanimity. There is nevertheless some acceptance of shared values and attitudes, which are well summarised by Derek Tilbury (91). "All social work disciplines already share much that is basic. Identifiably, Perlman (92), Konopka (93) and Goetschius

(94) share values based on the worth of the individual and his rights as a member of a democratic society; and principles, in that the work is directed to solving problems of social functioning through the use of acceptance and client self-determination (within the usual limitations of law, morality, client capacity and agency policy). There is common methodology based on concepts of assessment or diagnosis, and the establishment of treatment goals rooted in what is possible within the limits of client capacity, resources available, and again, agency policy. Each identifies a treatment process with a beginning phase, an on-going phase and (if necessary) a terminating phase. All methods use relationship, demonstrably concerned, but professional in that it is directed by the problem-solving process; and all attempt to solve problems through the appropriate use of external resources and/or strengthening and developing internal capacity. Each pre-supposes an agency setting which will to some extent pre-determine the clients served and influence the choice of goals and the methods used. Workers by any method will face similar problems of reconciling the needs and demands of their clients with the sometimes conflicting demands of society, agency policy, the policies of other agencies and institutions, and professional obligations".

Despite this, the broad impression given is that there is little consistency in the taught knowledge base of social work, both generally and specifically with regard to child care practice, and that even on a single course it is unlikely that a number of students would take away a common body of knowledge for use in subsequent practice.

This is perhaps inevitable in a young discipline whose knowledge base is still relatively under-developed. However, while the absence of a clear knowledge

base must inevitably complicate the teaching process, the lack of a consistent approach to the teaching of social work and child care theory will in turn lead to some confusion about child care practice within the Social Services, with different practitioners holding conflicting ideas about what constitutes "good" and "bad" practice. The nature of such confusion can be illustrated by way of an examination of the impact of the work of John Bowlby and others on our understanding of material deprivation and bonding.

Maternal Deprivation

Perhaps the most influential single concept in relation to child rearing practices, and one which continues to generate enormous controversy in the field of child care, is that of maternal deprivation. This was first presented by Bowlby (95), Goldfarb (96), Spitz (97), Levy (98), Bakwin (99) and others prior to 1948, but its impact has to be seen in its historical context.

In the early twentieth century "scientific" theories of child rearing were favoured, with their emphasis on physical hygiene and routine. This was a natural reaction to earlier standards of hygiene and an awareness of their adverse consequences. An increased concern for efficiency and rational ability also suggested that the needy, who were increasingly accepted as the responsibility of society, should be separated into their appropriate groups: the sick isolated in hospitals, the old in institutions of their own, and parentless children in large orphanages. And so, as Kellmer Pringle (100) puts it "a probably unprecedented amount of officially approved separation was incorporated into the social policies of some civilised societies. Although the rightness of close mother-child interaction had been assumed by most

societies, there was no research documenting the ill-effects of loneliness as there was connecting disease with poor hygiene. The observations which led to the early studies of maternal deprivation, therefore, whether faulty in detail or not, can be considered a breakthrough of a more genuinely scientific attitude than the limited one which recognised only the physical needs of children".

Bowlby's monograph "Maternal Care and Mental Health" (101) was published by the World Health Organisation in 1951. 10 years later a re-assessment of the effects of maternal deprivation was published by the WHO (102), in the introduction to which it was stated "The conclusion Bowlby reaches in his monograph is that the prolonged deprivation of the young child of maternal care may have grave and far-reaching effects on his character and so on the whole of his future life; and he draws the corollary that the proper care of children deprived of a normal home life is not merely an act of common humanity, but essential to the mental and social welfare of a community. His indictment on that score of the nurseries, institutions and hospitals of even the so-called advanced countries has contributed to a remarkable change in outlook that has led to a widespread improvement in the institutional care of children".

Mary Ainsworth's review of subsequent findings and controversy (102) begins by stating that "These last 10 years of activity have clearly shown that research into the effects of maternal deprivation is extremely difficult and complex, and that the problems and findings are not as simple as they may have seemed to the reader of "Maternal Care and Mental Health" in 1951". Ainsworth concluded that: (1) recovery from a single brief separation will be fairly prompt, although possibly leaving a vulnerability to future stress; (2) relief from fairly prolonged deprivation in infancy may result in rapid improvement,

although vocalisation, and possibly other aspects of personality functioning, may be retarded; (3) severe deprivation beginning early and lasting for as long as 3 years usually has seriously adverse effects; (4) severe deprivation beginning in the second year of life also has serious effects, although the influence on intelligence may be reversible; (5) the age at onset and relief of deprivation are important, but a "sensitive period" cannot as yet be precisely delineated; (6) in the first year, the later it starts the better; (7) language, the ability for abstract thinking, and capacity for affection seem to be more permanently affected than other functions; (8) intensive therapy undertaken early may reverse impairment; (9) subsequent stressful experience probably reinforces the effects of earlier deprivation. In his more recent review of research and theorizing stemming from Bowlby's work, Rutter (103) goes much further. He acknowledges that Bowlby's indictment of residential care of children led to a remarkable change in outlook that was followed by a widespread improvement in the institutional care of children. Nevertheless he concludes, "The concept of 'maternal deprivation' has undoubtedly been useful in focussing attention on the sometimes grave consequences of deficient or disturbed care in early life. However, it is now evident that the experiences included under the term 'maternal deprivation' are too heterogenous and the effects too varied for it to continue to have any usefulness. It has served its purpose and should now be abandoned. That 'bad' care of children in early life can have 'bad' effects, both short term and long term, can be accepted as proven. What is now needed is a more precise delineation of the different aspects of 'badness' together with an analysis of their separate effects and of the reasons why children differ in their responses".

Jane Rowe (104) has since written that "Bowlby's original work on maternal deprivation has frequently been misunderstood. His own more recent writings and those of others have led to a deeper, though still incomplete, understanding of emotional attachment and the effect of disrupting this at various stages of a child's development. It is clear that the psychological ties developed between young children and those who care for them are of more importance than biological ties and that for healthy development children must have actively involved 'parents' whatever the legal or biological relationship. Just caring for a child is not enough. He must be 'parented' in the full sense of this word".

However she also notes in the same article that the social work profession "is deeply divided in its attitude to adoption. Those who have been exclusively concerned with infant adoptions may be somewhat complacent and lacking in full awareness of the difficulties which develop in some adoptive families. On the other hand, for a number of social workers, their only contact with adoptions is with cases of breakdown or serious problems. Others again see adoption as the epitome of our failure to provide social services and financial support for families in difficulty. And interwoven with all this is the basic and complex matter of the blood tie. This concept may be dismissed as old fashioned. Nevertheless, feelings about it persist in strong and sometimes unexpected forms".

Rowe goes on to say that the emphasis during the early days of Children's Departments on the development of preventive and rehabilitative services resulted in an acceptance of fostering and an unwillingness to see adoption as other than a sign of failure, and that "many of those now occupying senior

positions in the social work world" (including that of education and training) "started their professional lives during this era". She argues for a change in perception as to the place of adoption in light of 3 important developments. Firstly the recent revelation of the length of time many children spend in care and the lack of meaningful contact with their parents. Secondly the emphasis on the child's need for parenting and the concept of the psychological parent. And thirdly information on the success of adoption for older children.

Building on these themes the formidable team of Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (105) drew strong and persuasive conclusions in favour of clearer, firmer and swifter decision making than currently occurs. Beyond the Best Interests of the Child has been described (106) as "one of the most significant socio-legal works to appear in recent years", although its impact on practice cannot yet be assessed.

In this book the authors stress that, unlike adults, who measure the passing of time by clock and calendar, children have their own built in time sense, based on the urgency of their instinctual and emotional needs. This results in their marked intolerance for postponement of gratification or frustration and in intense sensitivity to the length of separation. They state that the younger the child the shorter the interval before a leave-taking will be experienced as a permanent loss accompanied by feelings of helplessness and profound deprivation.

Although the decision about where to place a child removed from his biological parents is "a highly complex decision which involves, implicitly if not explicitly, a prediction about who, among available alternatives, holds most

promise for meeting the child's psychological needs", a child's sense of time demands that such decisions must be made as soon as reasonable. Whereas psychoanalytic theory confirms the substantial limitations on our capacity to make such predictions, "yet it provides a valuable body of generally applicable knowledge about a child's needs, knowledge which may be translated into guidelines to facilitate making decisions that inevitably must be made".

The essential feature of a placement, in the view of the authors, should be its ability to fulfil a child's need for unbroken continuity of affectionate and stimulating relationships with an adult. In the case of temporary foster placements this guideline indicates the need to develop procedures and opportunities for monitoring the relationship between a child and his absent parent(s). Beyond the short term, the authors feel that "the child-foster parent relationship has little likelihood of promoting the psychological parent-wanted child relationship". All child placements, they suggest, except where specifically designed for brief temporary care, shall be as permanent as the placement of a newborn with its biological parents. Failing this, placements should provide "the least detrimental available alternative for safeguarding a child's growth and development".

This is a passionate and powerfully argued case for a radical approach to the requirement of the Children Act (1975) to make the needs of the child paramount, and to interpret this need in light of the most recent research findings. However, as already indicated, there is no sign of such clear agreement within the practice of social work.

Social Workers Use of Research



In 1969 Peter Righton (113) wrote "There seems to be little love lost between the social worker and the tough-minded, research-oriented behavioural scientist who devises and tests the theories that should guide the social worker's practice. Many social workers are scared or sceptical of scientific rigour, have difficulty in understanding or applying research findings and suspect academic social scientists who in their turn scorn the woolliness and imprecision which they detect in the thinking of social workers, and deplore their stubborn faith in methods which do not yield readily to testing".

10 years on (114) Righton feels that research has offered little to social work education since descriptive research concentrates on what is, not what ought to be, and evaluative research provides few studies which he considers useful. Similarly David Fruin (115) says of Parker's book *Decision in Child Care* that, though he "attempted to present his research findings in a probabilistic form which could assist social workers faced with decisions about foster home placements....very few social workers have actually made use of his research findings in this way." This sceptical, passive response of social workers to such research findings may well be appropriate since other research in the fostering field has thrown up conflicting results. The studies by George, Napier and Cautley and Aldridge (op cit) fail to present a uniformity of single characteristics predictive of fostering success .

However Fruin's conclusion assumes that the average social worker is a discerning consumer of available research findings, which are generally of little relevance to him. My reading of the literature indicates that there are certain research findings and theories of practice which would provide useful guidelines for the practitioner, and that insofar as these are not generally

known, the outstanding question is, why not?

A. Rubin and A. Rosenblatt (116) have edited a book entitled "Sourcebook on Research Utilisation" which is a collection of the major papers presented at a conference held in New Orleans in 1977 with the purpose of answering the question "Why do social workers attach such little value to research courses and seldom consult research studies to guide their practice?" 11 years previously Rosenblatt had published an article entitled "The Practitioners' Use and Evaluation of Research" (117). In this he described how he had set out to establish: (1) the extent to which workers read research articles before developing a treatment plan in a difficult case; (2) workers' ratings of the value of supervision, consultation and research; (3) workers' rankings of the helpfulness of various experiences in improving practice; (4) workers' opinions about the helpfulness of research and other courses in preparation for their social work career. "In each area research was rated the least used or the least useful activity". Practitioners relied more on precedent, common sense and intuition.

Much more recently the joint report of CCETSW and PSSC "Research and Practice" (118) states that "...the body of social work knowledge contains less evaluation than that of comparable professions". Among possible explanations for this the authors include the fact that "it is hard to resist the impression that the dominant climate of many social work courses is non-intellectual, even anti-intellectual". The net result is that not only are qualified social workers unlikely to share a common research-based body of core knowledge, but also that they will not have been encouraged to develop the habit of standing back, taking stock and rethinking - in short the "critical perspectives (which)

is the beginning of research mindedness".

Fruin (119) makes the point that the researchers' concern to make comparisons and to generalise, both of which are based on the operation of categorising and classifying people and phenomena, meets great resistance from social work practitioners. For much of the work social workers do is founded on a belief in the uniqueness of the individual client and in the consequent need for services to the client to be explicitly tailored. The difficult move beyond the single subjective experience to arriving at explicit judgements about the similarities and differences of the phenomena being studied is one which many practitioners remain unwilling or unable to take.

There have only been two empirical investigations^{which have} attempted to determine the nature of the knowledge that is used by practitioners. The first was by Karpf (120) in 1931 and his disappointing conclusion was that "There is little evidence that the caseworker used any other than common sense concepts and judgements relating to the attitudes, emotional states, personality and personality traits of the client..... and a host of other types of important problems and situations". Since then a considerable number of articles have referred directly or indirectly to the place of knowledge in social work activity, of which the most significant have been those by Kahn (121), Greenwood (122), Kadushin (123) and Bartlett (124). These authors agree that the primary sources of knowledge used in practice are knowledge borrowed from other disciplines, and knowledge developed in social work.

In 1979 Robert Carew (125) published the results of an exploratory study conducted to establish whether a small sample of social workers was using theoretical knowledge as a basis for activities in practice. He concluded that "few of the responses (from interviews between the participants and the researcher) reflected the use of theory and research findings. The situation never occurred where respondents clearly indicated that a response was based upon theoretical knowledge or generalisations from research". Practitioners tended to suggest instead that the primary base for their activities was either their own experience or advice from their more experienced colleagues. "However, when the researcher finally suggested an author, a theory, or a piece of research that might be related to what they had done, then the respondents would sometimes be able to link their activities to a theoretical framework".

Carew goes on to say that many of the techniques practitioners used fell into this category insofar as they were similar to those discussed in the literature by writers such as Hollis (126). "They had techniques and procedures that could be used to meet most of the demands made by clients. Simply put, they would get their clients to state their problems, discuss their feelings about them, reflect on the causes and on how the problems could be overcome through the provision of resources, the workers would use their knowledge of the availability of resources, and the procedures and legislation related to these to help the client to obtain them. If the problem could not be overcome in this way, the client would be encouraged to ventilate and reflect further. The important concepts that guide this activity are related to relationship, reflection and ventilation".

The parallel between this general approach and that suggested in the literature does not necessarily imply a causal connection however, for Carew found the usual justification for such behaviour to be that it was a reflection of the practitioner's own value system, and that he and his colleagues had found it effective in practice. "With this body of practice wisdom as a basis for their activities , the need to use abstract theories and generalisations from research was minimal, particularly when those proposing theories had failed to demonstrate their effectiveness in the field".

Some respondents suggested that they were using theoretical knowledge unconsciously and perceived themselves as eclectic. However Carew points out that eclecticism requires critical consideration and understanding of the available theories before a decision is made about what should be used. Similarly in Ryle's (127) discussion of skill a person's performance is described as skillful if he detects and corrects lapses in his operations and profits from the examples of others. In other words he must perform critically and not simply out of habit.

In conclusion Carew states that "The findings in this paper clearly indicate that these practitioners were not using theoretical knowledge as a basis for their activities to any significant extent, and that the literature on this subject had had very little effect on the way in which they approached their work".

On a more specific level John Tresiliotis conducted some research into the adoption policy and practice of 12 local authority and voluntary agencies in

Scotland (128). This "revealed the absence of any coherent body of knowledge and of working principles governing practice in this area. Among other things, blanket or undifferentiated types of practice were common and important decisions were made on very slender evidencewith few exceptions, work with natural parents, the child and the adopters, bore little relation to standards of practice suggested in social work literature". This and other work indicates that there is a clear discrepancy between the theory of social work and its practice, and so raises the possibility that there will be no consistent or recognisable approach by qualified social workers, and consequently little consistent distinction in practice between qualified and unqualified social workers. This was in fact the conclusion of George (129) who said that "no substantial differences were found between the practices of trained and untrained Child Care Officers in this research".

Reid (130) found that variations in technique were more a function of the individual case worker's style than anything else that could be identified. For example if a worker's style was to use advice a great deal, this would occur, whatever case he handled, with only small variations from his "norm". This was borne out by Davies and Knopf (131) who, in a study of time factors in social enquiry reports found that differences in patterns of working could be ascribed to 2 variables: the personal working mode of the individual officer, and the influence of his local office traditions "which appeared to be sufficiently powerful to overcome other factors such as professional training". In the absence of clear national guidance as to desirable child care practice, there is a danger that such local trad^{itions} might be widely divergent and that the treatment a child will received on coming into care could consequently be unduly influenced by the subjective values and beliefs of individual practitioners or their line managers.

National and Local Child Care Policy

Brian Walker and Mike White (107) concluded in 1976 that "Since the inception of Children's Departments in 1948 legislation relating to children has steadily accumulated but in such a piecemeal fashion that it is virtually impossible to determine any coherent national policy on child care. The Children Acts of 1948 and 1958, the Children and Young Persons Acts of 1963 and 1969 and the Adoption Act of 1958 were all introduced to cover particular issues of concern - the need for care services, the need to protect private foster children, the need to legitimise preventive work and so on. The most recent statute, the Children Act 1975 is in similar classic vein and amends previous legislation on adoption, on foster care and on care services as well as, by the way, closing loopholes in the Children and Young Persons Act (1969). It is, of course, understandable in a relatively new field that the growth of services and policy will be less than smooth, but now virtually 30 years on from the Curtis Report

the question ought to be asked whether there is any generally agreed policy which guides our approach to services for children and their families. Quite certainly the answer is that there is not".

The lack of any national policy makes variation in local policy inevitable, and Jean Packman (108) has demonstrated that such variations in practice between local authorities are much greater than could be explained by differences in "local need". She showed that some authorities had much higher numbers of children in care than others, and that while some relied very heavily on residential care, others favoured foster care. Similarly authorities spent greatly different amounts on cash grants to families. The latest DHSS statistics indicate that these differences persist. Packman gave rates for children in care per 1,000 of the population under 18 years by county and borough. She found an enormous variation, from 9.7 in Oxfordshire to 1.9 in Bootle in 1962, a year in which the national average was 5.1. The most recent figures available are those given in the HMSO statistics relating to the census of children in care in England and Wales taken from 31st March 1977 and covering the preceding 5 years. Numbers in care had risen from 90.6 thousand in 1972 to 101.2 thousand in 1977. The variation by area was as dramatic as it had been previously. England and Wales are divided into 12 planning areas in which the lowest rate - 5.2 per 1,000 children under the age of 18 estimated to be resident in that area - was found in area 6 (consisting of counties such as Essex, with the lowest ^{within-area} rate - 4.9, and Suffolk with the highest 6.2). The highest ^{national} rate was reported ~~from~~ London (planning area 8) with 11.1 per 1,000 children under 18 in care on 31st March 1977. But this rate itself masks the massive range within that area of 3.4 in Harrow to 31.3 in Tower Hamlets. And

while class differences clearly play a part, it is significant that the next highest rate was found in Kensington and Chelsea with 25.5 per 1,000 while 7 other central London boroughs were at the 20 - 21 per 1,000 rate, well below that of Tower Hamlets.

2 of the main issues in which government and local authority uncertainty is most apparent are the balance which should be struck between preventive-supportive services for the family and care services and between institutional care and non-institutional forms of care. It has been suggested that the fact that DHSS planning guidelines all relate to bricks and mortar facilities constitutes a pressure towards care services and residential care since local authorities adopt them as targets, despite the fact that they are not based on research about levels of real need or related to any evidence about the relative effectiveness of particular methods.

Even the DHSS guide to practice on foster care says nothing about the priority of foster care save that "the swing of the pendulum in the mid 1970's may well go once more in favour of increased resources being given to foster care"; it says nothing about whether this would be considered desirable or otherwise.

The consequence of this unclarity is that individual social work practitioners cannot look to central government to provide a coherent framework within which to operate, but will inevitably be dependent on guidance from their own department or on their personal interpretation of their role.

Local guidance may be hard to come by for, as Professor Tutt says (109) "Social Services managements have failed to provide clear policies (on juvenile delinquency)". Local authority services have developed in widely different ways depending as much on inherited provision and on local committee ideas as on any need-related basis forming part of an agreed national policy. So such guidance as does exist may be more implicit than explicit in the sense that certain resources are more frequently provided or more readily available than others, and thus have the effect of persuading or conditioning local practitioners to their use.

However, whilst organisational norms and departmental *policies* can undoubtedly exert considerable pressure on individual social workers, it would be disturbing if social workers proved as a group to be so malleable that they can adapt to working within whatever resource constraints their departments impose. For one of their principal tasks is to assess the needs of clients and to recommend or prescribe a solution which in their opinion will be most beneficial, or least harmful, to that client. If shortfalls and discrepancies between needs and resources are seen to exist it would be reasonable to assume that concerned practitioners would try to draw this fact to the attention of their managers and that a responsive organisation would attempt to modify its performance to bring its provision of services into line with perceived needs. However when Nina Toren (110) conducted a study in the USA into social work provision, it suggested that while social workers may be guided by internalised norms and values, they are invariably ^{influenced} by administrative rules and superiors within the agency, with the consequence that the employing organisation rather than

professional training is the greater determinant of social workers' values. Martin Davies (111) suggests that the impact of public enquiries into such tragedies as Maria Colwell, combined with the emphasis of social work managers on the need for rationality and clear channels of accountability, has been to lay increasing stress on the expectation that social workers will adhere to departmentally prescribed guidelines and consequently to discourage or leave less scope for the exercise of "professional judgement".

The degree of influence exerted by professional^{and} organisation^{al} factors is one which I intend to explore more fully. For, as Professor Tutt (112) says, "Social work practitioners have failed to accept the results of what little research has been done and to modify their practice accordingly. They have failed to grasp the national trends as merely aggregates of individual decisions by practitioners". Similarly local policies are implemented by way of a series of individual decisions taken by practitioners in the light of their own values, knowledge and beliefs, but also guided and constrained by Departmental policies and other organisation^{al} pressures. Which of these factors exerts most influence is one question I hope to explore.

Summary

Kufeldt (132) states that a general overview of the research that has appeared with regard to fostering since 1960 indicates that the problems identified by Maas and Engler (133) are still existent today and that the major findings, which apply equally to residential placement, can be summarised as follows: (a) once children are placed there is a danger for them of the period of placement becoming prolonged; (b) there is a tendency to lose contact with the natural family; (c) children experience instability through multi-placements and (d) contact with the natural parents seems to be one of the most useful predictors of outcome.

Whether other factors constitute useful predictors of outcome has not been clearly established, as the validity of Parker's original Prediction Table has not been confirmed by subsequent studies.

However, even if research did reveal the existence of firmer predictive factors, their impact would be uncertain because there is no clear evidence that social workers make use of such research findings as do exist. A part of the explanation for this may well be that social work education is going through a period of considerable confusion, with the consequence that there is little consistency in the taught knowledge base of either social work in general or child care social work in particular. Consequently it is perhaps unsurprising that the small amount of research which has been conducted in this area has failed to reveal significant differences in performance between qualified and unqualified social workers. On the contentious issue of blood ties and their implications for adoption, the social work profession appears to be split.

On the question of residential or community based care it appears that fostering is usually seen as the placement of first choice by social workers, although such Governmental guidelines as do exist are ambiguous and have been seen in some quarters as encouraging the developing of residential resources. There is little coherent guidance from research or policy statements on how best to match the particular needs in children to specific resources - whether residential or community based.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the Act
Falls the Shadow

T.S. Elliott "The Hollow Men"

The problem of assessing how accurate data derived from interviews is likely to be is summarised by Dean & Whyte (1) who say "people sometimes say things for public consumption that they would not say in private. And sometimes they behave in ways that seem to contradict or cast doubt on what they profess in open conversation". As Roethlisberger & Dickson (2) long ago pointed out, the interview itself is a social situation, so the researcher must consider how this situation may influence the expression of beliefs and the reporting of events.

He must also be aware that when events are being reported retrospectively, the distorting effect of selective perception will further colour the picture of reality which is presented.

The interview can only reveal the informant's picture of the world as he sees it, and as he is willing to pass it on in the particular interview situation.

This picture may well include inherent contradictions and is not necessarily an accurate guide as to how the informant might actually behave in a different social situation.

The gulf between intention and action has been demonstrated very clearly in the realms of social work activity. Florence Hollis in 1967 (3) spoke of acceptance and self-determination being two of the fundamental principles underlying social work practice, and yet in 1970 Mayer & Timms (4) published their major work on the client's perspective and in "The Client Speaks" illustrate the "clash of perspectives" which can result in those at the receiving end of welfare intervention feeling that they have been misunderstood and inappropriately handled. More specifically, Jane Rowe & Lydia Lambert's study "Children Who Wait" (5) illustrates the fact that the realisation by a social worker that a child is inappropriately placed does not necessarily imply that any action will be taken to find a more suitable placement.

The reasons for such discrepancies between action and intention are undoubtedly complex and probably owe as much to unclarity about basic values and beliefs about child care practice as to practical problems such as pressure of work, shortage of resources and inadequate supervision. Nevertheless the justification for the system of reviews and reports which constitutes the framework within which child care planning is carried out has never been seriously challenged, and this fact makes the widespread disregard of some of its most basic requirements, which was recently revealed in the Department of Health and Social Security study of the Boarding Out of Children (6), all the more significant as an indication of the discrepancy between "the idea and the reality".

In order to explore why this should be so it will be necessary to uncover the various factors which influence the decisions which social workers

make with regard to children in their care. In this chapter I shall explain the methodology by which I hope to move beyond the level of existing information and theoretical analysis in examining the decision-making practice of a group of social workers.

Although, as mentioned earlier, there is considerable literature pointing to the importance of the decision-making process in child care practice, and indicating the factors which particular authors consider to be of importance in the process, there has been no research to date into how social workers make such decisions and which factors influence them most. This work is therefore essentially exploratory in nature. The specific questions it will be addressing are: how do social workers make decisions about where to place children who come into their care?; and, what are the particular factors which have most influence upon their decisions? There will also be a longitudinal element to the research in that I shall review individual decisions six months after they have been made, in order to test the accuracy of the predictions upon which they were based.

Within these broad question headings I shall also be exploring whether significant differences exist between qualified and unqualified social workers in their style of decision-making and in the nature of the decisions they reach. The two questions are combined into a particular idea as follows:

I am suggesting that in relation to decision-making a rationalistic, starting - from - first - principles approach will be most likely to occur in situations in which the number of variables is limited and in which the decision-maker is likely to have a high degree of expert knowledge about the situation in question

and therefore about possible alternatives. I am further suggesting that those practitioners having a "professional" self image, which I define as including a primary commitment to fulfilling the needs of an identified client as opposed to complying with Departmental requirements, will be more likely than their "bureaucratically" orientated colleagues to adopt a rationalistic approach to decision making.

