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A Study Of Practitioner Learning In Social Work

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SUMMARY

This study is about how people learn to be good social workers. It is based on thirty-seven tape-recorded interviews with practitioners who were selected by their peers and each other as doing the job well. The analysis adopts the view that interviews be seen as situated encounters in which interviewees attempt to provide morally adequate accounts of themselves and their actions. This approach is used as a means of making sense of both the 'interview talk' and of the cultural features to which appeal is made in producing an adequate account.

The analysis is set in a discussion of new theories of adult learning; a critique of professional literature on theory and practice in social work; and, an appraisal of organisational studies of social work. Whilst the professional literature can be criticised for paying scant attention to the organisational settings of social work, the sociological studies can be criticised for failing to comprehend the accomplishments of social workers. This study aims to avoid both of these shortcomings. The literature from new theories of adult learning provides some promising developments in this regard, and the recent trends in the re-organisation of professional training are subjected to scrutiny.

On examining the social workers' accounts, it was seen that there were certain central features in common. They were all structured so as to relate the social worker's identity to his or her role, and to relate learning to experience. The differences as well as the similarities in how this is done are clarified by the analysis. In constructing

their versions of good social work, the practitioners differed according to their managing of the tension between the formal dimensions of their practice (law, policy, procedure) and their informal, discursive interactions within the everyday worlds of their clients.

The accounts of learning given by the social workers refer predominantly to the place of experience, and to membership within collegiate teams. This is viewed as consistent with their ways of constructing good practice, but it is in marked contrast to the versions of learning dominant within the professional literature and educational methods. Ultimately, however, the social workers' own accounts of their learning falter, as they are unable to construct an adequate version for the rigours of formal rationality. The argument is made that this is due to the suppression of a different reading of social work: social work as 'practice', a practical activity, and a cultural practice. Finally, the implications of this different reading of social work are considered, and reference made to recent major changes in legislation.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about how people learn to be good social workers. It is based on thirty-seven tape-recorded interviews with practitioners who were selected by their peers and each other as doing their job well: it analyses their accounts of how they learned to do it. The main body of the thesis (chapters four to six) is an analysis of their versions. This shows that they had certain central features in common. They were all structured in such a way as to relate the social worker's identity to his or her role and to relate learning to experience. Not all made the same links, or related these elements in the same way: the analysis clarifies the differences as well as the similarities in how they accounted for their accomplishments. But perhaps the most striking feature of the interviews was the virtual absence of references to theory, to knowledge (other than legal knowledge), to formal training, or to general principles or 'methods'. Quite simply, no-one set about explaining how they came to be a good social worker by describing processes of study, understanding, abstraction or generalisation, and little of what they said about learning could be seen as transferable through recognised training methods.

What does this say about social work and learning? How should these accounts be read within the professional and educational literature? The reading that I shall present in this thesis is that they focus attention on social work as a practice, in two senses, both of which usually escape attention in these literatures. The first is the sense of practice as practical activity, something that is done (rather than

written or measured). Unlike other human service occupations (medicine, education or law), but like much police work, youth work and voluntary work, social work is not done in a controlled environment which is designed and structured for professional practice, and hence which can readily be captured in the scientific or normative frameworks of a professional literature. It is done in an office environment which is structured by the needs of bureaucracy - local authority accountability, records, resource allocation, work management, etc - or in the informally structured worlds of people's homes, the streets, community centres, and so on. The interviews describe working in these conditions (the procedures, the constraints, the chaos and crises, but also the opportunities for camaraderie and support). Rather than abstracting practice (in the form of 'methods' or 'principles') from its context, they locate it firmly in this context, for this is what it is to practice, and to be a social worker.

Mr. Anstone: I'm not just anybody working into a house. I work for local government. I'm not just whatever I'd like to think of myself as. I am a local government officer...And, people see me as somebody from the Department of Social Services.