Such a "professional" self image does not necessarily pre-suppose a professional training, and it is possible that professionally trained social workers will have a primarily "bureaucratic" orientation and, conversely, that untrained social workers may have a "professional" orientation. However, I am also intending to test the idea that those who have undergone professional training have thereby gained more theoretical knowledge about social work and child care practice, a set of social work values, and a particular self image which results in them being more likely than untrained social workers to develop a "professional" identity.

METHOD OF ENQUIRY

These questions and ideas were investigated and tested by way of an exploratory survey of the decision-making processes of a group of social workers. The sample was fifty social workers chosen randomly from a population of approximately one hundred social workers, both qualified and unqualified, employed in the five geographical Divisions which constitute the East Kent Area of Kent social Services Department. Each Division consists of between three and five teams averaging six social workers each. Each of the five Divisions was

approached, was given an outline of the research proposal and its social workers were invited to participate. All but two social workers agreed to do so. The fifty social workers covered in the survey were intended to be the first fifty to make child care placements during a six month period from July to December 1981.

The choice of the population was dictated by four main factors. The first was the desire to cover a sample which would be sufficiently large and representative to allow conclusions to be drawn with a reasonable degree of confidence. It was felt that fifty social workers would be sufficient for this purpose. At the outset it was intended that each social worker would be questioned on two separate cases, giving a total of 100 cases, and that it would be possible in addition to test some of the findings derived from Parkers' Prediction Tables (7). Both these aims were subsequently dropped. The first as a result of practical difficulties which arose during the pilot studies, and the second because the scope of the project was becoming unmanageably complex. The second factor was that of practicability. Given that I would be administering the questionnaire personally, having decided that it would not be completed adequately by way of a postal survey, the population had to be such as to enable me to complete the survey over a period of approximately six months. Pilot surveys indicated that the questionnaire would take on average one hour to complete and it was decided that an average of rather more than two questionnaires per week during the appropriate period was possible in the time available to me.

A third consideration was that of access to the population. There is very little tradition of practice based research in social work and the fact that my

previous post as Principal Social Worker in the Canterbury Division and my subsequent post as Development Officer responsible for Policy Research gave me access to and some credibility with the East Kent Area was of some importance. This was all the more so at a time when cutbacks were reducing both the time available and the inclination of social workers to participate in any activity which was not seen as essential to the performance of their job. And finally, related to the question of feasibility, was the question of proximity. Even East Kent constitutes a considerable geographical area and any survey based on this area would involve a great deal of travel. It would not have been possible in the time available to cover a larger area.

The Pilot Studies

The survey was based on a structured questionnaire (see Appendix A) comprising some open-ended and some closed questions, which was administered by me. The questionnaire was considerably modified in the course of two pilot studies and, as mentioned above, in its finished form was expected to take on average one hour to complete. The first pilot study was carried out in May 1980, the second between September 1980 and February 1981. The main objective of the first pilot involving five social workers was to assess the adequacy of the questionnaire in eliciting information necessary to answer some of the questions being explored. The response led to modifications, particularly in relation to the question of decision making styles, and the revised questionnaire was subsequently tried on twelve further social workers. This in turn led to modifications in the wording and sequence of the questions posed, but had the added advantage of testing the feasibility and response rate of the procedure by which social workers informed me of any new placements.

The process used was for each social worker to be given a brief summary of the reasons for the study and the method to be used, together with a postcard addressed to myself. Social workers were asked to send the card to me, recording the name of the child concerned and the date of his placement, on the first instance after a given date (September 1st, 1980) on which they made a placement decision. Within two weeks of receiving the card I would endeavour to visit the social worker and complete the questionnaire. Social workers were to be asked during the interview whether they felt it likely that the child would remain in care "short term" (less than three months) or "long term" (more than three months). They were then asked to notify me on a second postcard of any subsequent placement of a child who fell into the opposite category (i.e. if the first placement had been deemed "short term" then I wanted to know the next "long term" placement). On the second occasion I would not repeat the full questionnaire, but only the last third of it, relating to "specific case"; this would take approximately twenty minutes.

Three months after the initial interview I would follow up the case by looking at the file, to establish whether the prediction upon which the placement decision was based had proved accurate, or whether any changes in plan had occurred.

The second pilot revealed three difficulties in this method of data collection, apart from necessary modifications to the questionnaire. The first was the irregular pattern of placements. During some weeks I would receive no cards, in others I would receive a series of cards, and would consequently be unable to interview all respondents within the two week period I had set myself.

Secondly, it was clear that some social workers had forgotten to inform me of placements, since child care movement forms which were routinely sent into the head office where I was based, revealed that the numbers of children coming into care exceeded the numbers of cards received. And, thirdly, there were several occasions on which the cards arrived so late that the child in question had since been discharged from care. This raised the clear problem that social workers would be able to explain and rationalise decisions with hindsight and without the need to commit themselves to any prediction as to outcome; it therefore effectively undermined this aspect of the questionnaire. Both the latter points indicated a need for a more active system of reminders or of follow-up during the actual research or alternatively a different system of notification that a placement had occurred. In the event I was able to arrange to obtain copies of all child movement forms relating to East Kent, and this enabled me to initiate contact with social workers as soon as a placement had occurred. One further fact which emerged was that since the incidence of children coming into care was so unpredictable it was unrealistic to expect each social worker to be involved in two contrasting placements within a six month period. The idea of covering two cases per social worker was therefore dropped in favour of a single case. A final change on the original methodology was that the interval between placement and follow-up was increased from 3 to 6 months. This was because it became clear that three months was an insufficient period in which to form a judgement about the outcome. In fact my reading of the literature has led me to re-define "short term" care as "less than 6 months" and "long term" as "more than 6 months", and six months came increasingly to represent an important watershed in the career of any child in care.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is in five parts. It includes some standardised items, amenable to quantitative analysis, but also some open ended questions which allow respondents to elaborate on certain issues and thus provides a rich source of qualitative data. The first part - factual details - is intended to establish whether an individual is qualified or unqualified, where and when the qualification was obtained, whether the individual, if qualified, is a member of the British Association of Social Workers and how long he or she has been in post. These are clearly basic data in relation to any subsequent discussion as to professional or bureaucratic identity and orientation. The second part is wide ranging and covers theoretical attitudes, knowledge and practice. The first question is intended to establish whether the social worker identifies himself with a particular theoretical orientation - whether psychoanalytic, behaviourist, integrated methods or any other specific approach - and is relevant to the self-perception and degree of professional self-identity which the individual holds. The second question is specifically geared to child placement and is intended to clarify whether the social worker has a particular approach or theoretical orientation which might influence his decision making. In this regard Question 3a-c is related to research findings described by Gouldner (8) which indicate that those professional members of large organisations with the strongest professional as opposed to bureaucratic orientation identify closely with a colleague group and a set of values outside their organisational environment, and would therefore keep in touch with this group by a variety of means, including those listed. It is consequently assumed

that individuals with a very strong professional identity will take active steps to keep abreast of any developments within their profession.

Questions 4 - 13 are largely self-explanatory questions aimed at establishing the extent of individual knowledge about the social work literature as it applies to child placement, and about particular theoretical findings. At this stage it is not necessary to go into more detail as to the reasons for or significance of specific questions. Suffice to say that the books referred to are those which recurred most frequently on the reading lists of ten professional social work training courses (see chapter 2) and the theoretical issues are those which my earlier review of the literature indicated to be the most significant. My intention here was threefold: to establish whether social workers knew of a particular theory or book: to confirm, if possible, whether their perception of it was reasonably accurate: and subsequently to see whether this knowledge appeared to have had any bearing on the placement decision made. Questions 5, 6 and 7 and, to a lesser extent, questions 11, 12 and 13, are as much tests of attitude and belief as of specific knowledge of the literature, and clearly these are factors which could as readily be influenced by organisational forces and pressures as by training or knowledge. The problem of disentangling the respective influence of these factors will be largely one of analysis and will be related to the self-perception of the individual, his possession or lack of a qualification, and his predominant loyalty to either professional or bureaucratic values.

The third part of the questionnaire - decision making style - is intended to clarify the characteristic mode of decision making of the individual, ranging

from highly rational to incremental. This can alternatively be construed as on the one hand working from first principles and on the other acting intuitively on the basis of previous experience and within tight organisational constraints. I shall try to categorise individuals at either end of this theoretical spectrum by way of three factors. Firstly, my perception of the manner in which they arrive at decisions in the two hypothetical cases with which they are confronted; secondly, their self-characterisation in choosing between four alternative styles of decision making; and, thirdly, my subjective assessment of their attitude and approach towards decision making in general.

The fourth part of the questionnaire is designed to establish whether the predominant orientation of the individual is professional or bureaucratic. It is heavily influenced by the work of Peter Blau (9), and assumes two ideal typical social workers, one of whom takes as a reference point a professional code which places the needs of the client above all other considerations and sees the Departmental structure primarily as a means to the fulfilment of these needs: the other extreme is represented by a social worker who identifies himself essentially as a local government employee, sees the fulfilment of needs exclusively within the context of organisational rules, regulations and resources, and is consequently pre-occupied with considerations of client eligibility rather than of need. Question No. 2 is intended to pursue this issue further, and the succeeding Questions, Nos. 3 to 5, are all intended to explore particular findings which arose from Blau's own research. Questions 6 and 7 are further means of establishing the nature of the individual's self-perception with regard to the Departmental management structure.

The last section deals with the individual characteristics of the child about whom a decision is to be made. It was hoped that the data provided in this section would allow a categorisation of the children by type, in order to establish whether there was any association between the type of child and subsequent placement and, if so, whether there were differences in the way in which qualified and unqualified social workers handled the placement of different types of case. In the event this aspect of the analysis proved to be not only complex, but also somewhat peripheral to the main focus of the study, and was consequently abandoned.

This section was also intended to serve to clarify whether resource availability was a significant factor in determining the eventual placement (Questions 3 and 4) and which were the most influential factors in the opinion of the social worker (Questions 5 - 7). It will be possible to compare this information with that arising from the attempt to rate the predominantly professional/bureaucratic orientation of the individual social worker.

Finally, Questions 8 - 10 of this last section constitute the prediction as to length of stay and subsequent outcome which each social worker will be required to make. Parker has suggested that such a prediction is an essential prerequisite for any decision, and yet in day to day practice such predictions are not necessarily very clear or explicit. The fact that a prediction is made allowed me to do a follow-up study six months after the placement to establish whether the prediction proved accurate or, if not, why not. I was hoping that the great majority of such follow-ups could be done by way of file notes, and that only in the absence of such notes, or in instances where the outcome was

otherwise unclear, would it be necessary to go back to the individual social worker.

In practice the administration of the questionnaire proved fairly straightforward, with only two minor complications. Firstly the fact that some questions were open-ended meant that the time required to complete the questionnaire was influenced markedly by the volubility and enthusiasm of the respondent. Very lengthy responses had to be *precied* and read back to the respondent to check their accuracy. Consequently the completion of a questionnaire could take anything from one hour to two hours, which sometimes caused problems if a second interview had been planned one hour after the first. The second problem was that even though I had reduced the survey to a single case for each of 50 social workers, some did not in fact place a child during the allotted six month period. In all it took me nine months to *carry out the initial field research and a further three months to complete my follow ups.*

Having completed the questionnaire there followed a lengthy process of analysing the responses and categorising qualitative data provided in the open-ended replies. I had originally intended to undertake a computer analysis of the data, but the fact that only about half of the responses could be pre-coded, combined with the fact that fifty scripts could be adequately handled by way of a manual *coding* frame, persuaded *me* against doing so.

The specific difficulties of categorising individual replies are dealt with in more detail in my analysis of results. They stem broadly from the fact that

individual responses differed in their level of generality, degree of detail and knowledge and use of terminology, with the result that placing responses into a limited number of categories became a somewhat arbitrary and subjective process. In the course of this process detail was inevitable sacrificed and yet without it no generalised conclusions could have been drawn.

That this process was so difficult reflects the richness of the responses, and this in turn reflects the complexity of the subject matter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDANTS

In this chapter the results of the survey are described in detail broadly in the sequence in which they were covered in the questionnaire. Where comparisons of outcome have been made, as between qualified and unqualified social workers, married and unmarried social workers, or other such sub-categories, appropriate tests of significance have in some cases been applied to the results to determine how far they can be attributed to chance. This makes it possible to say whether any variations in the results are great enough for us to place some confidence in them as an indication that a substantive relationship does exist. In cases where such tests have been applied they have been estimated at the 5 per cent level of confidence. However, in the majority of instances the small size of the overall sample together with the relatively large number of categories rendered such tests of significance inappropriate.

SOCIAL WORK RESPONDENTS - FACTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Qualification

Of the fifty social workers interviewed, forty-three were qualified and seven were unqualified. The sample therefore contains 86% qualified social workers which is a significantly higher proportion than the 70% national average which is quoted in the Working Party report "Social Workers Their Role and Tasks",

hereafter referred to as the Barclay Report (1). While this is helpful insofar as it provides a larger range of qualified workers, it means that comparisons of outcome between qualified and unqualified social workers will inevitably be less satisfactory than would be the case if the two groups were of more equal size.

One reason for this imbalance, or relative over-representation of qualified staff, is to be found in the 1979 national social work pay settlement which resulted in social workers being divided into three grades according to the range of tasks they performed and the responsibilities they carried. In Kent, as in the majority of Social Services Departments, this resulted in high priority work - including most child care cases - being handled by level 3 workers, who were, in most instances, both experienced and qualified. However, even prior to 1979 there had been a consistent tendency to allocate most child care work to qualified workers.

Of the 43 respondents possessing a professional qualification, 36 (84%) held CQSW/MA qualifications obtained since the reorganisation of the Personal Social Services which occurred in the wake of the Seebohm Report in 1971 and earlier in Scotland; five held either Diplomas in Applied Social Studies, Diplomas in Social Work or a Diploma in Social Work Administration; one held a Diploma in Social Work obtained at Edinburgh University; and one held a BA in Social Work from the University of *Western* Australia.

The most geographically convenient training courses for practitioners living in East Kent are those providing the MA/CQSW at the University of Kent at Canterbury - a postgraduate qualification - and the non-graduate CQSW course at

the Mid Kent College of Higher and Furter Education at Maidstone. This latter course provides the largest single group of qualified social workers in the sample - 12 in all - with the UKC providing the second largest group of 7. The remaining qualifications were obtained from 16 different colleges or universities, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Academic Establishment	No.
Mid Kent College, Maidstone	12
University of Kent at Canterbury	7
North London Polytechnic	3
Bristol Polytechnic	3
Middlesex Polytechnic	2
West London Institute	2
Croydon Polytechnic	2
London School of Economics	2
Warwick University	1
Hull University	1
Nene College (Northants)	1
Liverpool University	1
Goldsmith College	1
Manchester University	1
Edinburgh University	1
Bath University	1
Perth University	1
Bristol University	1
Total	43

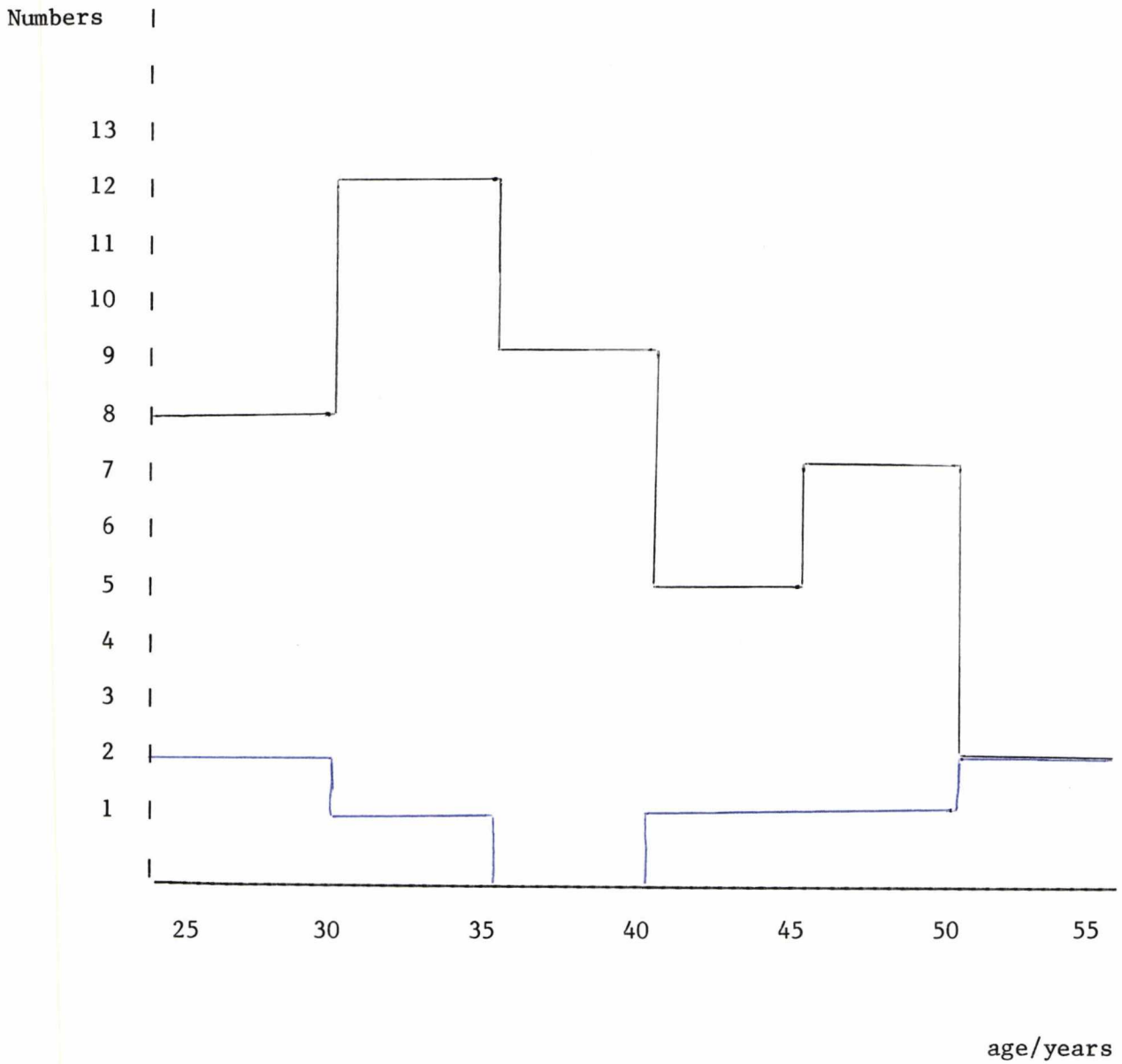
Age

The average age of the total group was 38.4, the youngest respondent being 26 years old and the oldest 55. The unqualified group was somewhat older than the qualified, the average age of this group being 42 years with a range of from 28 to 55 years. The average age of the qualified group was 37, with an age range of from 26 to 54 years.


The qualified group are therefore an average 5 years younger than their unqualified colleagues although they are clearly at 37 far removed from what the Barclay Report describes as "the conventional view that most field social workers are very young and inexperienced."

Nevertheless the histogram (Table 2) showing the age distribution of each group does illustrate the fact that the great majority of qualified social workers (67%) are under the age of 40, while all but two of the unqualified (71%) were over 40.

Table 2



 Qualified

 Unqualified

The Barclay Report (p 25) states on the basis of two surveys conducted in 1981 by Age Concern (2) and by the Association of Directors of Social Services (3) that about 65% of field social workers are aged between 25 and 45 years and that about 20% are within the 25 to 30 age range. The corresponding proportions for this total sample are respectively 76% and 18%, so that the average age is very slightly higher than the national average.

Marital Status

Of the total sample 41 (82%) were married, six single and three divorced. However amongst the unqualified group, all were married. The figures for the qualified group are therefore 34 married, six single and three divorced. Of the seven unqualified, four have children of their own, while three have not. Of the 37 qualified social workers who are either married or divorced, 26 have children while 11 have not. Of the 11 without children, none are divorced and most are fairly recently married, the oldest being 47 and the average age being 32. The single group, none of whom have children, are unsurprisingly the youngest group, with an average age of 30.

From this analysis it is therefore possible to identify five differently sized groups of social workers, namely:-

Qualified 1. Single - 6 respondents - average age 30.

2. Married - no children - 11 respondents - average age 32.

3. Married/Divorced, with children - 26 respondents - average age 41.

Unqualified 4. Married with children - 4 respondents - average age 44.

5. Married without children - 3 respondents - average age 40.

In my analysis of the results I shall, where appropriate, compare the performance of these sub-groupings. However, since the overall sample is relatively small it will not be possible to attach great significance to any differences found, and so for much of the discussion I shall restrict myself to a comparison between the two major groups - qualified and unqualified social workers.

How long in post

The Barclay Report states (p. 25) that a popular image of social workers as young and inexperienced persists, despite the fact that the rapid growth in staff following the 1971 formation of Social Services Departments has since slowed considerably. However that same expansion meant that many social workers were rapidly promoted to positions of supervision and management, leaving the less qualified and least experienced workers to deal at first hand with clients. It is therefore important to establish how long respondents have been in post and how much truth there is today in the popularly held view of social work practitioners.

On the basis of the 1981 Association of Directors of Social Services survey (op cit) the Barclay Report established that at a national level 73% of field Social Workers have been in post for at least two years and that 40% have been in post for more than five years; the equivalent figures for this sample are 58% and 24%. However there are significant differences between qualified and unqualified respondents - see Table 3.

Table 3 Time in Post

	Less					9 or			
Years	than	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 8	More	Total	Average	
	1								
Qualified	8	15	11	5	3	1	43	3.2	
Unqualified			4	1	2		7	5.7	
TOTAL	8	15	15	6	5	1	50	3.6	

None of the unqualified social workers has been in post less than three years, whereas 25 of the 43 qualified have been in post for less than that period. The average unqualified respondent has therefore spent almost twice as much time in his/her present post as his qualified counterpart. Nevertheless it should be noted that 19 of the 43 qualified practitioners qualified locally. (Although the questionnaire did not cover this point most of them qualified as employees of

Kent Social Services Department on secondment). The great majority of the remainder were employed by Kent Social Services Department prior to qualification. Many of them were therefore working in the same teams and often in the same post for some years longer than the length of their time in post would indicate. 17 of the 43 had been qualified longer than they had been in post, whereas the remaining 26 had been in post since qualifying. It is consequently unclear whether the local data is comparable with the national figures contained in the Barclay Report and it cannot therefore be assumed that this group of social workers are less experienced than the national average.

How long Qualified

Table 4.

	Less					More	
Years	than	1 - 3	3 - 5	5 - 7	7 - 9	than 9	Average 4.2
	1						
Qualified	1	18	11	4	4	5	Total 43
Nos.							

18 out of 43 (42%) had been qualified between one and three years and the remaining 58% more than three years. 13 (30%) had been qualified for more than 5 years. As the Barklay Report observes (page 24) "The paucity of basic statistical information is a long-standing deficiency which was noted by the Hal Birch Report (Report of the Working Party of Manpower and Training for the Social Services) in 1976" and this makes national comparisons impossible.

Sex of Respondents

Table 5

	Male	Female	Total
Qualified	22	21	43
Unqualified	5	2	7
Total	27	23	50

71% of the unqualified social workers were male as compared to 51% of the qualified; no comparable national figures are available.

THEORETICAL ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF RESPONDENTS

Respondents were asked whether they have any particular theoretical orientation which they use in their work generally. The main purpose of this question was to explore the self image of practitioners. Was the generic label "social worker", which Barclay and others have demonstrated is applied to a very wide range of individuals other than qualified social workers, felt by them to be a satisfactory self description, or do they use a different label or associate

themselves with a particular theoretical school? An additional dimension to this question is the fact referred to in the opening chapter that, in line with several other writers, Blau & Scott (op cit) contend that those individuals working for large bureaucratic organisations but having a strong "professional" orientation will retain a strong identification with their professional colleague group, will be highly committed to their professional skills and will look for support to professional colleagues outside the organisation as well as within. My initial aim is therefore to explore the question whether such a subgroup of practitioners can be identified.

Unqualified

Of the 7 unqualified respondents four (57%) answered the question "Do you have a particular theoretical orientation which you use in your work generally" with an outright no! Two did not qualify this response in any way, one added that "each situation is different - I rely a lot on instinct" and another that "I call on my life experience".

Of the remaining three one described herself as "a psychological social worker, but also a realist", another claimed to have "a common sense approach" and the third prefaced his answer by explaining that he works exclusively with children but described his theoretical orientation as being that "a child's first step into care is also his first step back into the community".

This latter may amount to a sound basic approach to planning for children but could hardly be described as a fully fledged theoretical perspective. In fact

the only self description which could conceivably have been thus described was "psychological social worker", but it is not in fact clear, and was not clear during the interview, what this label implies.

On the face of it these self descriptions say something about the approach towards social work which the respondents adopt but nothing about their attachment to a particular established theoretical school or professional colleague group.

Qualified

Of the qualified group 28 (65%) answered the question in the negative. This was very similar to the proportion of unqualified respondents giving a negative response. Of these 14 made no additional comment. The remaining 14 included five unique responses. These emphasised "an instinctive approach", "personal experience" and "the autonomy of the client" and also approaches described as "a child care orientation" and "a non-specialist systems approach". However the majority of this group (9 out of 14) could be placed in a broad "eclectic" category: three used this word expressly to describe their orientation, while the other six used the following self descriptions:-

"No specific philosophy"

"No specific theory - I draw from several- for example the child development theory of Piaget; systems theory and reality theory"

"I take things as they come and apply things as seem appropriate"

"I'm a general social worker"

"Nothing specific"

"I'm a Jack of All Trades - master of some for instance e.g. Family Therapy and Behaviourism - in a small way."

Only 15 (31%) of the qualified group answered positively thus laying claim to the use of a particular theoretical orientation and these can be broken into six categories as follows:-

Table 6

Eclectic	Systems Theory/	Psychological/	BAAF/	Task	Other	Total		
	Systems Theory/	Psychoanalytic	Child Care	Oriented				
	Family Therapy			Behavio-				
	(Interactionist)			uralist				
3	4	2	2	2	2	15		

The two placed in the "other" category described their theoretical orientation uniquely as:-

"Statutorily based"

and "A Marxist orientation which affects my understanding of peoples position within society".

The BAAF/Child Care category requires a little clarification. One respondent stated "I am committed to planning for children in care on similar lines to those advocated by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering". The other said "I have a child care focus". Whether this can justifiably be described as a theoretical orientation is questionable. For present purposes the fact remains that this is how it was described by two particular respondents.

From this analysis it is apparant that no particular school or theory has a significant number of adherents from amongst the qualified members of the sample. Nevertheless it is possible that those field workers who claim to have a particular theoretical orientation, albeit a very general one such as "eclectic" or a very inprecise and subjective one such as having "a child care focus" might be more strongly inclined to have a broadly "professional" self identity than their colleagues who claim no such orientation. This possibility will be explored further. It should however be noted that the "eclectic" category covers a wide range of responses. It includes nine of those qualified respondents answering no to the original question, in addition to three answering yes. In total 31 (72%) of the qualified group fell into one or both of these categories "negative" or "eclectic". Omitting the three "eclectic" social workers who answered positively and the respondent who described himself as a "statutorily based social worker", only 11 (26%) identified themselves positively with a broadly recognisable theoretical school of thought.

If, in line with the hypothesis suggested by Blau (op cit) this latter group do have a more "professional" and less "bureaucratic" orientation than their "bureaucratic" colleagues, they would be expected to be more likely to:-

- (a) Attend post qualifying training courses.
- (b) Have a reasonable knowledge of the key texts.
- (c) Belong to a professional association.

These two sub-groups within the total group were therefore compared directly with regard to numbers of post-qualifying courses attended, number of identified key texts known, and membership of BASW or other semi-professional associations. On two points the group claiming a particular theoretical orientation, consisting of 15 qualified and three unqualified respondents, were found to score significantly higher marks than their colleagues who claimed no such orientation.

Courses

Only 12 of the 18 "positive" respondents (66%) had attended post qualifying courses lasting more than one day in the previous year, as compared to 23 of the 32 "negative" respondents (72%). This difference is significant at the 5% level of confidence.

Literature

The "positive" group knew an average of five key texts, as compared to 3.43 amongst the "negative" group. This again is a significant difference.

Membership of Professional Association

Three of the 15 qualified respondents in the "positive" group belong to BASW (=20%) as compared to four out of 28 (=14%), of qualified respondents in the "negative" group. This finding is far from conclusive since the total number of respondents belonging to BASW is only seven from a group of 43 qualified social workers and 80% of the "positive" group are non-members; knowledge of the key texts was somewhat less amongst the "negative" group, in which 19 out of 32 had not read more than three of the key texts, but in the "positive" group only seven out of 18 knew more than four, so the difference was not very pronounced. However attendance of courses is even more ambiguous as an indicator, largely because the range of courses is so extensive and includes a great majority of in-service training courses. In all 35 out of 50 respondents had attended at least one course lasting for more than one day, but this could equally well reflect "bureaucratic" motivations - a desire to learn more about Departmental policies, procedures and requirements, as a "professional" desire to increase knowledge and expertise and enhance "professional" identity.

A more detailed analysis of the type of courses attended was rather more revealing. In a Department the size of Kent Social Services, there is an inevitable preponderance of internal courses and so a distinction between those

attending internal as opposed to external courses would be simplistic. However some courses which were provided locally on an in-service basis were attended by the majority of respondents within a given area. These clearly required less planning and effort on the part of the respondent and consequently did not necessarily reflect such a high level of motivation. By concentrating on courses - both internal and external -lasting from one day up to a period of 15 days spread over a period of 30 weeks, which implied particular interest by a respondent in a specific aspect of work, it was possible to isolate courses which were more likely to reflect interests associated with "professional identity".

This category included the Fostering Officer who attended an external course on fostering "Hard to Place" children; social workers who attended external courses on Family Therapy or Transactional Analysis, student supervision or residential work with children, or bereavement; and others who attended "internal" courses run by the University of Kent at Canterbury on such subjects as supervision, counselling, or Transactional Analysis. This contrasts with the group attending courses on "communicating with adolescents", "The Treatment of Young Offenders" and "community based services" provided internally and attended by a large number of local social workers.

Of the 43 qualified respondents 24 had attended a course which fell into the former category, being either external, of long duration, or of a specific nature and subject matter or having a specific theoretic orientation such as to require initiative and effort on the part of the applicant to obtain a place. Of these 24, nine had identified themselves with a particular theoretical orientation to their work. In other words nine out of the 15 (60%) identifying

themselves with a particular theoretical approach had attended such courses, as compared to only six out of the remaining 19 (31.4%).

Of the unqualified respondents only one had attended a course which fell into the above category.

Taken together then these findings do suggest that a sub-group of social workers having characteristics which identify them as having a more consciously "professional" self identity and approach to work (in terms of the suggested criteria of theoretical knowledge, course attendance and membership of professional associations) does appear to exist within the sample. However it is far from being clearly distinguishable from the majority group and constitutes only 35% of the qualified group and 30% of the total. At a later stage I shall pursue further the question whether such differences in self perception are reflected in different attitudes towards the role and tasks involved in child care planning.

Having established some of the characteristics and self perceptions of the respondents at a general level, it was necessary to explore the extent to which their attitudes, beliefs or theoretical orientation was felt by them to affect their work in practice, and specifically in the field of child care. This was done by way of the next question which asks whether particular theories or research findings influence individual approaches towards planning child placement.

DO PARTICULAR THEORIES OR RESEARCH FINDINGS INFLUENCE YOUR APPROACH TOWARDS PLANNING CHILD PLACEMENTS? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE THEM.

Unqualified

Of the respondents three gave an outright no! and three a qualified no. These latter included the statements:-

"The first step into care should be the first step back into the community."

"It is important to formulate a clear plan."

"It is my personal belief that (1) Every child should have dual parenting and (2) Younger foster parents are preferable in long-term placements."

The single positive response was explained as "A reaction against the institutionalising effect of residential care - a belief that a family placement - that is, fostering - is better for the child. My recent feelings about this have been influenced by a variety of factors, including changes in Departmental policy, general reading, experience, supervision and team discussions".

Qualified

Seven of the qualified group answered with an outright no. A further eight gave a qualified no. These were as follows:-

"Only insofar as I'd rather not remove children but leave them at home and work with them and their families."

"Theories and findings probably have an influence, but I'm not aware of any particular guiding theory."

"Not directly, but its probably internalised. I'm aware, for instance, of child development theory, the social work processes, and fostering breakdown."

"Nothing specific - a mish-mash of ideas at the back of my mind - for instance Spencer Millhams' book 'Locking up Children'." (4)

"No conscious influence, but I'm aware for example of the Department's Children's Policy, which will emphasise the need to place children locally."

"I use whichever model seems appropriate to the situation - I've no strong inclination to a particular model, although I've been influenced recently by the Lothian research on adoption, in which plans for permanence are made when a child has been in care for more than 6 months and placement for adoption can occur after two years."

"Its largely unconscious, for instance the importance of continuity of relationships, the importance in placing children of trying to match the social class backgrounds of natural and foster parents and the importance of keeping siblings together."

"I'm not sure. I'm aware of perspectives and frameworks within which I plan, but can't specify exactly where they originate. For instance in the case of a young child I would aim to provide a substitute family environment, based on the belief that children need some continuity of parenting - as shown by Kellmer Pringle in "The Care of Children (5), in the Robertson studies (6) and by Rutter in "Maternal Deprivation." (7)

The remaining 28 respondents (65%) gave a positive response, justifying this answer with reference to between one and three pieces of theory or research. In total 40 such reasons were given, which can be broken into eight broad categories, listed according to frequency of use.

1. 11 of the 40 (27.5%) fell into a category which covered the work done by Rowe and Lambert - "Children Who Wait" (op cit) and associated with the writing and teaching of the British Associations of Adoption and Fostering (8). This includes a constellation of ideas surrounding the danger of children "drifting" into long term care, the fact that the chances of rehabilitation deteriorate markedly after the child has been in care for six months, and the importance of clear, early decision making.
2. Seven of the 40 (17.5%) referred to ideas covered by Goldstein, Freud & Solnit in "Before the Best Interests of the Child" (9) and "Beyond the Best Interests of the Child" (10). These include the need in a growing child for a sense of stability; the concept of psychological as opposed to natural parenting; and an awareness that removing a child from home is a traumatic

and disruptive experience which can on occasion do more harm to the child than leaving him even in very unfavourable home circumstances. This point is also borne out in the works of the Robertsons (op cit) and is consistent with the early writing of John Bowlby (11).

3. Six responses (15%) referred to the work of Bowlby (op cit) or in one case that of Fraiberg (12). This covers similar ground to the above but with a somewhat different focus. The emphasis is on the need of children for mothering; the effect of separation on the bonding process and on the subsequent mother/child relationship; and the potentially damaging effect of institutional placements on the child. Similar ideas are associated with the writings of Kellmer Pringle (op cit) and in the same way Michael Rutter (op cit) is identified with a reassessment and qualified endorsement of the concept of maternal deprivation.
4. Five respondents (12.5%) gave reasons associated with the work of George (op cit) & Parker (op cit). The main emphasis was on such concepts as the importance of matching the needs of the child with the needs and abilities of the foster family; the idea of a foster home as a source of support to the natural parent and not simply as a substitute home; and the importance of children in care maintaining contact with their natural parents.
5. A further five answers (12.5%) gave methodological reasons, although in no case was a specific author referred to. These included an emphasis on the value of task centred, time limited contract work; "positive thinking and self determination" and Family Therapy and crisis intervention.

6. Two social workers (5%) emphasised thinking based on the 1975 Children Act. This amounts to an explicit intention to give paramouncy to the needs of the child as opposed to the rights of the parent as a starting point in child care planning.

7. A similar number quoted Winnicott (13) and Piaget (14) respectively to justify the importance of a "facilitating environment" and the value of understanding the developmental stages in child development.
8. Two more quoted Norman Tutt (15) and David Thorpe (16) and Spencer-Milham (op cit) to the effect that there is a particular danger with regard to the imposition of Care Orders of removing a child unnecessarily from his home environment with a potentially damaging effect on his subsequent development.

Clearly these categories are somewhat arbitrary and there is a considerable degree of overlap between them. In addition in only 27 of the 40 references (68%) were authors or methods or research findings referred to in a totally clear and unambiguous way. However in all cases where an author and/or a book title is referred to explicitly in one of the eight categories it is because it was referred to thus by a respondent - in other words I have tried to avoid attributing responses to particular authorities in such a way as to accord with preconceived ideas about the importance of authors included in my list of key texts. In addition in those cases where no name or title is given in the response, the source of the idea is often very clear - for example "The importance of children in long term foster care maintaining contact with their natural parents has been well documented".

These findings make an interesting comparison with those of Carew (17) in his exploratory study of the use of theoretical knowledge by social workers. He concluded that "few of the responses reflected the use of theory and research findings. The situation never occurred where respondents clearly indicated that a response was based upon theoretical knowledge or generalisations from research, for example, no one made such remarks as: "I asked that question because Steele indicated that a significant proportion of abusive parents were abused by their parents in childhood". They tended to suggest instead that the primary base for their activities was either their own experience or advice from their more experienced colleagues. However, when the researcher finally suggested an author, a theory, or a piece of research that might be related to what they had done, then the respondent would sometimes be able to link their activities to a theoretical framework". (P361)

What Carew found many of his participants did was to base their activities on principles derived from the values of social work and on principles derived from certain underlying concepts. "Self determination" and "respect for the individual" were the predominant values, but these were not perceived by participants as social work values so much as part of their own value system which as such were automatically applied when interacting with others. Respondents made *wide* use of concepts such as "ventilation" "exploration" and "reflection" deriving from their predominant values, but did not relate them to a particular source. The general impression given was that, having at some stage been introduced to these principles they had applied them in practice, found them useful and subsequently integrated them into their interactions with clients.

Carew says of this use of techniques and procedures which enable clients to state the nature of their problems, the feelings they have about these problems, to reflect on the cause of them and the way in which they can be overcome, that the fact that they are discussed in the literature by writers such as Hollis (18) suggests that they are related to the use of skill and as such could be categorised as a knowledge of "knowing how". They are tried and trusted procedures that are passed on from practitioner to practitioner and are reinforced by the agency through the provision of opportunities for supervision, case conferences and so on.

In psychological terms most of these practitioners had a "set" as far as their activities with clients were concerned. They had techniques and procedures that could be used to meet most of the demands made by clients. Simply put they would get their clients to state their problems, discuss their feelings about them, reflect on the causes and on how the problems could be overcome and verbalise their reflections. If the problem could be overcome through the provision of resources, the workers would use their knowledge of the availability of resources and the procedures and legislation related to these to help the client to obtain them. If the problem could not be overcome in this way, the client would be encouraged to ventilate and reflect further. The important concepts that guide this activity are related to relationship, reflection and ventilation.

With this body of practice wisdom as a basis for their activities, the need to use abstract theories and generalisations from research was minimal, particularly when those proposing theories had failed to demonstrate their effectiveness in the field.

The findings of Carew's paper clearly indicate that those practitioners were not consciously using theoretical knowledge as a basis for their activities to any significant extent, and that the literature on the subject had very little effect on the way in which they approached their work. Browne (19) reached very similar conclusions in her study of social work activities. She concluded that "On the whole, our respondents' descriptions of their work with clients did not suggest that practice was drawn from specific theoretical perspectives....There was some evidence that many of the experienced workers were accustomed to working mainly on an intuitive level - in the sense of regarding to the immediate situation without conscious reliance on theoretical framework."

She goes on to say that, whereas "there was evidence that social workers used concepts from sociology, social and individual psychology to understand clients and their difficulties... there was less evidence that these concepts had been assimilated into an integral system to guide practice." In her view "Many social workers seemed ambivalent about discussing their work in a theoretical context. Their ambivalence was compounded, if not at times mainly determined, by what they saw as the absence of a comprehensive framework which pointed to a relationship between the assessment of problems and the choice of an appropriate method of intervention."

She speculates that it may be because the concepts of the treatment model of most practice theories are too general and therefore not readily translated for application that social workers make scant reference to theory.

Whatever the reason, she concludes that "Not surprisingly then, some experienced social workers indicated that they had accumulated knowledge on the basis of what appeared to work for them, and had built up their own model of practice in a rather eclectic way but this knowledge did not seem to have been formulated in a manner which would allow it to be conveyed easily to others. Perhaps this process goes by default unless there is a particular stimulus by which it can be maintained."

Carew's final conclusion is that practice wisdom may be more relevant to social work than theoretical knowledge, and that a gulf exists between theoretical writing emanating from academic establishments, and concerned about the "professional" status of social work, and a larger practice-based sub culture which in the words of Sheldon (20) is "forced to develop itself in extremely unpropitious circumstances, increasingly anti-intellectual in its approach to the problems and issues of social work, suspicious of outside research and preferring still to rely largely on personal impressions as a way of monitoring its objectives".

At a time when so many disciplines are aspiring to "professional" status the issue of whether they possess a sound theoretical and knowledge base is often contentious and unclear. Curnock and Hardiker (21) argue that social workers do possess practice theory, derived from both experience and text book knowledge, but that the process of using them is imperfectly

understood. Acknowledging the point made by Compton & Galaway (22) that when social workers discuss their practice knowledge in journals, they often only write about unique, individual situations without attempting to generalise their experiences and connect them with existing knowledge, they state that "It is our belief that social workers have and use a more systematic knowledge base than they usually acknowledge but that this is rarely codified or documented". They go on to suggest that "This is one reason why social workers frequently refer to their "practice wisdom" rather than to their use of "theory" when they are describing to others their work with clients. Because this has the unfortunate result that social workers often see "theory" and "practice" as opposites, we found it quite useful to think instead of terms of "theories of practice" and "practice theories". 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". However despite their efforts to tease out the assumptions used explicitly and emphatically by social workers as they work with clients in order to enable some generalisations to be made about the process of using knowledge in social work practice, Young was led to conclude in the forward to their work that "One of the aims of professional education is to train social workers in a way that enables them to analyse their own practice, but evidence that this process continues as they gain experience or that it results in the formulation of practice theory, is not encouraging".

Carew's research was based on detailed interviews with practitioners about specific cases, whereas my results here relate to a question concerning the more general use of a theoretical or research based perspective towards planning child placements. It would be wrong for me to conclude from these responses that theoretical and research findings do not influence placement decisions. What is clear is that a very wide range of theoretical perspectives exists; that there is little evidence of a core body of theoretical knowledge shared by professionally trained social workers; and that personal beliefs and personal experience are likely to be playing an important part in such decisions in the absence of a clear theoretical perspective.

This implies that there may be considerable scope for further action by social work agencies rather than individuals in making more explicit their beliefs about desirable practices and in laying down clear policies and procedures.

Knowledge of key texts

Insofar as there is a core of social work theory and knowledge I assumed that this should be reflected in the reading lists of a representative sample of professional social work training courses. I therefore selected ten courses - four Polytechnics and six Universities - on a common sense basis and wrote to their registrars requesting a copy of their child care reading lists. The selected courses were at:-

Leicester Polytechnic
Liverpool Polytechnic
Manchester Polytechnic
Preston Polytechnic
University College, Cardiff
London School of Economics and Political Science
Manchester University
Nottingham University
University of Oxford
University of Sussex

Without going into unnecessary detail the fact which became immediately apparent was that there was very little common ground between these courses with regard to reading requirements. Preston Polytechnic's child care reading list for their two year CQSW Diploma consisted of 12 references: that of the LSE consisted of eighty, only two of which appeared on Preston's list; and that of Nottingham University runs to over two hundred references, only four of which appear on the Preston list.

This lack of consensus meant that any attempt to test the knowledge base of social work practices would inevitably be a rather arbitrary exercise and at the same time suggested that the likelihood of qualified social workers sharing a body of child care knowledge was slight. I decided that the most satisfactory compromise would be to test for knowledge of a number of books which appeared most regularly on the course reading lists. The final list included eleven books and two articles and was as follows:-

Bowlby J. Attachment & Loss

DHSS Foster Care A Guide to Practice HMSO
Child Care and the Growth of Love

George V. Foster Care Theory and Practice

Williston G. The Foster Parent Role

Weinsten E.A. The Self Image of the Foster Child

Parker R. Decision in Child Care

Trasler G. In Place of Parents

Reid & Shyne Brief and Extended Casework

Rowe & Lambert Children who Wait

Goldstein Freud & Solnit Beyond the Best Interests of the Child

Articles

Thorpe R. Mum and Mrs. So and So

Holman R. The Place of Fostering in Social Work

Respondents were asked whether they had read specific books or articles immediately after answering questions to which the literature had some relevance. Their responses were as follows:-

<u>Table 7</u>	Qualified	Unqualified	Total	
Foster Care: A Guide to Practice	6	2	8	
Bowlby: Attachment and Loss	35	3	38	
Care and the Growth of Love	39	5	44	
George: Child Foster Care	8	2	10	

Williston: F.P. Role	0	1	1	
Weinsten: Self Image of Foster Child	2	0	2	
Parker: Decision in Child Care	9	1	10	
Trasler: In Place of Parents	3	2	5	
Reid & Shyne: Brief/Extended	9	1	10	
Rowe & Lambert: Children Who Wait	23	4	27	
Goldstein, Freud & Solnit: B.B.I.C.	16	0	16	
Holman: The Place of Fostering	6	2	8	
Thorpe: Mum and Mrs. So and So	4	0	4	
	160	23	183	
	Ave 3.72	Ave 3.29	Ave 3.66	

The only works known to a majority of respondents were those of Bowlby and Rowe and Lambert. The average level of awareness did not vary greatly as between qualified and unqualified, and nor did the range of works known, which varied from one to eight among the unqualified and from one to seven among the qualified.

What this clearly demonstrates is that in the important area of child care social work there is no core body of theoretical knowledge which is shared by qualified respondents. In view of the enormous variety of literature on the readings lists of the sample of training courses that is perhaps unsurprising. However, since child care work is given great priority by most Social Services Departments, this does beg the question, what features would the majority of

training courses have in common? This in turn leads on to the questions, what teaching approach is adopted by such courses? If the approach is essentially "educational" as opposed to "instructive" or "vocational" it may well be that students completing the same course would come away with very different levels of knowledge about apparently basic aspects of social work. Whilst it could be argued that this fact simply reflects the unscientific state of an underdeveloped semi-profession, the inevitable consequence of an inability to identify and share whatever hard knowledge does exist, is that practitioners will be left with little other than their own beliefs and experiences, together with any guidance given by their employing authority, to use as a basis for practice.

I shall return to this issue in the concluding chapter.

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO KEEP ABREAST OF SOCIAL WORK THEORY AND KNOWLEDGE BY WAY OF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?

Table 8

2.15.	<u>Books</u>	<u>Qualified</u>		<u>Unqualified</u>		<u>Total</u>	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Yes	31	72	3	43	34	68
	No	12	28	4	57	16	32
		43	100	7	100	50	100

Qualified respondents were almost twice as likely to have read a social work book in the preceding 12 months as unqualified respondents. The books read by respondents during the last 12 months were too varied to list here, but constituted a total of 35 titles, some of which could be seen as mainstream social work books, but many of which concerned more tangential subjects such as Transactional Analysis, Sexual Therapy and Feminism.

Table 9

<u>Journals</u>	<u>Qualified</u>		<u>Unqualified</u>		<u>Total</u>		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Yes	36	84	5	71	41	82
	No	7	16	2	29	9	18
		43	100	7	100	50	100

The journals read, in order of popularity were:-

	Read by
Community Care -	35
Social Work Today	31
New Society	8

BAAF Journal	5
Journal of the Association of Family Therapy	4
Transactional Analysis	1
The National Foster Care Journal	1
British Journal of Social Work	1
Journal of the National Childrens Bureau	<u>1</u>
	<u>87</u>

Here the difference between qualified and unqualified respondents was much less marked and readership of the two most popular social work journals - Community Care and Social Work Today - was high amongst both groups.

Conferences

Table 10

<u>Conferences</u>	<u>Qualified</u>		<u>Unqualified</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	15	35	0	0	15	30
No	28	65	7	100	35	70
	43	100	7	100	50	100

The distinction between a conference and a one day course or seminar was not clearly drawn by the interviewer. However, 35% of the qualified respondents had attended events which they defined as conferences, whereas none of the unqualified respondents had done so. Conferences usually lasted for one day, but the Annual Residential Social Work Conference lasted for three days and one conference/workshop for two days.

Two respondents had attended the conference of British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF); three had attended conferences on adolescence; and others had attended conferences covering topics ranging from the Handicapped Child and Non-Accidental Injury to Intermediate Treatment and Transactional Analysis. It did seem that these qualified workers were, in many instances, identifying themselves with particular specialist areas of work and with specific peer groups and that in this sense they have been displaying a "cosmopolitan" professional identity in line with that described by Gouldner (op cit). However, the findings were not sufficiently detailed to establish whether this attitude was associated with a general orientation towards the employing authority as was the case with Gouldner's college teachers, or more a reflection of specialist interest within a diverse range of social work activities.

Courses

Table 11

<u>Courses</u>	<u>Qualified</u>		<u>Unqualified</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
(1 day)						
	Yes	15 35	1	14	16	32
	No	28 65	6	86	34	68
		43 100	7	100	50	100

The range of one day courses attended by both qualified and unqualified respondents was considerable but while qualified social workers were almost twice as likely as their unqualified colleagues to attend such courses, the 35% of qualified workers who did so included only three of those who attended conferences. There is little evidence therefore of a sub-group of qualified workers with an active commitment to pursuing "professional" interests through the medium of courses and conferences. This impression is heightened by the fact that the great majority of courses attended by members of both groups were local, in-service courses, readily accessible to interested practitioners as opposed to out-County courses which would require greater motivation on the part of the participants.

Table 12

<u>Courses</u> (more than 1 day)	<u>Qualified</u>		<u>Unqualified</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	28	65	6	86	34	68
No	15	35	1	14	16	32
	43	100	7	100	50	100

Interestingly only one of the unqualified respondents had not attended a course lasting more than one day, while 35% of the qualified respondents had not done so. However, of the total sample of 50 only 5 - one unqualified - had attended neither conferences nor courses of any description during the previous year.

Preferred means of keeping abreast of social work theory and knowledge

Table 13

	<u>Qualified</u>	<u>Unqualified</u>	<u>Total</u>
Books	1		1
Journals	3	1	4
Conferences	2		2
Courses	17	3	20
Books & Journals	1	1	2
Books & Courses	8		8
Books & Colleagues	1		1
Journals & Colleagues	0	1	1
Journals & Courses	4		4
Courses & Conferences	1		1
Books, Courses & Conferences	1		1
Journals, Courses & Conferences	1		1
No preference	3	1	4
	43	7	50

By far the most popular means of keeping abreast of social work theory and knowledge was by way of courses, with a combination of courses and either books or journals as second favourite. This preference is reflected in the frequency with which both qualified and unqualified social workers attend courses and this preference was usually accounted for in terms of courses allowing interaction and being more stimulating than the more "passive" activity of reading.

Nevertheless the two most popular social work journals - Community Care and Social Work Today - are clearly widely read and the great majority of social workers (68%) had read a social work book in the previous year.

Despite this it is apparent that very few social workers rate books or journals very highly as a means of acquiring knowledge and an equally small number read the specialist journals such as the British Journal of Social Work, or the Journal of the Association of Family Therapists or BAAF Journal, which generally give fuller and more detailed coverage of new developments in research.

Various reasons were given to justify these preferences. Many said that their preference depends on the quality of the course or of the books, some of which were criticised for being "poorly written". Many claimed lack of time or energy to read about social work in the evening. One said that the failure to read social work books was a reaction against all the reading she had done during training; another said she would like to attend more courses as she feels "very understimulated at present" but claimed to have no time for reading during work and to be unwilling to read out of work time. Another said that conferences and courses refresh rather than update and claimed that "you need self discipline to read books and journals" and although aware that she does not read enough said that she was disinclined to read about social work in the evenings.

The general impression conveyed by these responses is that social workers are not great readers and are extremely dependent on the popular social work journals to keep them abreast of new developments.

DO YOU THINK CHILDREN AND PARENTS GO THROUGH PREDICTABLE RESPONSES TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SEPARATION. IF SO, CAN YOU DESCRIBE THEM?