[Mr. Anstone, 7]

Ms. Simpson: I think you've got to be a credible person with your clients...If you walked in pontificating like blazes, they're going to suss you out as an idiot, as a fraud. They're not going to listen to you. I'm honest with my clients and try to get them to be honest back to me, to be a relationship based on reality, on an honest exchange of views.

[Ms. Simpson, 25]

The second sense of practice is linked with this. As an occupational grouping, a local authority agency and an instrument of social policy, social work is a 'form of life' (Wittenstein, 1953). Social workers constitute a membership group with shared ways of perceiving, managing and changing their world, and shared standards for evaluating their work and each other's performances. In the philosophical literature,

the examples of practices chosen are usually cultural or recreational ones, such as music and chess: practices are activities in which members commit themselves to the pursuit of excellence in an expertise requiring dedication and skill (MacIntyre, 1981). Standards are viewed as intrinsic to the practice, and members submit themselves to evaluation under these, as well as to the rules governing their activity: thus they form a community with a common interest in upholding and extending the qualities prized within their practice. As a practice in this sense, social work can be understood as a cultural grouping or social entity in which members construct understandings and values, through which they perform their daily work, and regulate their social environment. Here again, the practice is not to be analysed by abstracting certain aspects (either professional or bureaucratic), but by looking at the norms and standards that members apply, and how these are used within their everyday working lives.

The focus on social work as practice bridges two rather separate traditions in the academic literature. On the one hand, there are the many studies which attempt to set standards of good practice through theoretical analyses of the principles and processes of professional work. This tradition is strongly normative: although good practice remains contested both at the level of personal axioms and detailed methods, authors are implicitly agreed on the necessity to reach abstract criteria for evaluation, and to specify effective working skills. On the other hand, there have been sociological studies of the organisational settings of social work, which have analysed the ways in which teams, groups or agencies perform their tasks. Against the professional and normative tradition, these have tended to emphasise the bureaucratic organisation, the routine nature of the

processes, the stereotypical perceptions and rules-of-thumb employed by workers, and the defensive attitudes and practices of agencies. These more critical and 'realistic' studies, therefore stand in some contrast and tension with the professional literature, raising doubts about its loftier claims and aspirations.

What the interviewees say about their practice makes links between these two seemingly contradictory views of social work. Their descriptions of the context - pressured, rationed, rushed, crowded and shaped by legal and procedural requirements - bears out the picture conveyed by the sociological research. And yet it is clear from their accounts that these particular social workers do strive to practice well: they do subject themselves to constant critical evaluation, chide themselves for falling below their own best standards, and try to learn from their mistakes.

Ms. Drake: There were details and complications, and he ended up going back to his mother. But, my mistake was about overestimating the foster parents' ability to care for him in anything other than a practical sense, and underestimating his desire to please the foster parents, so that I took this at face value, misunderstanding his real desire to be back with his mother. It's ever so easy to get into seeing kids as better off where they are, and thinking that maintaining the status quo is the most important thing, and not saying this has to change, it's going to change, it's going to be difficult and painful to change it, but we've got to change it.

[Ms. Drake, 11]

This process of evaluation, and the attempt to refine and improve practice, takes place by reference to experience which is both personal and related to the working group. These social workers do not abstract their individual identities from their work: they perceive their lives outside their occupation (relationships, events, emotions) as relevant to their practice, and as providing a means of understanding and influencing it.

Ms. French: It's life process. It's what you've done. It's where you've been, what you've seen. It's who you've been with

...I feel that my life experiences have given me strength, and I suppose I am quite pleased with myself.

[Ms. French, 7]

But experience is also to be shared, and support given, within the working group. Social workers accrued great importance to informal discussions among themselves, often snatched in breaks between visits or telephone calls, or over coffee. They insist that these are a source of help and learning - that the team culture does not routinise, stereotype or distance the work from self as some studies have suggested, but enriches and stimulates, giving them the strength and the insight to practice better.

Ms Moore: I talk to colleagues when I don't know what to do. Have you got any ideas? This is what I've done, this is how far I've got, this is the brick wall I've reached. Have you been in this position? What have you tried?