Kufeldt (23) concludes on the basis of an analysis of the work of Bowlby (op cit), Rose (24), Thomas (25) and Jenkins and Norman (26) that the "normal" phases through which both children and parents pass in the process of dealing with their reactions to the loss of one another are pre-protest, protest, despair and detachment or resolution. The Working Party on Fostering Practice (op cit) broadly agreed that this would be the expected behaviour in such situations, though describing the emotional responses of parents as anxiety, depression and detachment in succession. There is, therefore, a good degree of agreement on this sequence, although Jenkins and Norman identified a whole gamut of feelings experienced by parents on the placement of their children, including sadness, anger, relief, bitterness and guilt. Kufeldt emphasises the importance of workers in child care being aware of the concept of a sequence of responses. The significance of this knowledge for practice, she says, is that "it is during the anxiety phase that the parents' energies may be most readily mobilised on behalf of the child. As they progress into the depressed stage energy is reduced and withdrawal begins to take place. Finally detachment will lead to disengagement and the re-arrangement of the parents' lives in such a way that it will become progressively more difficult to re-introduce the child".

Answers to the question were as follows:-

Table 14

	Qualified	Unqualified	Total
Yes	42	6	48
No	1	1	2
	43	7	50

Table 15

If yes

	Qualified	Unqualified	Total
No sequence	24	3	27
Sequence	19	4	23
Correct Sequence	0	0	0
	43	7	50

No respondent was aware of the sequence described above, although almost 50% of the total believed there to be some sequence in the responses. Some of these expressly stated that there was a sequence while others implied this. Among those who felt there to be no sequence there was a consistent feeling that "you can't generalise" or "all situations are different". The last sentiment was often accompanied by the belief that responses will vary according to such factors as the reasons for separation, the age of the child and the quality of the relationship.

A wide range of emotions was attributed to both children and parents, the most common being anger, guilt and grief. In fact Bowlby (op cit) and Thomas (op cit) emphasise the important difference between "grief" and "separation anxiety". The latter is experienced when the loss is believed to be retrievable and hope remains. Consequently they suggest that when the aim is to rehabilitate the child with the natural family it is important to help him through the task of moving to a stage of resolution, as opposed to detachment, which in turn emphasises the importance of keeping alive the mother/child relationship by way of such activities as maternal visiting. Unless the child can re-organise his prior relationships in the light of the reality situation, he will find difficulty in re-investing himself in the new relationship (see Thomas pp179-80 for a more detailed description of the process). Yet this is complicated in practice by the fact that the pre-protest phase may often be characterised in adults by a state of numbness, apparent apathy or even transitory relief. Since this phase is typically deceptively calm, a social worker who is unaware of the underlying dynamics might well be tempted to leave the child and the foster family alone "to settle down together" immediately

after placement. Similarly foster parents who have not been alerted to these phases and the typical affective responses and behaviour associated with each could well misinterpret subsequent behaviour. If, for instance, the social worker re-introduced herself and the natural parents into the system as the child is moving into the protest phase, the foster parent could well make a false interpretation of the meaning of that phase with the result, at worst, of a demand for the child to be replaced, or, at best, of a feeling of antagonism towards the natural parent and possibly towards the social worker, unless the latter is able and willing to spend the time necessary to interpret the events.

I have dwelt on this issue because it does perfectly illustrate the fact that established theory and research findings could have a direct bearing on practice if its significance was appreciated. Whilst there are great differences in the reasons for, the nature of, and the degree of distress caused by the placement of a child in care, which calls for the individualisation of the treatment programme for each child, the fact that at the same time there are common elements which can be considered and generalised when developing a framework for practice - that, specifically, there are certain "normal" phases through which children and parents pass in the process of dealing with their reactions to the loss of one another and the expected behaviour in such situations, suggest that in practice clear guidelines could be developed which would apply to almost every case. One clear implication of these findings is that close contact should be maintained between all concerned in the early stages of placement.

The seeds do seem to exist of a research based body of practice theory which could be taught within training courses and advocated and pursued with Social Services Department.

FOR WHAT TYPE AND AGE OF CHILD ARE THESE PLACEMENTS MOST SUITABLE?

Short Term Foster Care

Responses to this question varied greatly. The question did not define "short term" and the great majority of respondents did not do so either. Those who did so saw this period as ranging from six months to one year. Recent work building on that of Rowe and Lambert (op cit) (e.g. Shaw and Lebens (op cit) and Bullock (op cit)) would suggest that it would be more appropriate to define short term care as less than six months, and that it might even be appropriate to reduce this figure to three months. These and others also qualified their answers in the following ways:-

"The concept of 'short term' varies with the age of the child".

"There is a need for special short term foster parents willing to work with natural parents."

"With teenagers it is important to obtain their agreement to a foster placement."

"Social workers must be open and honest with foster parents about the nature of the problems they are being asked to take on."

"I am giving generalisations in answering these questions, when social workers deal with individuals."

Nevertheless it was possible to categorise the range of answers into two broad groupings - those which identified types of children or particular circumstances which were especially suited to short term foster care and those which specified circumstances in which the use of short term care would not be appropriate.

Some respondents gave answers which included both categories so that the total number of categorisable answers exceeds the number of respondents.

Table 16 Categories of children or circumstances suited to short term foster care.

	All types & Ages	Short Term Crisis- no extended family - children to be rehabilitated	Holiday break (for child old enough to understand)	Young child 0-8	Pre - 0-12	Adoption
Unqualified	3	3	0	1	0	0
Qualified	18	8	1	5	1	1
Total	21	11	1	6	1	1

Table 17 *Categories of children and circumstances in which short term foster care would not be appropriate*

	Adolescents	Very damaged/ disruptive children (*)	Very young children	Clear long term cases	Potentially destructive/dis- ruptive child needing assess- ment, structure
Qualified	4	7	2	1	2

(*) "Very damaged/disruptive children" includes a range of problems:-

- Older children beyond the control of their parents or with special problems.
- Very damaged children.
- Children who have had very damaged relationships or who have experienced many unsuccessful placements in the past.
- Children who are unusually disturbed, upset, unstable or disruptive.
- Very self destructive children - especially adolescents.
- Severely handicapped children.

Long Term Foster Care

Table 18

Definitions in terms of specifically suitable groups.

	All types & Ages	Children with strong parental links but unable to go home or be adopted	Teenagers un- able to cope with adoption	Younger children	Under 5	7	12	Cannot generalise
Qualified	16	4	2	2	1	1	2	
Unqualified	4	0	0			1	2	
Total	20	4	2	5			4	

While there was some contradiction here between those who see long term fostering as particularly suitable for "younger" children and those who see it as more suitable for teenagers, the majority of respondents in this group do not draw such distinctions as they see this type of placement as being suitable for all types and ages of children. This is very much at odds with the concept of

"permanence planning" which is described by Jane Rowe (27) as "almost certainly the most important and influential idea to be introduced in recent years" to the theory of fostering. Writers such as Anna Freud (28), Kenneth Watson (29), Marvin Bryce and Roger Ehlert (30) have stressed the difficulty children have in reaching their full potential when living in "limbo", uncertain where they will be living next or who is ultimately responsible for them. Since fostering has no legal base, its security is doubtful and its suitability for children needing really long-term care is therefore questioned by such advocates of planning for permanence as Margaret McKay (31) and Margaret Adcock (32).

Tizard's rigorous study (33) of children who were adopted or restored to natural parents clearly showed that the former fared better and Soothill and Wall (34) rightly conclude that "Today quasi-adoptive fostering should be a carefully chosen course of action and not something drifted into because of lack of social work with natural and/or foster families..." What is emerging is the recognition of the importance of distinguishing between short and long-term fosterings and between the most appropriate types of foster parents to meet short and long-term needs. The quasi-adoptive relationship has its place on the continuum of caring. Despite some references in the literature (Rowe (35), Shaw and Lebers (36)) we still have a long way to go before understanding how.

Table 19

Definitions in terms of exceptions

	Adolescents opposed to foster care	Very young children (under 2)	V. disturbed disruptive children	Mentally/ Physically Handicapped or Special Needs	Children with strong parental ties	Institutionalised child
Qualified	5	3	3	2	1	1
Unqualified	1	0	0	0	0	0
	6	3	3	2	1	1

Small numbers of respondents felt that particular groups of children would be difficult for foster parents to cope with, or, in the case of adolescents, might be unsuitable by virtue of their opposition to the idea of foster care.

However, there was little consensus on the suitability or otherwise of long term foster care for particular categories of children beyond the general belief that it would be broadly appropriate for most. These responses reflect a variety of different perceptions as to the nature of foster care and bear out Jane Rowe's statement (37) that "The fostering scene in the early 1980's is exciting but somewhat confusing. Many changes are taking place in foster care services and

it seems quite possible that by the end of the decade a major transformation will have been achieved. Meanwhile, however, development is patchy, terminology is confused, there is often a wide gulf between theory and practice and major problems can arise from a lack of definition of the many different types of fostering. These days the dictionary definition of fostering as 'bringing up someone else's child' is appropriate for only a proportion of foster home placements. Assessment, treatment, relief care and preparation of young people for independent living are all tasks being undertaken by foster parents who are caring for children of all ages and with a wide range of problems and handicaps". It is clear that despite the growing, and sometimes overwhelming preference amongst social workers for foster care rather than residential care, there has been little progress in producing coherent and agreed terminology to differentiate the diverse tasks associated with foster care. In the absence of such agreement it is perhaps unsurprising that social workers have such different views about which groups of children are best suited to the traditional, though increasingly outmoded, categories of short term and long term foster care.

Residential Care

1. By far the largest category thought to be suitably placed in residential care was that group of children which it was felt foster parents could not handle or should not be asked to handle. The advantage of residential care in this respect was felt to be the fact that residential staff could share the care of the child as opposed to leaving a foster couple to carry the full burden. The most frequent example given was of the acting out, very

disturbed adolescent, but this group also included children who had experienced several fostering breakdowns; or who had recurring problems which foster parents seemed unable to cope with; and large family groups; together with children whose natural parents were extremely difficult to deal with.

This group was described as appropriate for residential care by 12 qualified and one unqualified respondent.

2. The second largest group for whom residential care was seen as appropriate were also teenagers - those who themselves, or whose parents resisted the idea of placement in a substitute family.

Five qualified and one unqualified respondents mentioned this category.

3. Five qualified respondents also saw residential care as suitable for children of any age who had experienced unsatisfactory previous placements or foster home breakdowns.
4. A fourth group of four qualified respondents stated that residential care could be suitable for all types of children as long as they were not very young. However definitions of very young ranged from six months to "under four", "under five" and "under seven". Amongst the unqualified respondents two said that residential care was only suitable for children over the age of 12.

5. Three qualified respondents said that residential care could be suitable for children of any age.
6. Three unqualified said it was rarely suitable for any child.
7. The last general category is one which includes specialist provision, which six respondents referred to:-

Five qualified respondents mentioned residential care providing a cooling off period for elder children; residential hostel provision for school leavers; remand provision; and the provision of special educational, physical or psychiatric care.

Finally an unqualified respondent felt that residential provision of assessment facilities was appropriate.

Table 20 Categories of children or circumstances suited to residential care

Category	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Qualified	12	5	5	4	3		5	34
Unqualified	1	1	0	2		3	1	8
Total	13	6	5	6	3	3	6	42

These responses were qualified on occasion in a number of ways:-

1. "Foster parents should be able to do all of this better - if only we could find them."
2. "Institutions are never better in the long term for anybody, because we all have eventually to fit into a society based on the family."
3. "I would always seek a foster home first."
4. "I usually try to avoid residential care but specialist residential care can offer something."
5. "It would always be better to place a child in foster care whenever possible. I can't envisage circumstances in which residential care would be the best option except in extreme circumstances where specialist medical or psychiatric care is needed."
6. "I don't really like residential care but it suits some children, for example the very severely delinquent. But fostering - normal family life - is always preferable to institutional care."

The variety of attitudes and responses reflected here are very much in line with the conclusion of Jane Tunstall (38) who wrote that "The 1948 Act extolled the virtues of fostering but... in the last analysis passed the buck to practice on the part of social workers who were offered no very clear guidelines as to what might constitute the 'welfare of the child'. A foremost characteristic of the

history of child care policy in this country is the extent to which legislation has left many of the thorniest questions hanging in mid air to be taken up by practitioners and therefore to be worked out at the level of practice, in the context of a wide range of personal, professional and political value systems."

They also seem to bear out the comment in the Barclay Report that:"the saying 'a bad home is better than a good institution', simple, yet misleading, still has its adherents," (P. 57) with the consequent assumption that fostering is unquestionably better than other substitute placements.

Since 1975 there has been in Kent a consistent move away from residential care, encouraged by a steady stream of home closures. Inevitably there has been a shortfall in parts of the County between the removal of residential services and their replacement by community based alternatives such as fostering. This move has been widely publicised and widely supported which makes it hard to establish whether changes in practice with regard to the placement of children have been influenced most directly by explicit Departmental policy and philosophy or by more pragmatic considerations such as the availability of particular resources. Whatever the causes, the fact is that the overall proportion of children in care who are boarded out with foster parents has risen in Kent from approximately 60% in 1975 to 80% in 1983. This must inevitably have influenced individual practitioners in their placement decisions, but, as Rowe & Lambert observed in "Children Who Wait" (P.76), a considerable range of factors are at work, for while "the characteristics of children and their family circumstances were important (they were) not the only criteria. Agency policy and tradition, the workers' own experience, preferences and prejudices and the availability of homes of various types must certainly have entered into many of the decisions though their influence could not be measured".

THE ROLE OF FOSTER CARE AND RESIDENTIAL CARE

Respondents were asked "Do you think the role of a foster home should be primarily:-

(a) To provide a substitute family or home.

(b) To act as an extension and support to the natural family unit?"

Table 21

	(a)	"Alternative Family"	(b)	Either	Total
Qualified	30	3	10	30	73
Unqualified	6		7	6	19
Total	36	3	17	36	92

"Do you think the role of a residential home should be primarily:-

(a) to provide a substitute home or

(b) to act as an extension and support to the natural family unit?"

Table 22

	(a)	"Temporary Sanctuary"	Either	(b)	Neither	Total
Qualified	16	1	13	42	1	73
Unqualified	1	0	1	7	0	9
Total	17	1	14	49	1	82

These findings indicate that twice as many of the qualified staff see a substitute home being appropriately provided in the fostering sector as in the residential sphere. Amongst unqualified the ratio is six to one. These views are in line with the recommendations of the Curtis Report, which effectively provided a blue print for the 1948 Act. Curtis argued strongly in favour of fostering as the best form of substitute care for deprived children, barring adoption, and this preference was enshrined in the 1948 Act. As Tunstall (P.9) has emphasised "This conclusion was profoundly influenced by the work of Bowlby...both at the stage the Committee were reaching conclusions and perhaps just as importantly, at the level of practice, where newly trained personnel were joining the Childrens Departments having encountered work on maternal deprivation and the choice of substitute care as standard on the pioneering courses".

However, whereas this view might suggest the likelihood of a difference in approach between older and younger staff in the qualified group, an analysis of those respondents who do not see the role of a foster home as primarily to provide a substitute home, and of those who see a residential home as capable of performing this role shows similar numbers above and below the average age for this group of 39 years. This suggests that Departmental philosophy, whether explicit or implicit may be a much more potent factor in individual practice than training or experience, and that such philosophy is still being powerfully influenced by the training received by earlier generations of social workers who are the current managers and policy makers.

On the issue of foster homes and residential homes acting as extensions and supports to the natural family unit, there was almost total unanimity amongst both qualified and unqualified staff that both should be capable of performing this role. In a historical perspective this is unsurprising in light of the emphasis in the Children Act (1948) on the need for social workers to work towards a child's return home wherever "it appears to them consistent with the welfare of the child to do so", and of the fact that the 1963 Children & Young Persons Act makes it "the duty of every local authority to make available such advice, guidance and assistance as may promote the welfare of children by diminishing the need to receive children into or keep them in care". However it complicates the task of fostering, as foster parents are no longer seen solely as "substitute parents", but as people who, when appropriate, would be as willing as the social workers to work towards rehabilitation by playing their

part in encouraging the natural parents to visit their children and being willing to tolerate the many tensions involved in this sort of partnership. The fact that 30 qualified social workers felt that the primary role of foster care should be the traditional one of the long term provision of a substitute home, that 10 felt the primary role to be the more sophisticated one of providing a short term rehabilitative "resource", but that 30 felt it could legitimately be either indicates that tensions persist in this field and that in the absence of clear policy guidelines there remains considerable scope for the sort of role confusion that George (op cit) pointed to 13 years ago.

DO YOU USE ANY SPECIFIC GUIDELINES IN ATTEMPTING TO MATCH A CHILD TO A FOSTER FAMILY? IF SO WHAT ARE THEY?

13 respondents (all qualified) replied with either an outright no or "no - rarely or never have a chance" - other responses included:-

"I wish I did - have almost never had a choice either in an emergency or in other situations."

"Generally very frustrating area of experience."

"No theoretical framework."

"No - not that I'm aware of."

"I would like to do so but resources rarely allow."

"Depends entirely on what's available."

"You're restricted before you start."

"Its essentially a gut reaction based on an internalisation of many factors."

30 qualified and seven unqualified respondents answered yes, and mentioned the following factors:-

Age

Table 1 The use of age as a factor in matching a child to a foster family.

	General Consid- eration	Natural Spacing	Avoid same age	Spacing at least 2 yrs	Avoid being middle child	Place with older natural children	Spacing at least 5 years	Doesnt matter	Not Ment- ioned	Total
Qual- ified	8	5	13	4	1	3	1	1	7	43
Un-Qual	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	7
Total	8	8	13	5	1	3	1	1	10	50

These attitudes and beliefs reflect the absence of hard evidence on the question of age arising from the various studies described in Chapter Two. Harry Napier (op cit) found general agreement in all the studies that the "factor of age" is a crucial one. However, the fact that generally speaking the younger the child at placement the better the chances of success, and that there is a particularly marked increase in fostering breakdown between the ages of 5 and 7 was not referred to by any of the respondents. Doubt has probably been thrown on this finding by the development of successful specialist fostering schemes for adolescents, of which by far the most influential was Kent's special family placement project (39), the success of which should be well known amongst Kent social workers.

However, responses do seem to reflect a general awareness that most studies have shown that foster parents having children of their own whose age is within three years of that of the foster child will inhibit the success of a placement, as will the presence of a foster parent's own child whose age is similar to that of the foster child.

Experience, Attitudes, Expectations or Abilities of F/Ps

Qualified	23	
Unqualified	3	
Total	26	

The question of the experience and abilities of foster parents is extremely imprecise and subjective and although many qualified respondents considered it to be important, few were explicit as to how and why. In earlier studies Parker (op cit) had found that foster parents with over seven years' experience were the most successful, but George (op cit) had not found their previous experience to be a significant predictor of success.

Willingness of F/Ps to work with Natural Parents

Qualified	12	
Unqualified	1	
Total	13	

The fact that 40% of the qualified respondents saw a willingness on the part of foster parents to work with natural parents as important may reflect an increasing awareness of the desirability of employing Holman's (op cit) inclusive model of fostering when the aim of the social worker is rehabilitation of the child with his parents. The difficulties and ambiguities of the social worker/foster parent relationship were first described in a British context by George (op cit). Jane Rowe (Fostering in the Eighties) describes how more recently specialist fostering schemes for adolescents have "created a new

relationship in which the foster parent is recognised as the key worker, peer group support is seen as essential, and the roles of child's social worker and family's social worker have to be clearly defined. In these schemes there is a significant shift of the balance of power and responsibility as between agency and foster family". (PP 25). However it is important to remember that George found in 1970 that the majority of social workers held an inclusive view of fostering, although very often their practice did not appear to reflect this belief. Therefore it does not follow that because a high proportion of respondents profess a desire to work with foster parents in this way, they actually do so in practice.

Attempt to match needs and/or wishes of child with abilities/preferences of F/Ps

Qualified	23	
Unqualified	2	
Total	25	

This is the broadest and most complex factor identified by respondents and the basis on which attempts are made to match the child's needs with the foster parents' abilities or preferences was not clear. We are here firmly back in the subjective, largely intuitive area of social work in which, as Napier (op cit) reminds us "we are still dependent on the skill of the child care officer with the selection, introductions support and encouragement necessary to the success of the placement".

Socio-cultural background of natural parents and foster parents - attempt to match material standards and class attitudes and expectations.

Qualified	15	
Unqualified	5	
Total	20	

The extent to which it is possible to attempt to match natural and foster parents for both material standards and class attitudes and expectations is doubtful, although 50% of this group of respondents considered this an important factor.

Geographical location - accessibility to current school, familiar features, family, friends and relatives.

Qualified	9	
Unqualified	2	
Total	11	

The importance of ensuring some sense of continuity by maintaining links with a child's past would suggest geographical location as an important factor in any placement decision, although only 30% of respondents mentioned it specifically.

Other factors considered to be important

Qualified

Stability and commitment of foster parents

Temperament and general compatibility of foster child and foster parents

Structure of existing family

Basic warmth of foster parents

Appropriateness of child's relationship with natural parents

Child's own character.

Unqualified

Religious and other beliefs

Type of schools in area

"Experience, personality, material conditions of minor importance - most important factor is ability to accept most difficult behaviour without rejecting child."

Respondents were then asked "more specifically do you take any of the following into account"?

- (a) The age of the child relative to other children in the foster family.

All of the unqualified claimed to do so and 40 of the qualified.

- (b) Particular needs of the child relative to the abilities of the foster family.

All respondents answered positively.

- (c) The expectations of the foster parents.

All unqualified and all but two qualified answered yes.

- (d) The wishes of the natural parents.

Six unqualified and 33 qualified said yes.

- (e) Other factors

Locality -

2 unqualified

12 qualified

"Economic factors":-

1 unqualified

5 qualified

Child's needs -

1 unqualified

3 qualified

Child's wishes

4 qualified

Relationship between foster parents and natural parents

1 qualified

These results seem to indicate that few social workers had a clear framework within which to make such decisions and that even those who felt they used particular guidelines found it difficult to identify them without prompting. There was a widespread awareness of this lack of a conceptual structure, linked to a feeling that while this was unfortunate it reflected the fact that a lack of choice at the point of placement made all but the most rudimentary attempts at matching unrealistic.

In the event this belief was not borne out as the great majority of the foster placements made did entail a choice from at least one alternative family and only 6 (12%) of such placements were rated as "not ideal". At the same time the factors identified as important were largely predictable and uncontroversial, so that the scope for formulating acceptable guidelines clearly exists. For example there was a high degree of agreement about the importance of the age of the

foster child relative to that of other children in the foster family, and although individuals explained this differently, the consensus amounted to a recognition that children should not be placed in a situation where they will experience direct rivalry and that, in line with the Boarding Out Regulations, there should be natural spacing in the ages of all the children in a family group.

The review in Chapter 2 of research into matching children with suitable foster families highlighted the difficulty of producing clear-cut and universally applicable guidelines and also illustrated the fact that in such a complex area there will be exceptions even to the broad rules which do emerge. Nevertheless there is very general agreement in the literature about some of the factors which might be negatively associated with success and about the desirability of placing children with foster parents who are likely to be equipped to meet their needs. It is therefore disturbing to find that practitioners are attempting this complicated task without the assistance of an accepted conceptual framework and in the fatalistic and misplaced belief that any attempt to produce such a framework would be purely academic in view of the actual lack of choice which they experience at the point of placement.

Foster families are such a widely used and valued resource for Social Services Department, and the unfortunate consequences of foster placement breakdown are so generally acknowledged, that it seems astonishing that their use continues on such an ad hoc, individual and unsystematic basis.

DO YOU THINK PARENTAL VISITING IS IMPORTANT

(a) Before Placement

Unqualified	4	Yes
Qualified	34	Yes
Total	38	

(b) After Placement

Unqualified	7	Yes
Qualified	42	Yes
Total	49	

Answers were qualified by the following comments:-

1. Visiting the foster home before placement is not often possible and sometimes undesirable because it is very threatening to the natural

parents.	1
2. Visiting is desirable but never done in practice	1
3. Desirable but rarely occurs	7
4. Not always possible/desirable	6
5. Usually do so wherever possible	<u>10</u>
	<u>25</u>

As George (op cit pp 160-161) pointed out in 1970, the active involvement of the natural parents by the social worker in the placement of their child with foster parents is stressed by social work literature. Gluckman (40) gives three inter-related reasons for preparing parents for the placement of their child with foster parents: to ameliorate the pain of separation for both parents and child; to maximise the chances of success of the placement by enlisting the natural parents' co-operation; and to prevent the drifting away of the parents after the child's placement.

However, Gluckman's study, and that of Traster (op cit) found that children in foster homes actually have very limited contact with their parents. Subsequent literature in the field of social psychology (Clarke and Clarke (41); Robertson and Robertson (42); Bowlby (43) 19; Rutter (op cit)) has stressed the need for children to remain in close contact with their parents, if an effective bond is to be maintained. Some studies (Jenkins (44); Holman, (45); Thorpe (46)) have shown that lack of contact is indeed detrimental to the child's emotional growth and leads to more disturbed behaviour. These findings have been borne out by Fanshell & Shinn's (47) longitudinal study in America. They sum up their findings as follows: "In the main we strongly support the notion that continued contact with parents, even when the functioning of the latter is marginal, is

good for most foster children. Our data suggests that total abandonment by parents is associated with emotional turmoil in children". (P. 487).

However, Holman (48) indicates that most foster parents tend to operate on an "exclusive" model of fostering thereby encouraging a lack of contact between natural parents and the child in their care. This inevitably reduces the opportunity for foster children to gain a good knowledge and understanding of their situation. Yet despite the recognition in foster care theory of these findings there is evidence (Adamson (49); Shaw et al (50)) that in some cases social workers may wrongly collude with foster parents to exclude natural parents from their children's lives. This statement is not so strong as the conclusion by George (op cit P. 220) that "Child care officers and foster parents by their active hostility or passive inaction towards natural parents have forced or have merely allowed natural parents to alienate themselves from their children". Nevertheless, it does indicate the gulf between theory and practice and, perhaps, between intention and reality in this regard.

The findings of this study suggest that the great majority of social workers, whether qualified or unqualified, recognise the importance of involving natural parents in the placement of their child. The qualifications which some respondents added indicate justifications for not always adhering to this principle. What did not arise from the research was a clear indication as to whether parents were fully involved in practice.

FOLLOWING RECEPTION INTO CARE WHAT PERIOD DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR WORKING WITH A CHILD AND HIS PARENTS?

Table 24

	Immediately	Early Stages	First Week	First Month	First 3 Months	First 6 Months	At all times	No Specific Time	Total
Unqualified		3		2			1	1	7
Qualified	17	7	1	8	2	7		1	43
Total	17	10	1	10	2	7	1	2	50

Clearly almost all of the respondents recognised in their responses the need to work with families in the period following reception into care. No attempt was made to establish what was meant by "working with" such families, but the underlying intent was to test for awareness of the findings of Rowe & Lambert (op cit) and of Shaw & Lebens (51) that if purposeful efforts at rehabilitation are not made within the first few months - or even, as more recent research at Dartington Hall suggests (52) within the first few weeks - then the danger of a child "drifting" into long term care effectively by default are very real. As with responses to other questions intentions were rarely if ever attributed to

other than personal experience and so it was not possible to form conclusions *about* the effect of individual writers or researchers. At the same time the concept of "drift" and the attendant dangers were referred to by several individuals and it should be recalled that Rowe and Lamberts' book "Children Who Wait" was known to 27 or the 43 respondents. However, my subjective impression was that these findings may have had a particular impact through one or two influential practitioners - particularly fostering officers - influencing thinking about planning for children within local offices.

DO YOU THINK THAT MOST CHILDREN COULD BE REHABILITATED WITH THEIR PARENTS GIVEN ADEQUATE TIME AND RESOURCES?

Table 25

	Yes	Some exceptions	No	Total
Unqualified	2	4	1	7
Qualified	18	15	10	43
Total	20	19	11	50

What factors prevent more children from being rehabilitated?

13 respondents said more social work time, linked to smaller caseloads.

13 more support to parents once their children are in care, by way of social work time, support groups, parental training and education.

8 Local residential establishments, crash pads, day care, family care centres and day fostering.

8 Structural changes - higher Supplementary Benefit rates, better housing.

5 Better planning, decision making.

4 Social workers should not receive children into care so readily.

4 More family welfare, family care, family aides.

1 More flexible professional foster parents.

1 More skillful residential staff.

1 More specialised supervision.

This question was unsatisfactorily worded as it remains open to differing interpretations. The reality is that a majority of children do return home within six months and that even after such a period in care others will subsequently be rehabilitated. The intent behind the question was to explore whether respondents felt that more children could be rehabilitated than currently are, but the answers are ambiguous.

This is hardly surprising for it is on this point that writers have recently begun to differ very strongly. The Newsoms (53) have shown that families vary greatly in the way they meet their children's needs and in their capacity to do so. But the questions which are increasingly being asked are, at what stage does the care offered by parents cease to be "good enough" (54) to ensure the child's proper growth and development? How much help should the State provide so that parents who cannot meet their children's needs unaided can be helped to do so? If it is clear that some parents are at a given time, or perhaps permanently, unable to meet their children's needs, should they be able to maintain links with those children, or should such links be broken so that the children can be free to form new attachments with substitute parents? To what extent, and in what cases, should a parent's rights to be in contact with his child be terminated to facilitate the growth of new attachments?[?] These are issues which have been explored in some detail by June Thoburn (55) and to which I shall return. They are touched on in the remaining two questions concerning the 1975 Children Act and the issue of "blood ties".

IN LIGHT OF THE 1975 CHILDREN ACT, WHICH PLACES MORE EMPHASIS ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD AS OPPOSED TO THOSE OF THE PARENT, AFTER WHAT PERIOD OF TIME IN CARE DO YOU THINK IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO GIVE UP ATTEMPTS TO REHABILITATE THE CHILD AND TO MAKE ALTERNATIVE PLAN^S FOR HIS LONG TERM CARE?

Table 26

	Less than 6 months	6 months - 1 year	1-2 years	More than 2 years	5 years	No time limit	Total
Unqualified	0	5	0	0	1	1	7
Qualified	2	19	11	2	0	9	43
Total	2	24	11	2	1	10	50

One very interesting fact arising from this question is that while nine (21%) of the qualified social workers were unwilling to place an arbitrary time limit on their attempts at rehabilitation 32 (74.5%) replied that alternative plans for long term care should be made within a period of two years, and of these, two thirds felt that such plans should be made within one year. In fact the number of adoption placements made every year in the county of children other than very small babies is very small, and so one question that is immediately begged is what do respondents understand by the phrase "alternative plans for longer term care". If by this is meant long term fostering, to what extent is this perceived to be a satisfactory solution in the light of recent writing by Goldstein, Freud and Solnit,(op cit) Adcock (56) and McKey (57)? If on the other hand this implies that personal perceptions of what would constitute good practice are out of line with actual practice, is this symptomatic of a more general problem, in line with the findings of George (op cit) that social workers can apparently believe one thing but do another, or could it reflect a

a recent change in the climate of practice which has not yet been translated into case practice?"

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE ISSUE OF BLOOD TIES IN RELATION TO PLANS FOR LONG TERM SUBSTITUTE CARE?

Responses can be grouped into five categories.

1. At one extreme are the three respondents - one unqualified and two qualified - who said that blood ties are of paramount importance and that social workers should never give up attempts to rehabilitate a child.
2. Next came a group of two unqualified and 12 qualified respondents who said that it is hard to generalise about the importance of blood ties since every situation is unique and its importance will vary with such considerations as the age of the child, the quality of the mother/child relationship and the nature of other meaningful relationships the child has formed.
3. Third came a group of three unqualified social workers and 13 qualified who said that whereas blood tie is important and we should make every reasonable effort to reunite a child with his/her natural parents, there will be cases where we must accept that this is not going to be possible and where adoption or some other form of long term substitute care then becomes appropriate.
4. Next there are two groups of responses which are not very far removed from the above. These and the attitude of the previous group constitute by far the largest consensus.

(a) Blood tie is important but not paramount and ultimately the child's needs and best interests must come first - two unqualified and nine unqualified.

(b) Blood tie is important but primarily in the sense that a child's knowledge of his parents is vitally important to his sense of identity so that children, even if they are adopted, need to know about their roots and origins - four unqualified 13 qualified.

5. Finally five qualified social workers said that the concept of blood tie was not very important and four others went further and described it as meaningless or irrelevant.

Unfortunately this range of responses could not be placed into perfectly exclusive categories, with the result that the total number of responses exceeded the number of respondents.

Table 27 Categories of opinion on the importance of blood tie as a factor in planning long term substitute care.

Categories	1	2	3	4a	4b	5	Total
Qualified	2	12	13	9	13	9	58
Unqualified	1	2	3	2	4	0	12
Total	3	14	16	11	17	9	70

The wide range of opinions on this contentious and emotive issue reflects the current lack of clarity about how best to ensure a sense of security and permanence in the child who, for whatever reason, cannot return home to his natural parents.

Maluccio et al (58) refer to the principle of permanency planning as "the idea of removing the child as soon as possible out of temporary substitute care, and returning him or her to the biological family as the preferred alternative, or to an adoption home as the second priority or, if necessary, to another permanent alternative such as a family with legal guardianship". This approach has been given considerable impetus by the work of Rowe and Lambert (op cit) on drift and

of Goldstein, Frensdorf and Solnit (op cit). The latter state that "the child's well being, not the parents', nor the family's nor the child's agency must be determinative" (1980, P. 4) and this statement encapsulates the intention of refocussing child welfare services in a way which accepts the primacy of the needs of children over the claim for inherent advantages of the relationship between the biological parent and child.

Writers such as Brown (59), Pringle (60), Neilson (61) and Adcock (62) stress the importance of permanent homes for children as a developmental need, and in consequence a "right", and this need to ensure permanent homes for children in care lay behind much of the child care literature of the late 60's and early 70's with its concern about high fostering breakdown rates ((Trasler (63); Parker (op cit);) Jenkins (64); George (op cit); Kraus (65); Napier (66)) and their search for predictors of success.

The responses which point to the importance of natural parents for a child's sense of identity echo a growing reaction to the over-enthusiastic movement of children into adoptive homes which has been apparent in some quarters. As Morris (67) says "there is a ... danger that children will be rushed through care into placement without sufficient evaluation being made of either the child or his situation (Clark (68)). In the rush for security, the child's need for continuity with his family may be lost, and his identity shattered. This conclusion is based on the limited but significant evidence (Aldridge and Cautley (69)) together with a considerable amount of illustrative literature, that for successful adjustment in care a child needs either to retain contact with his parents on a regular basis or needs help to work through issues of who he is and why he is in care, so that he can move away from his natural family

and towards a permanent substitute home. This implies continuing work both with natural parents and directly with the child; and where appropriate allowing the child access to the decision making process" (pp 25-26) (supported by Solnit (70); Bush & Goldman (71); and Curtis (72)).

Summary

The fifty social work respondents who were interviewed emerged as a varied group amongst whom clearly discernable categories were hard to identify. Qualified practitioners were not significantly different in any consistent manner from unqualified, although a small sub-group constituting approximately one third of those holding professional qualifications appeared to have a more consciously "professional" self identity and approach to work in terms of their knowledge of certain texts, attendance of courses and membership of professional associations.

The average age of the group was 38 and of the total 82% were married, 12% single and 6% divorced. Both the qualified and the unqualified groups manifested a very wide range of theoretical knowledge and perspectives but with little evidence of a core body of theoretical knowledge being shared by the professionally trained social workers. There was equally little evidence of any conscious use of a common body of child care theory or research knowledge, although the influence of Rowe and Lambert was apparent in the responses of both qualified and unqualified respondents.

A considerable range of views emerged about the respective role of the residential sector and foster care although a large majority of respondents subscribed to the generalisation that foster care is almost invariably preferable to residential care.

The overall impression conveyed by these responses was that personal beliefs and personal experiences were likely to play a very significant part in any practice decisions in the absence of a clear theoretical perspective.

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CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS - CONTINUED

DECISION MAKING STYLE

The aim of this section of the study was to rate respondents on a scale running from rational at one extreme to intuitive at the other. These ideal type categories are inevitably somewhat arbitrary, but there is an assumption that the rational approach implies a willingness to approach a problem with an open mind, to gather together as much information as possible and to adopt a starting-from-first-principles approach; in contrast the intuitive approach is more circumscribed in the sense that it implies a more immediate decision, which in turn suggests an inclination to seek solutions within an existing repertoire of responses. In this sense the intuitive approach is akin to the incremental approach and reflects a greater concern for issues of eligibility or resource availability as opposed to a primary concern with the issue of client need.

Respondents were presented with two hypothetical cases and told that the way in which they would respond to the cases was of less importance than the means by which they would arrive at a decision. Their comments were then recorded verbatim and later rated either (a) rational (b) intermediate or (c) intuitive (incremental). Respondents were also asked to rank themselves according to three written characterisations of decision making style and these rankings were compared with my rankings. The characterisations were as follows:-

- (a) In making decisions I consciously structure my thoughts and go through a series of stages beginning with a clarification of the problem, leading to an identification of goals and alternative strategies for dealing with them, and culminating in a choice between these alternatives.
- (b) My decision making style is similar to the one described above in that there is a clear pattern to it, but it is less explicit and more varied.
- (c) My decision making style involves less conscious reflection than either of the above and is more intuitive than intellectual.
- (d) My decision making style is dissimilar to any of the above (if so, please describe).

In order to reduce the subjective element in my ranking, a third party was then asked to apply the three classifications to each written response and where a difference occurred between her ranking and mine, the basis of the decision was discussed and an agreed compromise reached. This useful antedote to any bias on my part was provided by a colleague who was employed by the Social Services Department as a Research Assistant and who divided the replies into the four categories on the basis of the criteria which I explained to her. There was remarkable similarity in our categorisation and only four responses were re-designated following discussion.

The Hypothetical Cases

1. The first case read "Imagine you are on duty in the office at 4.30 p.m. A young woman with a badly bruised face asks to see you. She is accompanied by a four year old child. She tells you that her husband has beaten her up, that she is afraid to return home but has nowhere else to stay, and asks you to receive her child into care overnight so that she can see a solicitor and obtain an injunction the following morning". The instruction was "tell me briefly how you would go about deciding what to do in this situation".

2. The second case read "You have written a Social Enquiry Report for a child who has just appeared in Court for a minor theft. You recommended a Supervision Order but the court has imposed a Care Order and made it clear that removal from home is thought desirable". The instruction here was as above.

Rating the replies as rational, intermediate or intuitive proved difficult and rather unsatisfactory. One of the main problems was that it was not the outcome that was being judged, but the process by which it was reached; different individuals could therefore reach the same conclusion by different routes and be rated at opposing extremes of the spectrum. An additional complication was that some respondents were inevitably better than others at articulating the thought process they adopted in reaching a decision. A third complication was the fact that the more experienced workers would be expected to have a fuller grasp of available options and resources, and so

would be less likely to have to start from first principles in assessing a problem. And finally those respondents who had dealt with similar or identical cases in practice might well have explored the options very fully before reaching a decision and so adopt an approach in subsequent cases which conveys a misleading impression that the judgement was reached quickly and intuitively.

Given these reservations my approach was to look in the responses for an inclination to elicit full details; an attempt to clarify the problem; to establish goals; to consider a variety of alternative strategies; and to consciously attempt to move from an identification of a need towards a preferred solution.

These characteristics were associated with a rational approach, which was categorised (a); An approach which indicated the existence of some but not all of these characteristics was categorised as (b); and one which indicated none was (c). Respondents were categorised for each of the two hypothetical cases, producing the categories (a) (ab) (b) (bc) and (c). Theoretically there was also scope for the category (ac) but in practice this never arose.

In order to simplify the results and to highlight differences, these five categories were subsequently reduced to three. If a rational approach was apparent with regard to one case but not another, this was judged on balance to indicate a rational style on the assumption that a more cursory decision making technique in the second case might reflect greater familiarity with the case example. At the other extreme, since an (a) - (c) combination never occurred and in order to offset the tendency to regress to the norm, I decided that a combination of (b) and (c) would be simplified to a (c) response. The two sets of tables subsequently produced were as follows:-

Table 28 Decision making categories

	(a)	(ab)	(b)	(bc)	(c)	Total
Qualified	7	7	12	7	10	43
Unqualified	1		3	2	1	7
Total	8	7	15	9	11	50

Table 29 Rounded-up categories

	(a)	(ab)	(b)	(bc)	(c)	Total
Qualified	14		12		17	43
Unqualified	1		3		3	7
Total	15		15		20	50

This contrasts with respondents' self rating.

Table 30 Self rating

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	Total
Qualified	15	21	7		43
Unqualified		3	3	1	7
Total	15	24	10	1	50

Overall approximately 33% of the qualified social workers rated themselves, and were rated by me, as highly rational in their decision making style, whereas among the unqualified group only one was rated by me as rational but none rated themselves in this category.

The contrast between tables 29 and 30 suggests that, unsurprisingly, there was a tendency in self rating to regress to the norm, and that this was more pronounced among qualified than among unqualified staff. In this respect it was perhaps surprising that an equal number of the qualified group in total rated themselves rational as were so rated by me.

Discrepancies between my rating and self rating were in the main remarkably small and exactly offset one another. While only 16 such ratings were identical, 28 of the 34 which were not were discrepancies of one point only. In only seven cases was a self rating at one end of the scale and my rating at another. Four of these were cases in which social workers perceived themselves as (c) - more intuitive than intellectual/rational - while I ranked them as rational. One such respondent was unqualified and three qualified. In addition three respondents - all qualified - rated themselves as rational but were rated by me as intuitive.

Interestingly members of these two sub-groups had some common characteristics. Of those with the less rational self image two were experienced and two inexperienced but they were generally younger, with ages of 28, 30, 33 and 35, than those with the more rational self image, who were aged 34, 37 and 43. Two of this group were inexperienced having been in their current posts for less

than two years and one experienced. In addition the three qualified respondents with the less rational self image all came from the same geographical division.

This latter finding suggested that there could be a tendency for the working environment to influence social workers professional self image and in order to explore this possibility my ratings and self ratings were analysed on the basis of local areas.

Table 31

Area A	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	Total
Self rating	3	2	4	1	10
My rating	6	4	0	0	10

Area B	(a)	(b)	(c)	Total
Self rating	2	4	1	7
My rating	1	2	4	7

	(a)	(b)	(c)	Total
Area C				
Self rating	5	7	0	12
My rating	3	3	6	12

	(a)	(b)	(c)	Total
Area D				
Self rating	4	6	3	13
My rating	4	2	7	13

	(a)	(b)	(c)	Total
Area E				
Self rating	1	5	2	8
My rating	1	4	3	8

These figures indicate significant differences between areas with respondents from Area A performing well on my rating but consistently under rating their own performance and respondents from Area C giving themselves a very much more rational rating than the one which I judged them to have earned.

Since it is possible to identify areas in which there is a significant discrepancy between ascribed rating and self rating, this may have something to do with morale or local self image, but unfortunately the nature of my research did not allow me to explore this possibility further.

In addition my findings about respondents whose self rating differed significantly from my rating of them suggested that self rating might vary not only with qualification but also with experience, and so in order to explore this possibility further results were analysed for discrepancies in rating in terms of experience. "Experienced" staff were defined for this purpose as those who had been in post for two years or longer, and "inexperienced" as those in post for less than two years.

Table 32

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	Total
Experienced					
Self rating	8	13	7	1	29
My rating	6	10	13	0	29
Inexperienced					
Self rating	7	11	3	0	21
My rating	9	5	7	0	21

Further sub-dividing the results to take account of the fact that all of the unqualified respondents are experienced gives the following picture.

Table 33

	a	b	c	d	Total
<u>Unqualified</u>					
<u>Experienced</u>					
Self rating		3	3	1	7
My rating	1	3	3		7
<u>Inexperienced</u>					
Self rating	0	0	0	0	0
My rating	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Qualified</u>					
<u>Experienced</u>					
Self rating	8	10	4	0	22
My rating	5	7	10	0	22
<u>Inexperienced</u>					
Self rating	7	11	3	0	21
My rating	9	5	7	0	21

This table suggests that while the overall numbers of experienced and inexperienced social workers rating themselves rational (a and b) as compared to more intuitive (c) are very similar, there are discrepancies between my rating and self-rating in the highly rational (a) category which indicate that some of the experienced social workers have over-rated their degree of rationality, whereas some of the inexperienced have under-rated themselves. However, the uncertain nature of these categories and the small numbers involved mean that no degree of statistical significance can be attributed to these results, even though they do prompt some speculative lines of enquiry.

Comparison of these results with Blau's (1) hypotheses about the impact of professional training are quite revealing. There appears to be, as he suggested, a difference in approach to client problems as between some qualified and unqualified staff. The inclination of some qualified social workers to adopt a rational, starting-from-first-principles approach is broadly in line with the anticipated tendency of qualified social workers to be "more flexible in their interpretation of client needs and solutions to them..." which thus seems to bear out one of Blau's assumptions about the likely impact of training. However a further assumption was that the effect of training would be to provide the social worker with a body of knowledge and skill and possibly a reference group of peers, which would effectively distance him from organisational and procedural constraints and leave him free to adopt a client-centred approach, as distinct from the hardened and somewhat cynical approach of the unqualified "old timers" that he had studied.

These figures suggest a rather different picture. Some of the older and more experienced social workers have a somewhat more rational self image but appear to adopt a more intuitive approach than some of their younger, less experienced colleagues. Whether this is a direct result of increasing experience and familiarity with particular situations and possible solutions, or whether it is simply symptomatic of a tendency to revert to a limited repertoire of responses is not clear. What it may in part reflect is a coming to terms with the organisational environment in which they operate, and this is an issue which is explored in the next section.

At the same time it is important to bear in mind the realistic limitations which should be placed on expectations of training. Much of the controversy surrounding the C.C.E.T.S.W. Working Party Report on a new training policy (2) reflects uncertainty about what a social work student can or should be expected to achieve during a two year period of training. Although an earlier report by the Training Council Working Group states that "The main task in social work education is to equip students with the knowledge and skills essential to effective social work practice" (3) there remains uncertainty about what knowledge is essential to social work practice and how to identify the necessary skills. An increasing body of opinion takes the view that a newly qualified social worker will take time to adapt to his new role in a work environment and that before being awarded a qualification he should therefore undertake a probationary year during which he will continue to be supervised closely. This reflects a recognition that it takes time for lessons learned during training to be integrated and incorporated into practice.

In effect what this implies is that a newly qualified social worker may be in much the same position as the inexperienced and unqualified social workers Blau describes, having to get to know the rules and constraints of a complex bureaucratic work environment and consequently going through a period of apparent preoccupation with questions of eligibility and concern about what is and is not permissible. Like a musician or sportsman, the social worker must become familiar with and master of certain basic techniques and conventions before becoming fully able to improvise and experiment, and this settling-in period will take time. The newly qualified social worker would therefore be expected to experience more uncertainty about his professional identity than his experienced colleagues, and in some individuals the first year or so of practice as a qualified social worker might well be characterised by a mixture of over-assertiveness about issues of professional autonomy combined with less certainty about actual professional identity.

On the other hand more experienced qualified practitioners might be expected to have come more fully to terms with the organisational context within which they operate, to be clearer about their professional role viz à viz their line managers, but also, perhaps, to be more likely to have adopted a particular repertoire of responses to certain categories of work.

This seems to be an inevitable process. As Brian Heraud (4) says with regard to medicine, "the nature of general medical practice seems to lead to the exacerbation of a more general condition of a professional practice, that of treating as routine and ordinary problems that to the patient or client seem crucial (Freidsan 1961). Here knowledge categories are so narrow that a whole

range of complaints may be seen to fall within a particular class for diagnostic purposes. This means the often premature categorisation of complaints which to the patient can appear to be an avoidance of what is to him the real and much more complex problem." This tendency was specifically identified in Social Work by Mayer and Timms (5) in their study of the views of sixty-one clients about the service they received from the Family Welfare Association. The most dissatisfied groups of clients were those seeking either material help or help in dealing with someone else who were treated by workers who were "insight-orientated". "These clients assumed that their workers would share their views concerning problem-solving and when this did not turn out to be the case, they imputed erroneous meanings to their workers' activities - ones, incidentally, which friends and relatives, due to their own unsophistication, were unable to correct. For example, the clients concluded that the worker was not interested in them, did not trust them, lacked the authority to take appropriate action and so forth. By leading clients to become angered or resigned, these erroneous imputations undermined the worker's efforts to help and served to drive the two parties further apart."

While this might be an extreme example of the failure of social workers to communicate effectively with the client, *leading them* to respond in a manner which *the client sees* as inappropriate, the underlying tendency which is so clearly illustrated is for the practitioner to adopt a characteristic approach to problem-solving and to attempt to fit the presented problem into his restricted set of responses.

PROFESSIONAL/BUREAUCRATIC ORIENTATION

The next section of the questionnaire was concerned with the professional/bureaucratic orientation of the respondent and was directly intended to test Blau's hypothesis that professional training would have the effect of freeing the social work practitioner from bureaucratic or peer group constraints in face of "professional" imperatives. More specifically his research indicated that:-

1. A commitment to high professional standards was directly associated with a tendency to criticise agency practices and procedures for interfering with services to clients; this could include criticism of legislation, Departmental practices and eligibility criteria.
2. That knowledge and skills acquired through training rendered workers less anxious and thus less rigid in their outlook.
3. That "an orientation to the profession as a reference group makes a worker somewhat independent of organisational pressures and thus more inclined to deviate from administrative procedures in the interests of professional service to clients".
4. That workers oriented to professional service were also more independent from peer group pressures than workers not so oriented; the former were more likely than their "bureaucratic" peers to differ from the majority of their work group in their judgement of their superiors.

Eight questions were devised which it was hoped would test this hypothesis:-

1. When you make a decision about client needs, to what extent do you think you are influenced by policy statements? Answers were as follows.

Table 34

	Not at all	To some extent	Very greatly	Total
Qualified	4	34	5	43
Unqualified	0	6	1	7
Total	4	40	6	50

While this indicates that only amongst qualified practitioners were there individuals who claimed to remain independent of policy statements - which might qualify in Blau's characterisation as "organisational pressures" - in pursuit of a professional commitment to client service, the number falling into this category represented fewer than 10% of the total.

2. The same question was asked with regard to "the current resource situation" and produced the following responses:-

Table 35

	Not at all		To some extent		Very greatly		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Qualified	2	4.6	17	39.5	24	55.8	43
Unqualified			3	43	4	57	7
Total	2	4	20	40	28	56	50

Here the proportion of both the qualified and unqualified groups falling into the categories "to some extent" and "very greatly" are very similar and although the only individuals claiming not to be influenced at all by the resource situation once again come from amongst the qualified group, the respondents concerned represent fewer than 5% of the total.

3. Respondents were then asked directly what their reaction would be if their assessment of the needs of a client and what should be done to serve them was at odds with that of the Department, most likely in the shape of their immediate line manager, who in this case would be a Principal Social Worker (Team Leader).

The options from which respondents were asked to choose were:-

- (a) That their initial assessment was wrong in that it failed to take full account of Departmental policy.
- (b) That they should continue to press their client's case, but on the basis that if their Principal Social Worker cannot be persuaded to change his mind, he retains the final decision making power.
- (c) That they should try to persuade the Principal Social Worker to change his mind and if necessary to act on their own assessment despite his opposition.

The assumption here was that those with the strongest "professional" orientation would be more likely than their "bureaucratic" counterparts to have the confidence and the independence necessary to stand by their own assessment in the face of organisational pressure. Responses were as follows.

Table 36

	(a)		(b)		(c)		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Qualified	1	2.3	19	44.2	23	53.5	43
Unqualified			4	57	3	43	7
Total	1	2	23	46	26	52	50

This indicates that 23 out of 43 (53%) of the qualified social workers would be willing to resist pressure from their line manager if they felt this to be in the interest of a client, but that a somewhat smaller proportion (43%) of the unqualified were also prepared to do so. Thus 26 in all - 52% of the total - stated that they would be willing in certain circumstances to pursue a course which they felt to be professionally correct, even in the face of direct opposition from their immediate Line Manager. This is an interesting and potentially far reaching conclusion to which I shall return.

4. Respondents were asked "Are you influenced in your attitudes by the attitudes and opinions of immediate colleagues?" According to Blau's hypothesis those having a more professional orientation would be more inclined to answer "not at all" than their bureaucratic colleagues, who would be "very much" influenced.