[Ms Moore, 21]

Ms. Orton: I always like to listen and learn from other people what they do. I always say to them, what did you do then? And then see what their way of doing it was.

[Ms. Orton, 18]

Embedded in these accounts of practice, then, is a version of learning - learning from experience of life outside work, and learning from the shared experiences of work as a member of an occupational community. The aim of the analysis which is the main part of the thesis is to delineate this version, to see how it is constructed, and to investigate its coherence. In the interviews, these social workers were trying to give a creditable explanation of how they learnt to practice well in the context of their past and current roles. But they were also doing so to an academic, someone from the world of formal education and training. Hence, even though they made few links between learning through experience and learning through study or instruction, they were conscious of accounting to someone from those spheres. This raises the issue of how the analysis of these

interviews is to be related to formalised processes of professional training and development. It requires the study of practitioners' versions to be located in the wider literature of social work and of learning.

Training In Transition

The most obvious reference point for these accounts of learning is the official system for education and training of social workers (presided over by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, CCETSW). This is currently under radical reorganisation, with two existing qualifications (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, CQSW, and Certificate in Social Service, CSS) being merged into a single Diploma in Social Work (Dip.S.W.) In presenting their case for reform, CCETSW referred to the impact of new legislation (sixty-two Acts of Parliament relating to social work in England and Wales in the previous fifteen years), the impact of changes in government policies and service reorganisation; and the impact of new and changing social problems. (CCETSW, 1987).

The new Dip. S.W. programmes aim at a closer integration between the educational and practical elements in training. This is to be achieved partly by organisational change - programmes are to be provided through 'partnerships' between academic institutions and social work agencies - and partly through new requirements and regulations governing the curriculum and assessment methods. In its introduction to the curriculum requirements, CCETSW states,

Qualifying social workers need a rigorous approach to the acquisition of knowledge. They must become confident in identifying, locating and using relevant source material - factual, general, specialist and research. They must be able to

conceptualise, to reflect, to analyse competing theories, ideologies and models of practice which will inform their work.
(CCETSW, 1989, p. 14)

Conversely, assessment should be focussed on the applicability of knowledge to practice: it must be knowledge-for-use, and social work students must demonstrate their ability to employ it in their work.

Students should be assessed for their understanding of relevant knowledge and theory in the context of its application to social work practice and their ability to apply it. Therefore, for the award of the DipSW, academic disciplines should only be assessed with relevance to social work practice.

(CCETSW, 1989, 3.4.1.3, p. 24)

Thus a particular relationship between education (knowledge, theory, research) and practice is postulated in the reorganised training programmes. There is a user-friendly form of theoretical base, that is ready to be applied (perhaps a bit like certain new brands of non-stir, non-drip paint). It consists of models, values, law, applied social sciences and organisational context, and checklists are provided for the appropriate topics. Practice, in turn, must be demonstrably informed by theory: good practitioners can show how their work embodies understanding, awareness, ethics and skill, as these relate to specific aspects of the knowledge base.

Changes in social work training are echoed in other human service occupations at the present time. A new programme for nursing, midwifery and health visiting was recommended by its Central Council (UKCC, 1976). Her Majesty's Inspectorate called for improvements in the training of teachers (HMS, 1987). Common themes in these proposals for change were a broad knowledge with a specialist area of competence; linking theory and practice, with an emphasis on demonstrating the former through the latter; and greater collaboration

between educational institutions and service organisations. The proposed improvements were all seen as major overhauls in training, not just tinkering with existing systems, and all addressed to new needs in services, and to identified faults in existing preparation for practice.

It is important however, to recognise how these recommendations have been reached. On the one hand, they have stemmed from a critique of the performances of past practitioners. In social work, criticisms have come from such sources as employers recruiting recent trainees, other professionals, and committees of enquiry into child abuse scandals. On the other hand, they have come from awareness of new legislative and administrative frameworks, new needs, and new issues (such as discrimination). Perceived inadequacies and omissions in practice have been attributed to lack of proper training and relevant knowledge. The focus is therefore on enabling appropriate theory to 'penetrate' practice, with the assumption that it will be absorbed, and will in turn transform that practice, to the benefit of service users.