Table 37

	Very much		To some extent		Not at all		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Qualified	2	4.7	38	88.3	3	7	43
Unqualified	2	28.5	2	28.5	3	43	7
Total	4	8	40	80	6	12	50

Analysis of these results is difficult because whereas two of the unqualified respondents profess to being "very much" influenced by their colleagues, three say that they are influenced "not at all". The great majority of the qualified respondents (88.3%) as compared to only 28.5% of the unqualified fall into the middle category, saying that they are influenced "To some extent".

Any significant conclusions therefore depend upon whether the middle category is taken as indicative of a "professional" or a "bureaucratic" orientation. Since I concluded that this could only be a very arbitrary judgement and that it would be necessary to concentrate on the extreme

categories in designating respondents professional or bureaucratic it thus became increasingly apparent that this question would have to be omitted from the rating process. Even if this had not been the case the assumption being tested was thrown into doubt by the fact that immediate colleagues could be perceived in some instances as sources of "professional" opinion and in others as sources of pressure to conform to organisational expectations.

5. The next question was "Do you usually agree with colleagues in your attitude towards your superiors". Once again Blau's hypothesis would suggest that the more "professional" social workers would adopt a more independent line on this issue than would their bureaucratic counterparts.

Table 38

	Yes		Not always		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Qualified	12	28	30	70	1	2.3	43
Unqualified	1	14	6	86			7
Total	13	26	36	72	1	2	50

In fact 86% of the unqualified respondents stated that they did not always agree with colleagues in their attitudes towards their superiors, as against only 70% of the qualified and this finding is clearly at odds with Blau's expectations.

6. The sixth question was "would you favour a more formal Departmental policy towards record keeping, in which all cases were required to be written up and reviewed regularly".

Table 39

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Qualified	32	74	11	26	43
Unqualified	5	71.4	2	28.6	7
Total	37	72	13	26	50

Interpretation of these replies presents difficulties. Blau suggested that

whereas untrained social workers might be pre-occupied with the need to understand and to follow Department procedures, even at the expense of the interests of a client, "professional" staff would see the provision of client services as being of paramount importance and would wish to retain the freedom to choose not to write up a case if they felt that in doing so they would be spending time that could be better spent seeing clients.

This begs the question "what is seen as good "professional" practice?" Blau assumes that failure to write up a case might be justified on the grounds that client needs come first; It is equally possible that a trained social worker could argue that not to write up or review a case exposes a client to the risk of poor service if the social worker should leave or be taken ill. It is also possible to argue that the discipline of committing plans to paper is an important part of the diagnosis and ongoing review which is part of good practice. The reasons for the response are therefore more important than the response itself. Some respondents gave detailed reasons for answers but others did not, so it was not possible to say accurately whether a negative response stemmed from concern about client service, from an aversion to recording, or from a general disinclination to be subject to Departmental control. In the circumstances it seemed advisable to omit this question from the overall rating of respondents as either "professional" or bureaucratic".

7. Respondents were asked "Do you view supervision by your Principal Social Worker as primarily:-

- (a) A discussion between equals in which you are able to think through problems and alternative solutions?
- (b) An opportunity to ask for advice and guidance?
- (c) A means by which the Department can oversee and control the standard of your work with clients.

In line with Blau's general analysis it was assumed that "professional" workers would be more inclined to see supervision as a discussion between equals and that "bureaucratic" workers would tend to see it in terms of advice and guidance or control. Unfortunately the question did not distinguish between views about what supervision actually constitutes and what it should represent, and this complicates any interpretation.

Table 40

	(a) Discussion		(b) Advice/Guidance		(c) Oversight/ control		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Qualified	19	44.2	9	20.9	0	0	28	65
Unqualified	1	14.3	2	28.6	1	14.3	4	57
Total	20	40	11	22	1	2	32	64

	(ab)		(abc)		(dc)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Qualified	7	16.3	2	4.7	3	7	15	35
Unqualified	0	0	2	28.6	0	0	3	43
Total	7	14	4	8	3	7	18	36

Only one respondent, unqualified, saw supervision entirely in terms of control, although another 3, giving an overall total of 57% of the unqualified, acknowledged an element of control in the relationship. Amongst the qualified a large majority (81%) saw the supervisory relationship in terms of either a discussion between equals (44%), an opportunity to ask for advice and guidance (21%) or a combination of the two (16%), while only eight (19%) recognised an element of Departmental oversight and control. This does appear to confirm the view of the qualified social worker as having a greater sense of autonomy and independence from Departmental scrutiny and control. However it does not follow that this feeling stems directly from a sense of professional identity related to the fact of having received a professional training. It is equally possible that Departmental practice encourages trained practitioners, especially those who also have experience, to adopt this role and it is undoubtedly the case that within Kent the national regrading exercise carried out in 1979/80 had the effect of confirming the belief that practitioners graded at the highest level (level 3) had less need of supervision than level 1 or level 2 social workers and might have persuaded them that such supervision as they did receive would be seen as advisory and discretionary rather than as an integral part of the mechanism by which Departmental accountability was maintained.

8. The final question in this section asked "Is your attitude towards cuts in the Social Services Budget (1) that it is not your responsibility or (2) that it is a situation in which you should be directly involved in discussing priorities"?

Four of the qualified staff replied that this was not their responsibility while the remainder of the qualified and all of the unqualified felt that it was a situation in which they should be directly involved in discussing priorities. In these circumstances it was hard to attach any significance to the results and this question was therefore eliminated from the attempt to categorise respondents.

Taking the appropriate answers to the five relevant questions as indicators of either professional or bureaucratic orientation it is then possible to combine them in a matrix to obtain an overall picture of the degree of difference between qualified and unqualified respondents.

Table 41

	Professional		Bureaucratic		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Q1 Qualified	38	88	5	12	43	
Unqualified	6	85.7	1	14	7	
Total	44	88	6	12	50	
Q2 Qualified	19	44	24	56	43	
Unqualified	3	43	4	57	7	
Total	22	44	28	56	50	
Q3 Qualified	23	53.5	20	46.5	43	
Unqualified	3	43	4	57	7	
Total	26	52	24	48	50	
Q5 Qualified	31	72	12	28	43	
Unqualified	6	86	1	14	7	
Total	37	74	13	26	50	
Q7 Qualified	35	81	8	19	43	
Unqualified	5	71	2	29	7	
Total	40	80	10	20	50	
Overall Total						
Qualified	146	67.9	69	32.1	21.5	
Unqualified	23	65.7	12	34.3	35	

This analysis indicates that unqualified social workers score almost twice as many points overall on the professional scale as they do on the bureaucratic and that this is almost identical to the overall score for qualified staff. There is therefore no evidence that qualified staff generally have a more "professional" orientation than their unqualified colleagues in terms of the attitudes suggested by Blau. However there are significant differences in their responses to questions 3, 5 and 7. These suggest that qualified staff are slightly more willing than unqualified to act on their own assessment of client need in face of the disagreement of their Principal Social Worker; are more likely to agree with colleagues in their attitudes towards superiors; and are more likely to view supervision as either a discussion between equals or an opportunity to ask for advice and guidance. Whereas almost half of the qualified staff viewed supervision as a discussion between equals, only one of the unqualified respondents viewed it in this light.

However, Blau did indicate that the attitudes of unqualified social workers change over time as they become more familiar with and adjust to Departmental policies and procedures, and it is possible that a similar modification in attitude occurs amongst qualified staff. To test this possibility I analysed the material again, distinguishing between inexperienced qualified staff - those who had been in post for less than two years - and experienced qualified staff, who had been in post for two years or longer.

Fig. 42

	Professional		Bureaucratic		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Q1					
Inexperienced	17	81	4	19	21
Experienced	21	95.5	1	4.5	22
Total	38	88	5	12	43
Q2					
Inexperienced	9	43	12	57	21
Experienced	10	45.5	12	54.5	22
Total	19	44	24	56	43
Q3					
Inexperienced	13	62	8	38	21
Experienced	11	50	11	50	22
Total	24	56	19	44	43
Q5					
Inexperienced	15	71	6	29	21
Experienced	16	73	6	27	22
Total	31	72	12	38	43
Q7					
Inexperienced	20	95	1	5	21
Experienced	15	68	7	32	22
Total	35	81	8	19	43
Overall Total					
Inexperienced	74	70.5	31	29.5	105
Experienced	73	66.4	37	33.6	110

This suggests that there are only very slight overall differences between experienced and inexperienced respondents in their professional/bureaucratic orientation. However there are significant differences in their responses to specific questions. Experienced social workers were almost unanimous in saying in answer to the first question that they are not influenced in their assessment of a clients needs by policy statements. In contrast almost 20% of the inexperienced respondents felt that they were very greatly influenced by this factor. In answer to question 3, 12% more of the inexperienced staff stated that they would act on their own assessment of client need in face of opposition from a Principal Social Worker. And finally a considerably greater proportion of inexperienced social workers (95% as compared to 68%) saw supervision simply in terms of a discussion between equals or an opportunity to ask for advice and guidance, as opposed to a relationship which entails an element of oversight and control.

Taken together these individual differences in response between some experienced and inexperienced staff do suggest more general tendencies. The experienced respondents feel more able to put Departmental policy to one side when they are assessing client need, but when they come to discuss a case with their supervisor they are more willing to acknowledge his authority and to defer to it in cases of disagreement. In contrast some less experienced respondents appear to be assessing a clients need within the context of Departmental policy and to see the role of their Principal Social Worker essentially as that of a colleague with whom they can discuss a case before arriving at their own decision. These differences in

perception as to the respective role of social worker and supervisor have important implications for accountability and for the management of Social Services Departments.

Martin Davies (6) describes the fundamental role of the social worker as "contributing towards the maintenance of society by exercising some control over deviant members and allocating scarce resources according to policies laid down by the state but implemented on an individualized basis." He reaches this definition from the premise that, as Howe (7) has pointed out, social work can have no existence independently of the agencies in which it operates. In exploring the implications of such a role Davies points to the impact of the case of Maria Colwell and the public enquiry which followed her death at the hands of her step-father. "First, although it is recognised that the social worker's role as arbiter in areas of conflict and risk is both essential and difficult, and although the discretionary power vested in the social worker is acknowledged to be necessary and appropriate, it is nevertheless emphasised that the contemporary wishes and feelings of society as a whole (though obviously heterogenous and difficult to specify) have to be taken into account by the social worker in the decisions that he makes The second effect (has been that) social workers' decision-making in critical areas (has become) more formalised, more rigorously recorded, and more open to investigation and assessment by administrative and political superiors."

The exact balance of decision-making power as between individual practitioners and their line managers inevitably remains imprecise, and this fact is echoed in the reference in the Barclay report (8) to "Confusion and

ambiguity among social workers as to how far they were expected to act on their own judgement, and how far they were simply expected to carry out the orders of their departments". In fact Barclay elaborates further, saying that two additional themes which emerged from the evidence received by the working party were "a degree of frustration at the complexity of the structure of Social Services Departments, and at the difficulty of getting decisions made or resources allocated" and "a feeling among social workers that their managers neither understood nor supported them".

Davies' model of social work which is an admittedly consensus as opposed to a conflict model suggests a role for the social worker as an assessor of need, with the line manager acting as a gatekeeper to resources and an arbiter of departmental policy. However it is also possible to envisage social workers operating as freer agents within the known limits of policy and resource availability. As the Barclay report puts it "As we see it, the challenge for local authorities is to find ways to reconcile controls with a substantial and consistent degree of delegation to social workers. Much of the present tension seems to arise from the fact that social workers have a great deal of de facto discretion and that they need to have it in order to help people properly, yet they work in a structure in which, in theory they have little or none The challenge for social workers is to use their delegated authority and discretion in the best interests of their clients and work with each other and other disciplines according to an explicit understanding of respective roles and responsibilities." (9)

These general statements are, perhaps inevitably, stronger on analysis than on prescription, but Barclay does go on to say "In calling for greater

delegation to social workers, we do recognise that there are reasonable limits which should be set to this process, for the protection both of the public and of the social workers themselves. Some decisions (for instance in child abuse cases) are so critical that we think that they must always be shared, except in dire emergency; and we would draw a very clear distinction between the independence to be accorded to a very experienced practitioner and the close supervision needed by a social worker newly qualified. (Some of our evidence indeed, suggested that too much freedom is given to inexperienced social workers rather than too little)". (10)

In light of such general lack of certainty and of unanimity about the appropriate relationship between a social work practitioner and his employing authority, it is impossible to draw very definite conclusions from these results. However, as I shall suggest in my concluding chapter, there is strong evidence here that the models of "professionalism" which have been used in the past are inadequate for social work, as for increasing numbers of professions which are pursued with ⁱⁿ the context of large bureaucratic organisations. This is all the more so when such organisations exist within a local government setting.

However, returning to the current analysis, it is apparent that such differences in attitude could possibly be associated not only with experience but also with age, with, for example, young respondents being either more radical and more opposed to restrictions and procedures than their older counterparts, or, alternatively, less self-confident and less willing to stand by their own judgement. In order to explore these possibilities the responses of qualified social workers were compared on the

basis of age. The average age of the qualified group was 37 years. Those below the age of 37 were classified as young qualified and those of 37 and over as older qualified.

Table 43

	Professional		Bureaucratic		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Q1 Younger	21	87.5	3	12.5	24
Older	17	89.5	2	10.5	19
Total	38	88.4	5	11.6	43
Q2 Younger	11	46	13	54	24
Older	8	42	11	58	19
Total	19	44	24	56	43
Q3 Younger	13	54	11	46	24
Older	11	58	8	42	19
Total	24	56	19	44	43
Q5 Qualified	18	75	6	25	24
Unqualified	13	68	6	32	19
Total	31	72	12	28	43
Q7 Qualified	19	79	5	21	24
Unqualified	16	84	3	16	19
Total	35	81	8	19	43

This analysis reveals a remarkable degree of similarity of response between older and younger respondents, with no really significant difference in attitude on any of the questions.

As there is no evidence of a correlation between age and "professionalism" a further possibility to explore was that attitudes might be more directly related to the immediate work environment than to background factors.

Responses were therefore analysed by geographical division.

<u>Table 44</u>								
	Professional		Bureaucratic		Total			
Division A	No.	%	No.	%				
1	6	86	1	14	7			
2	4	57	3	43	7			
3	6	86	1	14	7			
5	3	43	4	57	7			
7	5	71	2	29	7			
Total	24	69	11	31	35			

		Professional		Bureaucratic		Total	
Division B	No.	%	No.	%			
1	8	100	0	0	8		
2	5	63	3	27	8		
3	2	25	6	75	8		
5	7	88	1	12	8		
7	5	62.5	3	37.5	8		
Total	27	67.5	13	32.5	40		

		Professional		Bureaucratic		Total	
Division C	No.	%	No.	%			
1	6	67	3	33	9		
2	5	56	4	44	9		
3	5	56	4	44	9		
5	7	78	2	22	9		
7	7	78	2	22	9		
Total	30	67	15	33	45		

	Professional		Bureaucratic		Total
Division D	No.	%	No.	%	
1	11	92	1	8	12
2	3	25	9	75	12
3	9	75	3	25	12
5	9	75	3	25	12
7	11	92	1	8	12
Total	43	70	17	30	60

	Professional		Bureaucratic		Total
Division E	No.	%	No.	%	
1	6	86	1	14	7
2	2	29	5	71	7
3	2	29	5	71	7
5	5	71	2	29	7
7	7	100	0	0	7
Total	22	63	13	27	35

The differences between Divisions can be seen clearly when each question is cross tabulated by division and by the proportion of "professional" responses.

Table 45

	Division	A	B	C	D	E
Question	1	86	100	67	92	86
	2	57	63	56	25	29
	3	86	25	56	75	29
	5	43	88	78	75	71
	7	71	62.5	78	92	100
Total		69	67.5	67	70	63

Whereas the differences in the overall proportion of respondents falling into each of the two major categories (professional/bureaucratic) is small, ranging from 63-70% in the professional category, the variations between specific questions are very considerable. For example Division D has the smallest proportion of social workers (25%) giving a "professional" response to question 2 - implying that most social workers within this Division are greatly influenced by the current resource situation; however this division also has the second highest proportion (92%) giving a "professional" response to question 7 - suggesting that the vast majority of social workers in this division see supervision primarily as a discussion between equals or an opportunity to ask for advice and guidance.

Similarly all of the respondents in Division B take policy statements into account in making decisions about client need, as compared to only 67% from Division C; but only 25% of respondents from Division B would take action on a case in face of opposition from their Principal Social Worker, as compared to 86% from Division A.

This does appear to indicate very strongly the existence of distinct divisional philosophies of practice.

This fact confirms on a smaller, more local scale, the variations in practice which Packman (11) revealed in 1968 on the basis of a detailed study of fifty local authorities. In this study Packman, having explored variations in "need", the range of services and "the structure, the policies and the work of the children's departments themselves", concluded that "no single explanation can adequately account for variations in the proportion of children in care". A subsequent study of two comparable authorities with significantly different proportions of children in care (Packman 12) also failed to establish conclusively which factors have most bearing on such outcomes. However, what she did emphasise was that significant differences in policy and in practice do exist and my results do appear to show quite clearly that such differences can exist within Departments as well as between Departments, and that they do appreciably influence the way in which social workers view their role within the organisation and thus the way in which they approach the task of making decisions on individual children.

Summary

Thus far three broad tendencies have emerged. Firstly, whilst qualified social workers do not have a consistent orientation towards practice which is measurably more "professional" than that of unqualified colleagues, they do as a group appear to be more inclined to make autonomous decisions and to use their supervisor as a sounding board rather than as a "controller" with the power to sanction such decisions.

Secondly, this general tendency towards independence of decision making and subsequent action is more pronounced amongst inexperienced qualified social workers than it is amongst their colleagues with two or more years of practical experience. This latter group seem to see their role somewhat more in terms of assessing client need with little regard to policy constraints and of subsequently checking out such issues with their supervisor. Consequently they are much more willing to acknowledge the managerial authority of their supervisors and less emphatic about their professional autonomy as practitioners. This finding is rather disturbing in view of the uncertainty within some Social Services Departments about the role and responsibilities of their middle managers vis a vis their social work practitioners. The three tier grading of social workers which was introduced nationally in 1979/80 was based on an assumption that more experienced staff would require less supervision and would be paid more for exercising greater individual responsibility. It would appear that among the respondents in this sample of practitioners there exists a group which resists the concomitant assumption that there is a need for close supervision and oversight by an experienced managerial supervisor in the period immediately following qualification.

And finally there is a very pronounced difference of approach between both qualified and unqualified social workers coming from different geographical divisions, suggesting the existence of distinct local philosophies of practice.

This raises the question, are such differences in attitude and approach reflected in corresponding differences in outcome for the children who are the subject of social work decisions? and this is the issue which is explored in the next section.

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CHAPTER SIX

RESULTS CONTINUED

OUTCOMES

OUTCOME OF PERIOD IN CARE

The fifty cases covered in this study are all very different and it would be foolhardy on the basis of fairly scant and superficial case details to try to draw any clear conclusions.

However as I have explained in earlier chapters there is a growing weight of evidence which emphasises the importance of early decision making in child care cases. This is justified partly on the basis that a child's time scale does not leave room for undue delay in reaching decisions about his or her future; and partly on the grounds that the danger of a child "drifting" into long term care exists even in the first few weeks of care; that it becomes increasingly serious after as short a time as three months; and that it has become a real likelihood after six.

It therefore seems reasonable to concentrate initially on two issues. Whether the child has returned home within six months of his placement in care; and whether the outcome after six months is in line with that predicted by the Social Worker at the point of his initial placement.

The analysis of these two questions has been carried out as a cross tabulation

with five other factors which it was felt might have some bearing on the outcome, namely qualification, marital status, parenthood experience and geographical location.

Fig. 46

		Whether still in care after six months					
		Yes		No		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%		
Unqualified		2	29	5	71	7	
Qualified		23	53.5	20	46.5	43	
Total		25	50	25	50	50	

		Whether outcome as predicted					
		Yes		No		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%		
Unqualified		4	71	3	29	7	
Qualified		31	72	12	28	43	
Total		35	70.5	15	29.5	50	

This indicates that qualified Social Workers are less likely than their unqualified colleagues to have been able to return the child home within six months, but that the outcome is equally likely in both groups to be in line with prediction. This might suggest that qualified Social Workers are handling more complex or intractable cases in which there is less likelihood of rehabilitation. Although my research provides no direct evidence to support this possibility, there is a widely based assumption that in practice most local authority employers make sure that only qualified social workers deal with difficult child care cases. Outcomes among children supervised by qualified social workers were next analysed by experience. (Using the earlier definition of "experienced" as implying two or more years experience since qualification).

Table 47

Whether still in care after six months

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Inexperienced	12	57	9	43	21
Experienced	11	50	11	50	22
Total	23	53.5	20	46.5	43

Whether outcome as predicted

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Inexperienced	16	76	5	24	21
Experienced	14	64	8	36	22
Total	30	70	13	30	43

This indicates that the differences in outcome between children supervised by experienced and inexperienced Social Workers are very slight after six months in care.

However one factor which might be expected to have some bearing on the way such cases are handled, regardless of experience or qualification, is whether practitioners have children of their own. The same information was therefore analysed on the basis of marital status and parental status.

Table 48

Whether still in care after six months

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
<u>Unqualified</u>					
Married with children	2	50	2	50	4
Married without children	0	0	3	100	3
Total	2		5		7
<u>Qualified</u>					
Single	4	66	2	33	6
Married with children	12	46	14	54	26
Married without children	3	27	8	73	11
Total	19	44	24	56	43

Whilst it is difficult to attribute much significance to these results, and while any attempts at interpretation can only be at the level of speculation, it is interesting to note that in both the qualified and the unqualified groups

there is a pronounced tendency for children supervised by married respondents without children to return home sooner than those supervised by respondents with children. Approximately half of all children supervised by married respondents with children were still in care after six months. This raises the interesting possibility that regardless of training, the fact of having children of one's own might affect judgements as to what constitutes satisfactory care for other peoples children. Possibly the effect is to lead practitioners to apply different expectations of care to the parents of children in care; possibly it results in values about the adequacy of substitute care being reassessed. Unfortunately the current research was not designed to explore such potentialities, with the consequence that I can do no more than note an intriguing development.

One way in which the differences in outcome between respondents with and without children could be explained would be that for some reason they happen to be dealing with different types of children or alternatively that they make their plans on the basis of different expectations. It is therefore important to establish whether outcomes were in accord with predictions.

Table 49

Whether still in care after six months

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
<u>Unqualified</u>					
Married with children	2	50	2	50	4
Married without children	2	66	1	33	3
Total	4	57	3	43	7

Whether outcome as predicted

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
<u>Qualified</u>					
Single	3	50	3	50	6
Married with children	18	69	8	31	26
Married without children	10	91	1	9	11
Total	31	72	12	28	43

These results suggest that ^hwereas qualified Social Workers were rather more successful than their unqualified colleagues at predicting the outcome of their decisions, those married respondents without children were consistently more successful than those with, regardless of whether they were qualified.

Taken together these tables suggest that married Social Workers without children are more likely than those with to predict an early return home for children coming into care and to find their prediction justified. Respondents with children of their own are rather less successful at predicting the outcome of a period in care and almost twice as likely to find that children they have taken into care remain in care longer than six months.

The next factor which needed to be considered was the differential effect of the working environment. Results were therefore analysed by local division.

Table 50

Whether still in care after six months

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Division A	6	60	4	40	10
B	5	62.5	3	37.5	8
C	6	54.5	5	45.5	11
D	7	54	6	46	13
E	1	12.5	7	87.5	8
Total	25	50	25	50	50

Whether outcome as predicted

	Yes		No		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Division A	7	70	3	30	10
B	5	62.5	3	27.5	8
C	5	45.5	6	54.5	11
D	11	85	2	15	13
E	7	87.5	1	12.5	8
Total	35	70	15	30	50

The variations here are much greater than expected. Over 60% of children had not returned home within six months in one division compared to only 12.5% in another. The range of accurate prediction was almost as great with unexpected outcomes in over 50% of cases in one division and only 12.5 in another.

Local factors are therefore emerging as by far the most significant variable for outcome and this therefore raises the question of whether local variations in outcome correlate in any way with measurable variables on the professional/bureaucratic scale. First, however, it is necessary to look at one of the intermediate outcomes that a recent DHSS study of Boarding Out

(1) has highlighted as an important factor dictating eventual outcome - namely whether those cases remaining in care were reviewed at the statutorily required intervals of three months and six months.

Number of reviews completed with regard to children still in care after six months.

Table 51	Within 3 months		Within 6 months		No review		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Division A	3	50	2	33	1	17	6
B	3	60	1	20	1	20	5
C	3	50	2	33	1	17	6
D	1	14	3	43	3	43	7
E	1	100	0	0	0	0	1
Total	11	44	8	32	6	24	25

Although the numbers involved in the last category - children still in care after six months who have not been reviewed - are very small, it is interesting to note that if the Divisions are ranked 1-5 with the first division being that with the largest proportion of unreviewed cases, the ranking is D, B, A, C, E. If divisions are similarly ranked with regard to the proportion of children still in care after six months the ranking is B, A, C, D, E. Finally, a ranking for accuracy of prediction of outcome is C, A, B, D, E. The consistent factor here is that Division E comes last in each ranking having the smallest number of unreviewed cases, the smallest number of cases still in care after six months and the smallest number of unpredicted outcomes.

There is of course no contradiction in being willing to consult a Principal Social Worker but to disregard his advice in case of a serious disagreement. On the face of it Social Workers in Division A take this line, being likely to consult their Principal Social Worker, but also willing to act on their own judgement in face of his opposition, and in doing so acknowledging an element of control and oversight in the supervisory relationship. On the other hand social workers in Division D appear disinclined to consult their Principal Social Worker and willing to act on their own judgement, but in taking this stand are unwilling to recognise an element of control or oversight in the supervisory relationship. The fact that respondents in Division B are conscious of a control element and unwilling to act on their own in face of opposition appears at odds with their failure to mention consultation with a Principal Social Worker, but on the other hand it is possible that the practice is so routine a matter that it is taken as read and was not therefore referred to directly by practitioners describing how they would handle the hypothetical cases.

What does stand out again is that in Division E there is a consistent inclination to consult the Principal Social Worker and to acknowledge a control element in the supervisory relationship and a corresponding unwillingness to contemplate acting on individual judgement in the face of opposition. In other words the existence of some managerial structure and constraint and the absence of a strongly individualistic emphasis on personal autonomy is, in this instance, positively correlated with regular reviews, early return home and predicted outcome.