This approach is rather uncritical in its assumptions about what practice is, that is, informed and skilled, or uninformed and unskilled. Starting from the view of practice that is conveyed in these interviews, these assumptions may be questioned. Practice as *what is done by members of an occupational community* is regulated by processes which are not necessarily directly accessible through educational approaches of this kind. The sort of learning through experience which is universally featured in these accounts is worthy of special study. At very least, when a group of workers who are endorsed as good practitioners by their peers relate their evaluation

and improvement of their practice to personal life events and the informal group interaction; an attempt should be made to understand how these modes of learning connect with formal training.

Taking Practice Seriously

Hence the analysis of these interviews points to intrinsic features of practice which demand study in their own right, as a means of illuminating the pathways to learning and change. Rather than constructing an idealised, abstract version of 'good practice' largely removed from its agency and teamwork context, research should address this context, and pay closer attention to practitioners understandings of their work.

However, the question apparently begged by this approach is raised at once by the attribution of merit to the interviewees in this study: in what sense were they good practitioners? How can research distinguish between good and bad practice unless it starts from an external 'objective' standard, derived either from some measurement of outcomes, or some general principles associated with a particular method? It seems unsatisfactory to allow the evaluation of practice to remain in the hands of its own membership group - especially when sociological studies have suggested that their methods are derived as much from 'self-protection' and 'occupational survival' as from professional norms (Satyamurti, 1981).

Against this it can quickly be objected that 'theory' and 'knowledge' have provided little in the way of reliable criteria for evaluating practice - practitioners wishing to challenge academics (and it should

be noted that there were none such among these interviewees) could point out that there is no agreement among theorists about how knowledge should be related to practice, and little among researchers about how much it is used by practitioners. They are not even agreed about the very basic issue of whether practice is a 'science' or an 'art'.

SOCIAL WORKER AS APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENTIST The argument for this position is that we all, as people, employ 'theories' all the time in going about our lives. These theories order the world for us and give us a basis of predictability upon which to decide and act. The social worker, whose job it is to act with purpose and clarity, has an obligation to examine the theories upon which she draws and to develop accurate and effective ways of explaining and intervening in the lives of others. The subsequent conscious use and application of theories, with their associated methods, offers structure to the work, avoids drift and purposelessness, and introduces greater reliability together with greater possibilities for systematic evaluation.¹

SOCIAL WORKER AS ARTIST The opposing line of argument points to the inadequacies of social science material: it is far too general and abstract for the hands-on demands of getting on with the work and, moreover, it is primarily analytic rather than prescriptive, leaving a lot to ponder but little by way of what to do. Practice, having to do with the particular demands of any one situation, always entails the selection, synthesis and interpretation of ideas. Understanding people necessarily involves the appreciation of meaning and draws heavily upon intuition. Taking action involves making judgments irreducible to any theoretically derived prescriptions. And, 'means' are as important as 'ends'.²

The presumptions and weaknesses of both of these positions have been discussed in the professional literature, from the 'opposing camps' but also from meta-positions which eschew the dichotomies which form the debate. But there is also considerable disagreement in the research literature about questions of whether and how 'theories' figure in the day to day work of practitioners. Studies in this vein have tended to conclude either 'not very much' or 'all the time', depending, of course, on what is taken to be an indicator of the presence of 'theory'. Corby (1982) concludes, from his investigation of long term, local authority social work teams, that the linking of theory with practice is tenuous, and refers to Sainsbury (1980) for confirmation. Giller and Morris (1981) argue, from their investigation of social workers' decisions with delinquents, that the practitioners did not work with clearly developed theoretical principles. By contrast, the introduction to Hardiker and Barker (1981) can see evidence of the use of integrated knowledge at almost every point (quoted in Paley, 1987).

As Paley (1987) suggests, there are alternatives to pursuing this 'do-they-or-don't-they' question. Pilalis (1986) argues that some 're-framing' needs to occur. She suggests using 'thought/action' in place of 'theory/practice', and studying the processes that result in greater or lesser 'integration' of thought and action. In so saying, she expects those processes to point to the part played by the 'general social context and specific agency context'³. This move focusses attention away from seeing lack of integration as due to the failings of practitioners (and training courses) and towards social factors. However, it still leaves intact the notion of the 'use (or not) of theory' as a description of something that happens, and

therefore risks assuming that when practitioners 'tell it like they think it is, ...that is how it is' (Paley, 1987, p. 185).

This study arose out of some doubt that becoming accomplished in social work is to be understood in terms of becoming more proficient at 'integrating theory and practice'. The aim of the analysis was to investigate the thinking and acting of practitioners but neither the frame set by the science versus art debate nor the quest to discover whether in fact practitioners do 'use theory' were seen as satisfactory starting points. My initial doubts stemmed from my earlier study (Jones, 1982) of two family therapy teams practising in a clinical situation. Though both teams acknowledged key theoretical terms as central, their practical interpretation of them diverged considerably. This opened up the possibility that statements of theory and practice do not carry one single meaning but that new meanings are created in the course of doing the work in a particular place with a particular group of people.

The consequence of these considerations is that conventional ways of conceiving the issues of the theory-practice relation are becoming increasingly inadequate. In a recent practice handbook introducing social work theory, Howe (1987) concludes: 'there are no simple models of social work any more' (p. 168). For too long, the complexities achieved by social work practitioners have been subject to simplifying models.

Learning And Social Work

There are available a number of ways of conceptualising that are potential allies in beginning to elaborate the complexities. There

are also neighbouring fields of inquiry that have begun to be influenced by them. This study is an attempt at connecting several of these developments. In addition, it attempts to do so through empirical investigation. The focal point for convergence is 'learning'.

The empirical work derives from the question: how do social workers learn to do the work they do, and learn to do it well? The determination of who is 'good' at the work is left to the social workers themselves. To pre-empt that definition would have been to impose a set of meanings upon the practitioners when, for this study, it is their conceptions that are wanted. A collection of thirty-seven accounts given by social workers of their learning and development provides the empirical material. Empirical investigation into practitioner learning in social work is rare, despite the proliferation of proposals for improving education.⁴ These accounts provide a rich source for consideration.

The literature on adult learning has itself been undergoing major revisions over the past decade, and there have been particular contributions within the area of workplace learning keen to be recognised as a 'new paradigm' (Marsick, 1987). Yet, as Gardiner (1987) argues, there has been little evidence of cross-fertilisation with social work until very recently.⁵ The practitioner accounts provide a place from which to view the revisions, and vice versa. The talk of a 'new paradigm' is intended to alert one to the different philosophical bases of the developments in ways of thinking about adult learning. These are explored in relation to both the perspectives on adult learning and the empirical material. The outcome is a series of new questions directed towards adult learning

formulations, and a substantively different picture of the world of social work practice and learning than that which appears from the more conventional approaches.

The conceptualising of learning as a socially and culturally constituted activity forms another central theme for the study. This draws upon poststructuralist and constructivist writings in particular. It entails examining practitioners' accounts of 'learning tasks' and 'learning environments', together with the associated constructions of 'learning processes'. In the play of context, meaning and contingency that is seen to follow, social work as practice gains a special significance.

However, if learning does depend on context and on membership of relevant communities, then the study of learning in a social work setting also needs to be located in the organisational details (both formal and informal) of contemporary British practice. This is why the study of learning cannot be the only theoretical perspective in which the interviews are addressed. Social work - embattled, contested, reorganised - must be seen as the wider domain in which this study was undertaken. The prevailing issues and ideologies affecting the interviewees' working environment are set out in chapter two.