Of the children placed during the research, 23 were girls and 27 boys. They varied in age from several months to 17 years, as shown Fig. 53.

Table 53

	Under	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18
Age	1 yr																	
No	6	0	3	4	2	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	4	5	15	2	1

The group which is clearly least evident here is the pre-teenage school child, for only eight (16%) fall into this category, whereas 15 (30%) are pre-school children and the largest group, 27 (54%) are teenagers.

25 (50%) of these children were immediately placed in foster homes, one being with a view to adoption. This included all of the younger age group with the exception of two who were placed in day nurseries and one who stayed overnight in hospital and then, following a case conference, was placed with his grandparents. Of the pre-teenage group 6 out of 8 (75%) were placed with foster parents. However the two who were not both came from a division which had adopted the policy of using a locally managed resource, known as a Family Support Centre, for short term

placement and assessment of all children coming into care. This was a policy which both the Social Workers involved agreed with and supported, and so they had readily placed the two children concerned in the childrens home, without finding it necessary to consider alternative placements.

It was therefore amongst the last category, that of teenager, that there was most likelihood of a placement in a non-fostering setting. Of the 20 who were placed residentially, nine went to local remand, assessment centres and four further children from the local office using a Family Support Centre were placed there in accord with local policy. This left seven children, one of whom had a young baby and was placed in a mother and baby home and the remaining six of whom were placed in childrens homes local to the area in which they came into care.

Length of Time in Care

0-4 yr olds (pre-school age)

6 returned home within one month
3 returned home within six months
4 were placed in long term foster care
1 was placed for adoption
1 was placed with his grandparents
15 Total

5-12 year olds (pre teenage school children)

1 returned home within one month
3 returned home within six months
3 were placed in long term foster care
1 was placed in long term residential care
8 Total

Over 13 years (teenagers)

5 returned home within one month
6 returned home within six months
9 were placed in long term foster care (including 3 in KFPS (Professional
Fostering Scheme))
1 was placed with grandparents

4 were placed in CHES (long term residential care)

1 was placed in residential school

1 was returned to his home town of Manchester

27 Total

From this analysis it does appear that about half of the children coming into care are returning home within six months and that, unsurprisingly, the teenage group are most likely to remain in care longer, usually in foster care (33%) but alternatively in residential care with schooling on the premises (15%). 60% of pre-school children returned home within 6 months of coming into care, compared to 50% of pre-teenage school children and only 40% of teenagers.

Unexpected outcomes

Of the 50 placements made, 35 turned out broadly as anticipated by the social workers concerned. That is to say that six months later the child had either returned home or remained in care in line with the prediction made at the outset, and, if still in care, was in a foster home or residential establishment much as the Social Worker had expected.

In 15 cases the outcome was not as expected and of these cases, two were of pre-school age children, two were of school age, pre-teenage children, and the remaining 11 were teenagers, thus reinforcing the impression that this is the most difficult group to place and to plan for.

Pre-school age children

Both the children in this category were four months old. The first was received into care for the second time after failing to thrive. She was delicate at birth and had since required special medical attention which her depressed and unstable mother was unable to give. Her mother is divorced, has one other child and has been known to the Social Services Department for some time.

The Social Worker saw the child's need as being experience of a stable family environment in a local foster home and placed the little girl with the foster family who had looked after her during her previous period in care. Although it was anticipated that she could return home within six months, her mothers home circumstances and ability to cope did not improve sufficiently to make this possible and after six months the child was still placed with the same foster family.

The second case was a baby boy who was received into care at his mothers request when she felt unable to cope. He was born with a congenital heart defect. His mother is married for the second time and has three children by her first marriage and one other by her second.

The present child was unwanted, has spent most of his young life in hospital and mother is said not to have bonded with him. His mother placed him privately with foster parents and when this situation was referred to Social Services by his Health Visitor the mother requested reception into care.

The Social Worker planned to place the baby with local foster parents for between six and twelve months who would be able to work with the parents and help them come to terms with him. In fact the parents initially agreed to this plan but within two weeks had changed their mind and taken their child home. The Social Worker felt there was insufficient evidence to justify care proceedings, but that the parents were likely to try to hide their inability to cope which might well result in the child coming into care again in the future. In fact six months later the child had experienced three further short periods in care.

Pre-teenager school children

There are two children in this category. The first is an eight year old boy who was received into voluntary care, along with his two sisters, following an attack by his mother on the eldest girl and a statement that she was unable to cope with them. The family had been known to the Social Services for many years and to the current Social Worker for four years. In the previous nine months their father had left home repeatedly. Their mother had a history of psychiatric illness and had experienced increasing difficulty in looking after and controlling her children.

The Social Worker was able to place the children together with foster parents who would prefer a definite long term placement. They already have two adopted children and one foster child. The Social Worker anticipated that the father, who had stated his intention of resuming care of the children once he had been rehoused by the Council, would insist on their return home within one or two

months, but that this situation would prove intolerable and might produce circumstances which would justify Care Proceedings. In fact the request from father to resume care never materialised and six months later the children were still placed with their foster parents.

The second child is aged 5 years. She was being raised by her subnormal father with support from the Social Services and was received into care after her father began to cohabit with a woman who was described as "damaged" and as being jealous of his daughters. The aim was to reduce tensions which has arisen at home, to assess the girls needs and to keep her in care for between three and six months while it was decided how best to help her. In this case her father requested her return home after six weeks and there were insufficient grounds for refusal. The Social Worker anticipated that there might be a further reception into care or Care Proceedings, but six months later the girl was at home with her father and step mother.

Of the four cases mentioned so far, two returned home unexpectedly, while two remained in care longer than expected.

Teenage children

Of the 11 children in this group, one 17 year old boy was on remand and was returned to Manchester. Another, a 15 year old girl with an illegitimate baby was placed in a mother and baby home to establish whether she could cope with the baby and wished to do so. Six months later she had been moved to a long term foster family and the baby had been placed for adoption.

Four of the remainder were unexpectedly in care after six months, while the other five had returned home within six months against the expectation of their respective Social Workers.

One of the four who remained in care longer than predicted was aged 14 and the others were all 15.

The 14 year old was a boy who was received into care when he became unmanageable at home and consistently failed to attend school. The Social Worker had attempted to work with the family for the six months prior to his placement in care. The intention was to place him for between 3-6 months in a local residential Family Centre to provide some discipline and structure and to provide an opportunity to attempt to improve his relationship with his mother. Six months later he had not moved home.

A fifteen year old from the same local office had a similar record, having been placed in a local residential Family Centre after refusing to return home. There was a history of difficulties and "mismanagement" by his parents. In fact attempts to rehabilitate him with his parents failed and after six months he had been transferred to a long term foster home.

A further case was of a 15 year old girl who was detained by Police on a Place of Safety Order when her mother and step father refused to have her home. She had run away repeatedly, was described as defiant towards her parents and said by them to be sexually promiscuous. Prior to being placed in care she had been missing for a week. Her Social Worker placed her in a local foster home with a

view to assessing and helping to improve the relationship of the girl with her mother and returning her home within six weeks. This did not work out as planned and the girl remained in care for more than six months.

The final case was of a 15 year old boy remanded to care on offences of burglary and theft. His Social Worker felt him to have a good relationship with his mother but decided that he needed a period of control and separation from his current peer group. He was therefore placed in a Community Home with Education for a period of 3-6 months with the intention of then returning him home. Six months later this had not proved possible.

Two final details of interest are firstly that three of the unexpected outcomes arose in cases handled by unqualified social workers, two being cases of early return home and one of a prolonged stay in care. This is not a significantly higher proportion than would normally have been expected from the population in question. Secondly, only one local office produced more than three unexpected outcomes, and three of these, representing 60% of the total, were early returns home of teenagers. What is noteworthy here is that this local office was the only one to be using a local Family Support Centre, to which children could be admitted for short term assessment and treatment and in which the close involvement of natural parents would be encouraged.

Summary

There are variations in outcome as between cases managed by qualified and unqualified social workers and also between married social workers with and without children, the latter group being more likely to have returned children home within six months of their coming into care. There are more pronounced differences in the handling of cases and in outcome as between social workers from different local offices, and the local work environment has emerged as by far the most significant variable for outcome. There is some evidence to suggest that offices which have a clear and acknowledged managerial role for Principal Social Workers are more likely to have reviewed cases remaining in care for more than three months, and also more likely to have returned children home within six months of coming into care.

However it should also be noted that 70% of placements turned out broadly as expected by the social workers concerned; that the remaining cases were complex and outcomes correspondingly hard to anticipate; and that the largest group in terms of overall numbers, unexpected outcomes and likelihood of remaining in care longer than six months was that of teenagers.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research has been to explore, by way of a survey of fifty social workers and fifty child placements made by them over a period of nine months, the question, "What factors influence decisions about where children who come into care are placed and for how long?" In pursuing the issue of what assumptions and considerations lie behind such decisions, the research has also begun to probe the part that training appears to play in practice. The particular concerns here have been the extent to which theoretical or research based knowledge influences practitioners and the degree to which a sense of professional self-identity effects styles of decision making. Running through these questions has been a concern about the extent to which social work can be described as a profession, or even a semi-profession, and the problems that arise for any aspiring profession within the context of a local authority bureaucratic setting.

In the preface to "Children Who Wait" Parker (1) stated that "The reasons why so many children wait in uncertainty are complex. They are a mixture of the child's characteristics and problems, the supply of substitute parents, the attitudes of social workers and the policies and traditions of the agencies which employ them. Since it is these last two elements which are most within our power to modify it is here that improvements must first be sought." This study has focussed particularly on the last two elements and in doing so has confirmed the complexity of their inter-relationship; the extent to which a range of very recent and significant changes in practice and policy co-exist

with outmoded ideas and traditions; and the real and far-reaching difficulties of putting theory and knowledge into practice.

The Social Workers

The social workers covered by the survey were somewhat older and more experienced than might have been anticipated, and certainly more so than their popular image would have led one to expect. The great majority of the group - 86% - were qualified. However amongst this group there was little evidence of a shared knowledge of certain key texts on child care. Only two pieces of work - the writings of John Bowlby and the book "Children Who Wait" by Rowe and Lambert - were known by the majority of respondents. In view of this finding it was perhaps unsurprising that there was no clear evidence of theoretical or research based knowledge being consciously deployed in either real or hypothetical practice situations. A consistent picture emerged of practitioners forming decisions on the basis of personal beliefs, often seeming to derive from, or to have been reinforced by, personal experience, and in a manner which was strongly influenced by the practice ethos which prevailed in their local office.

The general impression conveyed by the social workers as a group was of individuals who were sincere, concerned, well motivated and often possessing well integrated views about their task. The nature of the work, the process by which applicants are selected by both Social Services Departments and professional training courses and the predominant values and techniques associated with social work might be expected to ensure that there are certain basic similarities in outlook between the majority of practitioners. However

their views on more detailed issues such as child care remain essentially individual and subjective. There was little clear impression of a shared philosophical or knowledge base and an absence of any indication of the existence of a common supportive framework of policy or practice.

Social Work Practice

Undoubtedly this tendency towards an atheoretical and subjective approach has been exacerbated by the fact that many of the findings and opinions expressed in the child care literature are either contradictory or hard to translate into clear practice guidelines. It seems unarguable that this lack of clarity and consensus must have played a part in creating a situation in which many practitioners were confused about the respective roles of residential and foster care and in which a great majority appeared to subscribe to the simplistic view that any form of foster care will almost invariably be preferable to residential care. While much of Bowlby's original work may have been, as Rowe has said (2), "frequently misunderstood" and has subsequently been revised, the generally negative view of residential care which so many social workers have must, at least in part, be a legacy of the perception that many of them acquired of the concept of maternal deprivation. This negative view might well have been reinforced as a result of a growing awareness of the danger of drift for children in residential care as revealed by Rowe and Lambert's seminal study.

These simplified or confused attitudes add weight to the view expressed by Triseliotis (3) that "In general we are suffering from the absence of a clearer picture of the different forms of foster care. Because research so far has been rather too general and non-specific, we still tend to look upon fostering as a

blanket type of service and we have failed to identify and evaluate the distinctive characteristics of each class and type of fostering and which group of children it can serve best". Until this problem has been tackled we shall continue to experience the complication first revealed by George (op cit) of recruiting foster parents who are motivated to provide substitute family care and having social workers attempting to use them as "inclusive" or "professional" foster parents in a manner which lays emphasis on the temporary nature of the arrangement and on the foster parents acting as carers engaged along with others and the parents in the restoration or permanent rehabilitation of the child.

While this aspect of placement practice remains unclear the full involvement of natural parents in the placement of their children will continue to present avoidable difficulties. For much of the feeling of rejection that George and others identified amongst natural parents arose not from a conscious intention by social workers to exclude them but from an often unconscious tendency to collude with "exclusive" foster parents. The overwhelming majority of social workers who took part in this study viewed parental visiting of children in care and of residential and foster placements prior to placement as desirable. Nevertheless of those who qualified their responses, 60% said that it very rarely happened in practice that a prospective placement was visited by the parents either immediately before or after a child was moved. If simple visiting presents such difficulties, how much more difficult would it be to involve natural parents fully in planning and arranging the placement of their children? These findings appear to further echo the conclusion of Triseliotis with regard to adoption

that "with few exceptions, work with natural parents, the child and the adopters, bore little relation to standards of practice suggested in the social work literature" (4).

Nevertheless, while a partial understanding of the work of Bowlby and of Rowe and Lambert can result in a simplistic philosophy of child care, there is also evidence that such ideas are beginning to be refined. The danger of drift is increasingly being recognised as applying equally to children in foster care as to those in residential care, and this has resulted in a questioning of the benefits of long term foster care for children growing up away from their parents. Similarly Bowlby's work is being revised by writers such as Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (op cit) who lay emphasis on the need of a growing child for stable psychological parent figures. The philosophy of permanence planning espoused by McKey and Adcock (op cit) lays stress on the belief that such parenting requires a degree of commitment and a legal framework which is stronger than that offered by long term fostering.

Taken together, theoretical ideas and research findings concerning the "normal" phases of separation; the dangers of "drift" and of the severance of family ties; the consequent need for clear, early planning and decision-making with the full involvement of natural parents; and the complex implications of permanence planning, do provide a basis upon which a more coherent framework for child care practice could be built. A rudimentary awareness of some aspects of these ideas did exist amongst the practitioners surveyed in this study, albeit in an inchoate form. Given the strong influence of local, and apparently very variable, philosophies of practice, and also the popularity of in-service

training as a means of keeping abreast of social work theory and knowledge, there does appear to be considerable scope for Social Services Departments to develop and to propound explicit child care policies which incorporate clearer placement guidelines and to use the management structure more effectively to ensure that such guidelines are adhered to.

There would seem to be similar scope for professional training courses to adopt a clearer and more uniform approach in their teaching of child care and to provide practitioners with a firmer perspective from which to judge good child care practice. If what was taught was more directly geared to the needs of practice, it is likely that the impact of training on practice would be greater than it presently appears to be.

Social Work Training

The point has already been made that much of the research which has been done in the field of child care does not provide clear-cut guidance for practitioners in the field. As Fruin (5) says "The researcher's concern to generalise from a host of particulars contrasts with the practitioner's need to attempt to select from a myriad of generalisations (sometimes conflicting) something which will help him with a particular case pressing for an immediate decision. The researcher seeks rules applicable in the aggregate whereas the practitioner emphasises the uniqueness of every individual situation. Social science generalisations are often weak and probabilistic rather than categorical. They rarely take the strong form of "All A are B" but are typically more weakly phrased as "Some A are probably B".

However the further point has been established that even if this were not the case, there appears to be little knowledge among social workers of current research findings, little inclination within Social Services Departments to undertake rigorous research, and consequently an unpropitious climate in which to improve this state of affairs. One cause of this problem was identified in the joint C.C.E.T.S.W. and P.S.S.C. report "Research and Practice" (6) which states that "... the body of social work knowledge contains less evaluation than that of comparable professions". One possible explanation for this they suggest is the fact that "it is hard to resist the impression that the dominant climate of many social work courses is non-intellectual, even anti-intellectual". The net result is that not only are qualified social workers unlikely to share a common research-based body of core knowledge, but also that they will not have been encouraged to develop the habit of standing back, taking stock and rethinking - in short the "critical perspective (which) is the beginning of research mindedness".

A reluctance to initiate and to share research initiatives can have the effect of restricting the knowledge base of a discipline, and the absence of such a knowledge base substantially undermines the claim of social work to be recognised as a profession. As Baroness Wootton said in 1980, "I would define a professional as somebody who knows something other people don't know. A doctor knows about disease, a lawyer knows about the law, a teacher knows something about what he teaches. I'm not quite sure what social workers are supposed to know".

Attempts to reach agreement about what social work itself consists of have preoccupied social workers, social work teachers and observers of the social work scene for many years, and with an increasing sense of urgency of late. However the statement by the British Association of Social Workers on The Social Work Task and even the more recent Barclay Report have thus far failed to produce a description of social work which meets everybody's satisfaction. Robert Pinker, who in his minority report proved to be Barclay's most influential and coherent critic, describes the report as having tried, unsuccessfully, "to generalise the tasks of social work out of existence" (7). The current view of many observers is conveyed by Hoghughis'(8) statement that "'Social" means appertaining to society and "worker" someone who does a job. The combination of the two has no clearer denotation than any other number of similar compound nouns ... the wide range of functions of Social Services Departments has done nothing to give the social worker a reasonable professional boundary".

This lack of clarity compounds the problem of what social work education should be attempting to teach and how. In the absence of any central direction, each course is inclined to go its own way. Bamford (9) describes how "each training course has its own particular requirements; its own approach to theory which it would like to see applied in practice, and its own assessment guidelines which it normally requires to form the basis of assessment at the end of the placement". Although C.C.E.T.S.W. is currently in the process of reviewing its role in relation to basic training and considering how it might adapt that role for the 1980's, in the light of experience, confusion and diversity persist.

Davies (10) explains that a particular conflict exists "between the perspectives of social work education held by practice agencies and those held by teaching institutions, illustrated most strikingly by the former's preference for moving towards a national curriculum, scepticism about the value of sociology in C.Q.S.W. training, and feeling that there ought to be greater attention paid to skills - teaching". Most universities and polytechnics he feels, take the opposite view. Davies goes on to concede that, "although the idea of a national curriculum is almost certainly, and properly, a non-starter, there are nevertheless disadvantages in having 110 separate bases for social work education, each adopting a different approach to the subject". In his view the likely solution will be acceptance of "some kind of consensus position which lays upon the shoulders of a body like C.C.E.T.S.W. or B.A.S.W. the responsibility of defining necessary areas of learning in the here and now". Although many universities might resist such a move "it is difficult to avoid the feeling that such a step is implicit in the logic of wanting to award a nationally agreed Certificate of Qualification in Social Work".

Coull and Hall (11) make similar points about the need for social work curricula to become more practice-based than hitherto. They say that in the curricula of higher education courses "knowledge is selected according to the interests, preferences and expertise of individual tutors and its content is shaped by developments within their respective disciplines, rather than determined by the needs of practice ... the structures and values of higher education are in fundamental contradiction to the assimilation and demonstration of the essential

skills of practice". Davies (12) summarises the way this problem has been handled by saying "The tendency has been to see social work training as an extension of liberal education with the aim of producing critical, questioning, even sceptical graduates, while leaving the placement teachers to provide the positive input. Certainly I am not opposed to critical perspectives but this approach has always carried within it the danger of discrepancy between course work and placement, of conflict and resentment between lecturers and field teachers ..."

Davies (13) has recently completed a survey of 148 social workers who were asked to say, three years after qualifying, whether the training they had received had given them a good preparation for practice, and the findings bear out many of my conclusions. Whereas half of the respondents were satisfied with their preparation and half dissatisfied, "a clear message emerging from this enquiry says that institutions must ensure that their syllabi and their teaching staff are fully and unambiguously committed to the goal of training students for contemporary practice".

When asked to rank the tasks seen as being most important in their "present job", social workers placed decision-making second only to "counselling" but there was evidence that a significant minority of courses gave it very low priority. The association between ranking by individual students of teaching and practice was tested and "the difference between courses and agencies,

between teaching and practice, were such that no student could be sure that the training emphasis he or she received would accurately reflect the practice skills ultimately required in an agency".

Asked about the model of social work on offer on their courses, many used the terms eclectic or unitary methods. Among the more explicit labels were therapeutic, political groupwork, radical, mental health, task centred, behavioural, community work, psychodynamic, macro, casework and client centred. Less complimentary terms used included no direction, disorganised, pseudo-technological, conflicting, scrappy, out-of-touch, uninspiring, broad, ordinary with fancy titles. Davies concludes: "the truth is that very few courses emerged as having a clear theoretical identity. Even two courses which were said by some to teach a well-defined model - one was politically radical, the other strongly therapeutic - produced other respondents who categorically denied that any such model had been apparent".

What also emerged was that the two subjects which scored worst on the ranking scale were law, which was sometimes missing altogether from the curriculum, and social work literature/theory, where the quality of teaching was seen as especially poor. Clearly this is a disturbing finding in a discipline in which theory is intended to under-pin practice. As Davies says "No wonder the respondents had difficulty defining any model of practice, whether taught during training or practiced in the agency. With pragmatism and eclecticism rampant,

the risk might be that "anything goes", depending only on the energy, imagination and charismatic influence of the teacher or practitioner".

A final conclusion, which goes a long way towards explaining the influence of the immediate work environment in practice is that "The very high rate of confidence in field work arrangements means that there is no getting away from the astonishing discrepancy between these students satisfying experience under the apprenticeship model of practice and the fact that a significant minority of them expressed consistent and forceful lack of appreciation for what went on in the college setting".

The question of curriculum design cannot be separated from the need to strike a balance between generalist and specialist skills, which has persisted since the introduction of the Seebohm Report. Most Social Services Departments came to recognise that genericism is an attribute of teams rather than individuals, but today there is a significant shift in favour of more specialist teams, and much of this reflects a fear that social workers have become, and are seen to be, "Jacks of all trades, but masters of none". If social workers are likely, in practice, to specialise, at what stage should they begin to do so, and to what extent should courses encourage them? In a two year training period, is it realistic to introduce specialist courses, particularly in the context of uncertainty about what a basic generic training should entail and at a time when, as Pinker (14) says "our present curricula for social work education are already in danger of sinking under the weight of so many disparate training expectations".

There are no simple answers to such intractable questions, and the issue is further complicated by the multifariousness of the posts that qualified social workers subsequently move into. However my conclusions are in line with those of Davies who states that his study raised "questions about the common core of social work teaching, about the practice methods syllabus, about whether placement experience is always maximally relevant, and ultimately about whether the retreat from specialism that has characterised social work training for 12 years may now be seen to have had a de-skilling effect in some quarters".

Professionalism

The Barclay Report describes how the professionalisation of social work is complicated by the fact that most workers practice in a bureaucratic setting, and asks (15) "How can a social worker exercise professional discretion and independence where the demands of the organisation tend to run counter to them". The role strain implied in this question results from the four fundamental differences in orientation which Blau and Scott (16) say exist between the professional and the bureaucrat.

The first is that the professional is bound by a norm of service and a code of ethics to represent the welfare and interests of his clients, whereas the bureaucrat's primary responsibility is to represent and promote the interests of his organisation. Even in a service organisation where the ultimate objective of serving clients and serving the organisation coincide, there may be a conflict between the immediate needs of an individual client and the longer term interests of a collective clientele. Secondly, whereas the authority of the

bureaucratic official rests on a legal contract backed by legal sanctions, that of the professional is said to stem from his acknowledged technical expertness. A third difference is that the bureaucrat's decisions are expected to be governed by disciplined compliance with directives from superiors, whereas the professionals are governed by internalised professional standards. And finally, whereas decisions of bureaucrats can be reviewed by line managers, those of professionals can only be reviewed or criticised by his professional colleague group.

However, this model of conflict derives from a somewhat idealised trait model of professionalism. The reality is that many professionals operate within a bureaucratic context, including doctors, who are often taken as an example of independent professionals exercising absolute clinical freedom. In the case of social work the argument is complicated by disagreement about whether this discipline has a valid knowledge base. Despite the misgivings about social work training which have already been referred to, Pinker states in his Appendix to the Barclay Report that "Professor Stevenson's assertion that "there is a common core of knowledge and skill which should be acquired on basic qualifying courses (Stevenson 1981 pp 13-280) is well supported by the evidence" (received by the Barclay Working Party). However he also states that "Davies is right in saying that 'social work can have no existence independently of the agencies in which it operates (1981 p 43)'".

It would have been naive to expect to find many social workers attempting to practice social work on the basis of a model which would grant them total professional freedom to pursue client interests. The question I have pursued is to do with the balance which practitioners strike between "professional" and

"bureaucratic" imperatives and the extent to which a professional training has influenced this balance. What has emerged is that a significant number of respondents in this study see themselves as having a considerable degree of discretion in deciding how to handle individual cases, and saw supervision not in terms of line management and agency oversight but simply as an opportunity to discuss difficult situations with an experienced colleague.

This feeling was not restricted to experienced and qualified practitioners but was held by some newly qualified staff. A major questions which my research raises is whether recently qualified practitioners have been adequately prepared through training to exercise this degree of freedom responsibly. Using the criteria of "professionalism" which Blau (op cit) suggested it appeared that a minority of practitioners - approximately 30% of the total - evince the characteristics of independence from bureaucratic and peer group control which he predicted would result from training. However there was no evidence that the stronger professional self identity of this group was matched by a firmer knowledge base or a stronger shared perception of what constitutes "good practice".

The unreality of attempts to polarise "bureaucratic" and "professional" typologies is well illustrated in an article by Lawrence (17) who writes that "Most doctors accept that allocating resources - more kidney transplants or more geriatric beds - is a political decision. But many balk at the idea that economic considerations should influence individual clinical decisions, like what drug to prescribe. They fear a fundamental ethical imperative will be undermined: their duty to do their best for each patient that comes before them.

If they don't act as their patients agent trying to secure the best available care, who will?

But there is no hard and fast line here. Doctors don't do their best for each and every patient. If they did, as Alan Williams, Professor of Economics at York University, points out, they would sit with their patients till they died or were discharged, "The doctor as the patient's agent is just a slogan".