Plan Of The Thesis

Having introduced the major themes, I turn in the first chapter to an introduction to the theory of learning, and to particular developments which are relevant to practices like social work. Chapter two

addresses the organisational, policy and practice context of the interviewees' working environment. Chapter three describes how the sample of interviewees was gathered, how the interviewing was done, and the method of analysis. Chapters four to six set out the analysis of the interviews, showing how these social workers constructed themselves as credible practitioners, described good practice, and explained how they learned to do it. In conclusion, I will discuss the implications of the social workers' accounts for training and for practice.

Notes

¹ See Sheldon (1978) and Howe (1987) for examples of this line of argument.

² Examples of this position include England (1986) and Jordan (1978, 1979).

³ Pilalis (1986), p. 94.

⁴ Gardiner (1987, 1989) is a recent exception.

⁵ Harris et al (1985) is indicative of a building of momentum.

1 NEW RELATIONS FOR ADULT LEARNING

Right at the start of this thesis, it was acknowledged that the interviewees' accounts of learning to be good practitioners made little reference to training, theory or knowledge: they related it to personal and work experience. Why then should these versions of learning be taken seriously? If the social workers were unable or unwilling to link their practice with a body of professional ideas and methods, and to specify the principles which informed it, what have they to contribute to the study of competence, still less excellence, in their field?

In this chapter, I shall review the literature of adult learning, in order to relate these accounts of experiential learning of how to be practitioners within an occupational community to recent research. I shall argue that there are indeed developments in the understanding of how adults learn, especially in human service occupations, which help make sense of these views of learning good practice. Indeed, they suggest that practitioners such as these interviewees are addressing learning in the most appropriate way for the tasks they are required to undertake.

Adult Learning and the 'New Paradigm'

A new generation of catchwords have emerged in the field of adult learning sufficient to warrant the claim, according to Marsick (1987), that there is now a new paradigm abroad. Words such as "critical

reflection" (Mezirow, 1985), "learning conversation" (Brookfield, 1987), "double-loop learning" (Argyris & Schon, 1974), "reflection-in-action" (Schon, 1983), "action learning" (Revans, 1980), and "andragogy" (Knowles, 1980), are some of the more important examples referred to in substantiating the claim. Although the concept "paradigm" here is being loosely translated from the Kuhnian (1962) sense, the claim is nevertheless one of fundamentally different understandings being present.

In order to appreciate the forcefulness intended by talk of a new paradigm, it is instructive to review some of the main features of the 'old paradigm' with which it is contrasted. These features concern: assumptions behind the 'learning by objectives' approach; the centrality of the teacher; and, the disregard of context.

Learning By Objectives. Brookfield (1986) summarises criticisms of that approach to adult learning which emphasises identifying needs; defining objectives (preferably in behavioural terms); identifying learning experiences to meet those objectives; organising these experiences into a plan; and, evaluating outcomes in terms of the attainment of the objectives earlier defined. He does preface this critique with the observation that this approach may be effective given certain conditions, for example, a clear imbalance of expertise between teacher and taught, and the short-term acquisition of well-defined proficiencies (p. 206):

The criticisms are that, in pre-specifying learning objectives, there is a tendency to equate one form of adult learning, instrumental learning, with all learning. For Brookfield, 'significant personal learning' does not occur in the same orderly fashion as learning to

perform discrete, technical operations. Also, he suggests, 'it is reductionist in the worst possible manner...to reduce to a crude level of behavioural simplicity what are extremely complex mental operations' (p. 212). The activities of play and exploration are included as examples of productive learning which would fall outside of learning organised by objectives.

The concept of 'identifying needs' is criticised as acting as a "premature ultimate" - 'provoking such reverence and containing such connotative potency that its invocation tends to silence any further discussion' (p. 221). Further discussion is indicated since the question as to who is defining the 'needs' ought not to be foreclosed; whilst debating 'which needs' is itself seen to be an important activity in learning.