In a new paper (18) Williams argues that a doctor never makes a decision exclusively on the basis of the patient's best interests. "He may take account of the needs of the patient's family, the needs of his own family and the needs of other patients. And he may take economic factors into account. If two men have the identical hernia but only one is stopped from working, would it be unreasonable to operate on him first?" Williams concludes that doctors already operate a crude form of cost-benefit analysis which could be greatly improved upon.

A similar series of factors comes into play when social workers make decisions and because of the particular context in which they are made there is a very strong case for making them more explicit. Social Services Departments do have policies, even though they may be contradictory, variable, poorly articulated or poorly understood. Practice is often governed by the availability of resources which are rarely provided in direct response to expressed need. Managers are employed to help implement policies and to achieve objectives, though what the objectives are and how they are to be achieved is often less clear. This study

has reinforced the findings of Packman and others that there are great local variations in practice, many of which are not recognised by those responsible for them, and there consequently seems to be a strong case for making such variations more explicit and for either justifying them or attempting to introduce more standardised principles of practice.

Taken together the situations of both doctors and of social workers within an organisational context illustrate the increasing complexity of the work environment and the consequently greater sophistication that is needed in analysing issues of professional orientation. Blau and Scott wrote in the fifties and sixties at a time of great job mobility and increasing expansion. Today the economic climate has changed, organisations have grown larger and more all-embracing, and professional practitioners, as social beings, are inevitably influenced by the attitudes and practices which prevail in their place of work. The simplistic polarisation of professional and bureaucratic perspectives suggested by Blau does not therefore hold good today.

The existence of significant local variations in the extent to which, for example, Principal Social Workers are recognised as holding a traditional managerial authority as well as an advisory role seems to a large extent to reflect the lack of departmental guidance. This in turn appears to reflect uncertainty about the role of the individual practitioner. One solution to this dilemma has been put forward, or at least implied, by Davies (19). He envisages the social worker assuming prime responsibility for assessing the needs of the client, and discussing this assessment with his line manager who in his turn acts as an advocate for the wider society as represented by legislation and by local authority policy, and also as a gatekeeper to various resources.

Who actually carries most influence in this dialogue will depend upon circumstances and upon the personalities involved. A highly experienced and respected practitioner who is familiar with most of the wider considerations already alluded to will be likely to persuade his line manager of the merits of a particular course of action very much more readily than an inexperienced colleague, and in this sense the manager is playing a mediatory role, overseeing the quality of decision making and only very occasionally needing to resort to the use of authority in a direct way. This is quite probably how some supervisory relationships actually operate, but it appears from the variations emerging from this study that there is no standard model of management and supervision and this greatly strengthens the argument for making expectations and roles more explicit and taking steps to introduce more uniform procedures.

In response to the Barclay Reports question "How can a social worker exercise professional discretion and independence where the demands of the organisation tend to run counter to them". Klein (20) has pointed out that "other professionals - notably doctors - work in bureaucratic organisations. There is nothing unique to social work in this respect. The real difference is that the medical profession managed to assert its claim to professional autonomy before the state became the virtual monopoly employer of doctors. It therefore started from a position of strength, while social workers start out from a position of weakness".

There is disagreement within social work circles as to the current position of social work and how it should best proceed. In its supplementary evidence to the Barclay Committee the National and Local Government Officers Association (N.A.L.G.O.) argued against the establishment of a General Social Work Council,

responsible for the maintenance and development of standards of training and conduct in social work, on the grounds that there is no "generally recognised core of knowledge and practice necessary for, and appropriate to, social work". Their case is that since there is no clear definition in the public mind of a social worker or of the knowledge and skills required to do the job, there are no clearly accepted criteria against which to measure an individual's fitness to be admitted to a professional register.

In direct contrast the British Association of Social Workers (B.A.S.W.) stated to the Barclay Committee that it was "...deeply committed to the view that no single proposal would have greater impact on the definition and actual performance of social work" than the establishment of a General Council.

Speaking as General Secretary of B.A.S.W. John Cypher (21) elaborated on these conflicting views as follows, "One of the points that Barclay didn't make as forcefully as it ought to have done is that some major decentralisation of decision making is a prerequisite of any of the kinds of organisation which it sets out in Chapter 13. And I'd go on to ask how far the public will sanction that sort of decentralisation to front line practitioners unless it has some measure of satisfaction about their competence and their capability to take on a greater measure of individual professional discretion. This is my problem with N.A.L.G.O. which makes no claims about the need for social workers to be trained; who want autonomy for social workers but don't even see as a necessary prerequisite that social workers should be exposed to some kind of preparatory training".

Klein vigorously takes issue with Barclay on the question of a General Council and the accreditation of qualified practitioners. He suggests that N.A.L.G.O.'s argument "muddles up the contention that there are few, if any, areas of knowledge unique to social work (true) with the contention that social work does not have a knowledge base special to it (false). Even if social work training draws on other disciplines - psychology, political science, sociology and so on - it may still be distinguished by the fact that it requires a particular bundle of knowledge (in exactly the same way that medical training draws on a variety of disciplines, such as biochemistry, chemistry and so on, but still has a distinguishable knowledge base)".

So, he argues, even though it is true that social work is still in the process of creating and defining its own knowledge base, and though there is still a large, blurred area of overlap between those tasks which requires specialised social work skills and those that can be carried out by others, this is no reason for not trying to create standards by regulating entry and setting qualifying standards. Present doubts about the efficacy of social work applied even more strongly to the medical profession when the General Medical Council was created in 1858, which was long before the evolution of "scientific" medicine. Klein asserts that it is only the process of explicit professionalisation which is likely to convince the public that social work has a discreet knowledge base and role and that this process will also have the effect of emphasising the social workers' responsibilities to the individual client.

"The justification for medical autonomy is precisely that this allows the doctor to give priority to the interests of his patient: to do what he or she judges to be best for the patient (not the organisation). To this extent, professionalism provides a countervailing power to that of bureaucracies, and represents a safeguard for the client. And while it may be unlikely that social workers could ever succeed in asserting full professional autonomy on the medical model, a move in this direction might strengthen their ability to stand up for their clients; to assert professional definitions of problems as distinct from bureaucratic ones".

The Professional use of discretion

Giller and Morris (22) suggest that the first task for a social worker faced with the need to place a child in care is to answer the question "what type of case is this?" on the assumption that the answer will provide the social worker with a means of developing a rational response to an agenda of "real problems". They describe the chosen responses as "routine remedies" which "are usually implied because they are seen as usually appropriate in the normal course of events for that type of case". They are appropriate responses to the problems when viewed from the standpoint of the professional actor in the light of what "everyone knows" about the "real problems" in the case: his colleagues would do the same. My study bears this out to some extent, with the proviso that different groups of colleagues may arrive at different routine remedies.

They go on to say that "though the decision making process cannot be described as determined, it is routinised". Blaxter (23) has also noted that "Ideally in

the medical model, as in the social work model, there is no categorisation of the patient or his needs; each is individual. Yet in so complex a structure and with much of the work specialised and differentiated labels are necessary and the organisation is likely to categorise the way which will best suit the task in hand".

Smith (24) has also recently commented that "In spite of the central position of 'discretion' in the imagery of professional social work, a growing body of evidence indicates that social workers are probably behaving in ways which are very much more highly routinised than is generally acknowledged, certainly by social workers themselves". Recent research has shown (Smith and Harris (25); Rees (26), Giller and Morris (27)) that social workers seek rules, standards, categories and regular procedures so that they can, in Zimmerman's terms (28) "bring off the day's work with respect to the constraints of timing, planning and scheduling represented by the described "actual task structure"."

Giller and Morris emphasise that they are not implying that social workers neglect their clients, but rather that social workers, like all of us, must get through their work and that, to achieve this, assumptions are made about what is and is not problematic. The consequence is, as Walker (29) notes, in discussing social work with delinquents in residential settings: "The working day is simplified through developing 'recipes' of action for dealing with the standard kind of situation which emerges with this type of (case). "Individual treatment" does not happen most of the time; indeed, were it to do so, staff would very quickly resign for it would entail the abandonment of recipes which simplify everyday life and enable us to act".

We have established that social workers are not free agents. As Pinker puts it (30) "Social Workers are professional people" ... they "are accountable to their agencies and employers for what they do..." Given that they do devise recipes of action, my concern is therefore the basis on which they do so, for my research has demonstrated both the lack of a shared body of theoretical knowledge and of uniform departmental principles of practice and taken together these contribute to the existence of significant local variations in standard practice.

Curnock and Hardiker (op cit) distinguished between "theories of practice" which refers to knowledge which is borrowed in a relatively unmodified form from the social *sciences*, and "practice theories", by which they mean the rarely codified implicit knowledge base of social work. This does represent a promising attempt to bridge the apparent gulf between academic theory and practice wisdom, which might move social work beyond the depressing conclusion reached by Triseliotis (31)_ on the basis of his research into adoption policy and practice in twelve local authority and voluntary agencies in Scotland, that it revealed

"the absence of any coherent body of knowledge and of working principles governing practice in this area. Among other things, blanket or indifferentiated types of practice were common and important decisions were made on very slender evidence". Case studies such as that by Wright (32) clearly illustrate the way in which basic rather worthy sounding principles of practice - respect for the individual, starting where the client is, acceptance, non-judgemental empathy - can indeed be utilised in a way which conveys a truly "professional" sense of caring. However my study appears to confirm that there is still a long way to go before a credible body of either "theories of practice" or "practice theory" becomes widely recognised.

I had postulated that if an identifiable body of social work knowledge does exist this would influence the way in which trained social workers make decisions in child care cases. My findings appear to confirm Triseliotis' view that there is no coherent body of theory or knowledge governing practice, for even those workers who claimed that particular theories or research findings influenced their approach towards planning child placements quoted such diverse sources and such a range of ideas at such different levels of generality that it was impossible to identify a clear or widely accepted practice philosophy.

However there does seem to be a basis of "practice theory" which could be put to greater use and certain simple principles of practice which are widely observed.

A clarification of roles as between managers and practitioners; shared decision making within an agreed framework; the avoidance of drift; the involvement of natural parents; a more rational and purposeful use of residential and foster care; and the incorporation of a knowledge of the needs of children into explicit departmental policies towards children in care would

all help improve the quality of decision making in child placement.

Stevenson (33) wrote in 1974 in the wake of the inquiry into the death of Maria Calwell that "Those who commit themselves to social work contribute, in my view, to the sensitisation of our society. In so doing, they will not be popular. They must seek to hold, and to mediate in, the multiplicity of conflict in interpersonal relationships. They deal in shades of grey where the public looks for black and white. And they are bitterly resented for it. They are brokers in lesser evils, frequently faced with the need for choice followed by action whose outcome is unpredictable. In the precise sense of the word, society is deeply ambivalent about social work, asking it more and more to combat the alienation of a technological age, yet resenting its growing power and quick to point harshly to its failures, especially those in relation to functions of social control." This role, subsequently described by Davies as brokerage in shades of grey (34) is difficult and in many ways thankless, since there are rarely ideal solutions. But it is this very uncertainty which creates the need for some structure to be given to the task. Individuals should not be left to make complex decisions in isolation, on the basis of largely subjective experience and knowledge. The basis upon which decisions are reached should be made more explicit and principles of good practices should be agreed which would apply to practitioners at a wide level of generality.

As Winnicott wrote (35) "Those who take over responsibility for children need more than intuition, understanding and common sense, however valuable these qualities may be as a foundation. They need to be able to observe, stand back, to think things out, and to have a backbone of theory on which to hand whatever they find".

In practice social workers, including the newly qualified, will have to make decisions about child placement and if they are to do so with the minimum of harm to the child they should be aware of the need to make plans and put them into operation and to do so with due regard to external events and people in the child's life as well as the child's feelings about them. If some framework for taking such actions is not taught on training courses and departments fail to provide the necessary structure, social workers will continue to learn from a basis of personal experience with all the consequent variations in approach which that implies.

Conclusion

This study was devised to test a number of hypotheses relating to the way in which social workers reach decisions about where to place children who come into their care. The first three hypotheses were (1) that "professional" social workers would adopt a more rational approach to decision making than bureaucratically oriented colleagues; (2) that this tendency would in turn be positively related to an individual practitioners' awareness and use of social work theory and knowledge, and (3) that in consequence trained and qualified social workers would make more rational decisions and predictions as to the outcome of particular cases and that such decisions would be more accurate than those of unqualified social workers.

The results indicate that none of the hypotheses were substantiated in the sample form in which they were stated. Qualified social workers were not found to be significantly different from their unqualified colleagues in terms of their views on child care issues and their knowledge and use of social work

theory and knowledge. Use of the criteria suggested by Blau (op cit) does not reveal any evidence that qualified staff generally have a more "professional" orientation to their work. However a small sub-group, constituting approximately one-third of those holding professional qualifications, appeared to have a more consciously "professional" self-identity and approach to work in that they had a better knowledge of certain texts, had attempted more work-related courses, and were more likely to be members of a professional association.

However, in relation to decision making styles and attitudes to organisational constraints and accountability to their line managers, significant differences have emerged between the qualified and unqualified groups. A considerably higher proportion of qualified respondents than unqualified rated themselves, and were rated by me, as highly rational in their decision making style. One third of the qualified group rated themselves highly rational, but more of the unqualified group did so. In other respects also the qualified group appear to share a more confident self image and consequently to be more willing to stand by their own judgement of client need in face of disagreement with their line managers.

There were also significant differences in approach towards decision making between experienced and inexperienced qualified social workers. Some experienced social workers rated their decision making style as more highly rational than appeared to me to be justified, while, conversely, some inexperienced social workers rated their style less rational than I felt was the case. This may be a further reflection of their level of professional self

confidence and may represent a gradual progression towards a re-definition of their professional role.

For whereas Blau was discussing the likely effect of training on the performance of semi-autonomous individuals, it is necessary, in the context of large Social Services Departments, to take account also of the role of line managers. The main effect of training on the group of social workers in this study appears to have been to increase their self confidence and willingness to stand by their professional judgement. In some cases this seems to have led to an initial tendency to question or to reject the role of the supervising line manager, or to reinterpret it in such a way as to cast the supervisor in the role of a professional colleague and equal, and to deny his managerial authority. However some of the more experienced qualified staff appear to have moved beyond this stage to one in which they are increasingly confident to act on their own judgement, but at the same time to see themselves as having a specialised role in assessing a clients need, and their line manager as having a complimentary specialised role in mediating between their assessment and recommendations and what is possible or permissible in light of Departmental policy and resource availability.

Blau hypothesised that the effect of training would be to provide the social worker with a body of knowledge and skills and possibly a reference group of peers, which would effectively distance him from organisational and procedural constraints and leave him free to adopt a client centred approach. I had speculated that knowledge derived from training might enable an individual to

make more rational decisions. What now seems apparent is that training provides a greater sense of confidence and of professional awareness, but that it takes subsequent experience to transform this into a clearer sense of role-identity which takes full account of wider organisational realities including resource and policy constraints and the issues of accountability. This is the difficult process which enables the "professional" person, influenced by the values and beliefs implied in that role, to come to terms with the fact of working within a large, bureaucratic organisation.

If it is accepted that rational decision making entails a full and dispassionate appraisal of the problem, followed by an explanation of all available solutions, it seems clear that a division of responsibilities which enables the social worker to focus on assessing the nature of the problem and recommending a suitable course of action and which requires the line manager to discuss the basis of the recommendation and subsequently to place it in the wider context of competing organisational pressures and constraints before reaching an agreed discussion, is more likely to achieve this end than an approach which relies wholly on individual expertise and knowledge. The quality of decisions is therefore likely to be improved as a consequence of role clarification and training can help this process by instilling a sense of professional identity.

However the extent to which this will be achieved will vary between individuals and will be influenced by the working environment to which trained social workers return. What is clear from this study is that there is considerable variation between different geographical areas within a single authority in the way in which the respective roles of social worker and line manager are perceived, and that this fact can only serve to confuse the decision making process.

For this study also suggests that many practitioners, including the qualified, appear to work at a largely instinctive or routinised level, with little conscious regard to specific theoretical perspectives and with little explicit departmental guidance. By far the most influential factor in the decision making process appears to be the usually non-explicit ethos of practice which prevails in the local setting, and this can vary greatly.

These general conclusions constitute a strong case for departments making clear statements about the child care policy they intend to pursue; about the philosophical basis upon which it stands; about the way in which the various discreet activities occurring under the broad umbrella of "child care" should be related; and taking steps to ensure that by clarifying the respective roles of social workers and their line managers that policy, including explicit practice guidelines, is adhered to and that its consequences for children in care are monitored and evaluated. Only by undertaking such research will Departments be able to measure the impact of their child care activities, and they would do well to bear in mind the stricture contained in the Seebohm Report that, "The Personal Social Services are large-scale experiments in ways of helping those in need. It is both wasteful and irresponsible to set experiments in motion and to omit to record and analyse what happens. It makes no sense in terms of administrative efficiency and, however little intended, it indicates a careless attitude towards human welfare". (36) In addition my findings suggest that social workers are inadequately prepared by their professional training for the complex tasks they face in the field of child care, and that training courses could make better use of the social work knowledge available. If practitioners

were given a clearer grounding in child care theory and departments would provide more explicit child care policies within a more mutually supportive framework, social workers would be better equipped to make decisions about child placement and to carry through the plans they make.

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APPENDIX

CHILD PLACEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Social Worker:

Factual Details

1. Name: _____ Age: _____ Marital Status | M | S | D |
2. Have you any children | YES | | | NO | |
3. Qualified _____ Unqualified _____ Qualification _____
4. Where obtained _____ When obtained _____
5. Are you a member of BASW?
6. How long in present post
- i) Less than six months
 - ii) Six months - one year
 - iii) Between one year and two years
 - iv) More than two years

Theoretical Attitudes, knowledge and practice

1. Do you have any particular theoretical orientation which you use in your work generally?

Yes	_____
No	_____

If Yes - please describe it.

If No - please elaborate.

2. Do particular theories or research findings influence your approach towards planning child placements? If so, please describe them.

3. Have you been able to keep abreast of social work theory and knowledge by way of any of the following?

a) Books | Yes | | | No | |

Which have you read in the last twelve months?

b) Journals | Yes | | | No | |

Which have you read in the last twelve months?

Do any particular articles stand out? If Yes, specify.

c) Conferences

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

Which have you attended in the last twelve months?

d) Courses - lasting more than one day

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

lasting less than one day

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

Which have you attended in the last 12 months?

e) Do you consider any of these means more important than the others in keeping abreast of social work theory and knowledge? If Yes, please specify.

4. I would like you to answer the following questions and to qualify your answers by reference to theoretical material or research findings whenever this seems appropriate

a) Do you think children and parents go through any specific responses to the experience or separation?

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

If Yes, can you describe this to me first in relation to the child and then in relation to the parent.

Have you read any of the following?

Foster Care:	A Guide to Practice	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td>Yes</td><td></td></tr></table>	Yes		<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td>No</td><td></td></tr></table>	No	
Yes							
No							
Bowlby:	Attachment and Loss	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td>Yes</td><td></td></tr></table>	Yes		<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td>No</td><td></td></tr></table>	No	
Yes							
No							
	Child Care and the	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>			<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>		
	Growth of Love	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td>Yes</td><td></td></tr></table>	Yes		<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"><tr><td>No</td><td></td></tr></table>	No	
Yes							
No							

5. For what type and age of children do you think the following placements are most suitable? Why do you think this is so?:-

a) Short term foster care.

b) Long term foster care.

c) Residential care.

6. Do you think the role of a foster home should be primarily:-

a) To provide a substitute family or home?

b) To act as an extension and support to the natural family unit?

7. Do you think the role of a residential home should be primarily:-

a) To provide a substitute home, or

b) to act as an extension and support to the natural family unit.

Have you read any of the following?:-

V. George: Foster Care: Theory & Practice	<u> Yes </u>	<u> </u>	<u> No </u>	<u> </u>
R. Holman: The Place of Fostering in Social Work	<u> Yes </u>	<u> </u>	<u> No </u>	<u> </u>
G.C. Williston: The Foster Parent Role	<u> Yes </u>	<u> </u>	<u> No </u>	<u> </u>

8. Do you use any specific guidelines in attempting to match a child to a foster family? If so, what are they?

More specifically, do you take any of the following into account?:-

- a) Age of child relative to other children in foster family

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- b) Particular needs of child relative to abilities of foster family

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- c) Expectations of foster parents.

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- d) Wishes of natural parents.

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- e) Other - please specify.

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

Have you read either of the following?:-

- R. Parker: Decision in Child Care

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- G. Trasler: In Place of Parents

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

9. Do you think parental visiting is important:-

- a) Before placement?
- b) After placement?

Have you read either of the following?:-

- Weinstein: The self-image of the foster child

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- R. Thorpe: Mum & Mrs. So & So

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

10. Following reception into care, what period do you think is the most important for working with a child and his parents?

Have you read either of the following?:-

- Read & Shyne: Brief & Extended Casework

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--
- Rowe & Lambert: Children Who Want

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

11. Do you think that most children could be rehabilitated with their parents given adequate time and resources?

12. In the light of the 1975 Children Act, which places more emphasis on the rights of the child as opposed to those of the parent, after what period of time in care do you think it becomes necessary to give up attempts to rehabilitate the child and to make alternative plans for his long term care?

13 What are your views on the issue of blood ties in relation to plans for long term substitute care?

Have you read the following?

Goldstein, Freud & Solnit: Beyond
the Best Interests of the child

Yes			No		

Decision Making Style

1. Imagine you are on duty in the office at 4.30 p.m. A young woman with a badly bruised face asks to see you. She is accompanied by a four year old child. She tells you that her husband has beaten her up, that she is afraid to return home but has nowhere else to stay, and asks you to receive her child into care overnight so that she can see a Solicitor and obtain an injunction the following morning.

Tell me briefly in your own words how you would go about deciding what to do in this situation.

2. You have written a Social Enquiry Report for a child who has just appeared in court for a minor theft. You recommended a Supervision Order but the court has imposed a Care Order and made it clear that removal from home is thought desirable.

Tell me briefly what your thought process would be in deciding how to deal with this situation.

3. Please read these three characterisations of decision making style and tell me which one you feel is nearest to your own.

Cont'd.

Decision Making Style

- a. In making decisions I consciously structure my thoughts and go through a series of stages beginning with a clarification of the problem, leading to an identification of goals and alternative strategies for dealing with them, and culminating in a choice between these alternatives.

- b. My decision making style is similar to the one described above in that there is a clear pattern to it, but it is less explicit and more varied.

- c. My decision making style involves less conscious reflection than either of the above and is more intuitive than intellectual.

- d. My decision making style is dissimilar to any of the above. (If so, please describe).

Professional/Bureaucratic Orientation

1. When you make a decision about a clients needs, to what extent do you think you are influenced by:-

a) Policy Statements

Not at all | |
To some extent | |
Very greatly | |

b) The current resource situation

Not at all | |
To some extent | |
Very greatly | |

2. If your assessment of the needs of a client and what should be done to serve them was at odds with that of the department, would your reaction be:-

a) That your initial assessment was wrong in that it failed to take full account of departmental policy

b) That you should continue to press your clients case, but on the basis that if your Senior cannot be persuaded to change his mind, he retains the final decision making power.

c) To try to persuade your Senior to change his mind and if necessary, to act on your own assessment despite the opposition of your Senior.

3. Are you influenced in your attitudes by the attitudes and opinions of immediate colleagues?

Very much | | To some extent | | Not at all | |

4. Do you usually agree with your colleagues in your attitudes towards your superiors?

Yes | | Not always | | No | |

5. Would you favour a more formal departmental policy towards record keeping, in which all cases were required to be written up and reviewed regularly?

Yes | | No | |

Why?

6. Do you view supervision by your Principal Social Worker as primarily

A discussion between equals in which you are able to think through problems and alternative solutions 1 | |

An opportunity to ask for advice and guidance 2 | |

A means by which the department can oversee and control the standard of your work with clients 3 | |

7. Is your attitude towards cuts in the Social Services Budget

That it is not your responsibility 1. | |

That it is a situation in which you should be directly involved in discussing priorities 2. | |

Specific Case

Factual Details

1. Name: Sex M | F Age:

2. How did child come into care?

- i) Reception into care under Children Act (1948)
- ii) Committed to care by Court
- iii) Other (specify)
- iv) Have Parental Rights been assumed?

3. How many times has this child been in care previously?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. How old was the child when last admitted to care?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

5. What is the main reason for the child being in care?

- i) Family problems
- ii) Problem of child
- iii) Lack of parental interest
- iv) Other (specify)

6. How many siblings has the child?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 or more

7. Are there any other siblings in care? Yes | No |

8. When not in care has this child had

- i) Consistent care from one or both parents (or parent substitute)
- ii) Some changes
- iii) Many changes
- iv) No information

Social Work Assessment

1. Can you please outline this case to me in not more than six lines

2. Describe the child's present and future needs and what implications these have with regard to his placement

3. If you have a full range of options, what do you think would be the best placement for this child?

- a) Now
- b) Later on
 - i) Reception/Assessment Centre
 - ii) Community Home
 - iii) Residential Nursery
 - iv) Foster home assessment
 - v) Temporary/short stay foster home
 - vi) Medium stay foster home
 - vii) Long stay foster home
 - viii) Boarded out with relatives
 - ix) Pre-adoption foster home
 - x) Special Family Placement
 - xi) Other (specify)

4. Where did you actually place the child?

5. In arriving at your decision about where to place the child, what were the main factors you took into account?

6. Did any of the following specific factors influence your decisions?

- i) The need to keep siblings together
- ii) The attitude of the natural parents towards the placement
- iii) The child's wishes
- iv) The child's behaviour
- v) The child's health/mental or physical disability
- vi) Other (specify)

7. Were you influenced by any of the following factors?

- i) Departmental policy: If so, how?
- ii) Information or advice from a colleague or superior: If so, who?

iii) Have you dealt with similar situations before?
If so, do you feel this fact influenced the way you dealt with
this particular case? If so, how?

iv) Did any other factors influence you: If so, which?

8. How long do you think the child will remain in care?

- i) Less than three months
- ii) More than three but less than six months
- iii) More than six but less than twelve months
- iv) More than one year

9. Do you think this placement will continue until the child is discharged from
care?

Yes |

No |

10. Describe briefly your plans for this child a) Short term b) Long term

PDR13/PDRJS73
29.6.81.
PDR/JS



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