Learning as an orderly, finite affair is challenged also on the basis of this being an unattainable, idealised version of common experience, and one which denies the intrusion of the 'real world'. The danger is felt to be particularly for those who might aspire to it, and attribute failure as being due to their lack of diligence, clarity or completeness in following the stages rather than due to the model's erroneous assumptions about how learning proceeds.

The Centrality Of The Teacher. Two areas of difference are relevant here: the tendency to look at adult learning through the channel of adult education; and, the position afforded the teacher within that education. Much of the theorising about adult learning has been undertaken by people whose work it is to educate. The criticism is that this has resulted in narrowing the consideration of learning to that which occurs in educational situations. The unfortunate

consequences of this, furthermore, are seen to be the promotion of such learning as representative of all learning; and, the production of theories which over-generalise on the basis that there is something intrinsically significant about the 'adult'.

Restricting considerations of learning to educational situations is seen to have minimised the importance of understanding how adults learn in other ('informal') settings, or learn 'naturally'. The new paradigm, by contrast, is seen to invest great importance in these kinds of learning to the extent of using the understandings they generate to upturn previous views as to how educators should proceed within educational settings (see, for example, Schon, 1987).

In claiming theoretical significance for the 'adult', simplifications can be made which do not take into account even some of the most obvious ways in which learning might differ. Brookfield (1986) concludes, 'learning activities and learning styles vary so much with physiology, culture and personality that generalised statements about the nature of adult learning have very low predictive power' (p. 123). The production of generalised statements, though, does serve to mark out a territory for adult education and perhaps is not to be divorced from the professionalising interests of this occupation. As Brookfield notes, 'neat practice injunctions are appealing for their apparent simplicity and replicability. The act of facilitating learning, however, is one that is sufficiently complex and challenging as to make us suspicious of any prepackaged collections of practice injunctions' (p. 122).

The central position afforded the teacher within education has been a more long standing area of criticism (Dewey, 1938, being a notable

example), and the formulations of Freire (1972) and Knowles (1980) develop the theme in terms of andragogy versus pedagogy. What these formulations underline, in using 'facilitator' or 'resource person' in place of 'teacher', is a moving of the learner to centre stage. Learning here derives from adults' tendency towards self-directedness, and this stands in opposition to the passive assimilation of material transmitted by a 'teacher'. Clearly, there is scope for andragogy itself to become an orthodoxy within adult education, and to result in more 'neat practice injunctions'. Yet its importance in challenging assumptions about adult learning is seen to have assisted the arrival of a starkly contrasting approach.¹

The Disregard Of Context. All aspects of learning are touched by criticisms which concern the disregarding of 'context': the course learning takes; the opportunities for it to occur; and its value-laden character. Attention to context is seen to guard against idealised models and over-generalised theories. It is seen to re-introduce consideration of 'real world' effects such as personality factors, time and money, and social and economic policies. Learning becomes examinable as a social activity, involving power relations and value positions. Context also becomes something to learn about, a major area of 'significant personal learning' - and one way to do so as a learner is through critical examination of current learning practices.²

Recognition of the importance of context, Brookfield (1986) suggests, arose in part at least from the response of practitioners of adult education, to being educated in models of adult learning which disregarded it. 'Again and again course members reading the major works in this area would comment that "this is all very well in

theory, but in practice...". They would then proceed to describe the particular contextual features that made the adoption of certain apparently exemplary principles impossible' (p. 225). For all the theorising about adult learning, then, the world of adult education is described as just as vulnerable to the 'theory-practice disjunction' as social work and other human relations professions. It is the conception of this disjunction and the consequent re-casting of conceptions of learning that the 'new paradigm' attempts.

Domains, Levels And Approaches

A necessary stepping stone on the path towards this 'new paradigm' has been the attempt to identify different 'domains' and 'levels' of learning. Mezirow (1985) differentiates the instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective domains. Instrumental learning refers to task-oriented problem-solving and primarily involves technical skills and factual information. Dialogic learning concerns the way in which assertions of right or wrong, correct or incorrect, are discussed, interpreted and assessed. It entails 'a critical questioning of the assumptions on which the prevailing norms of appropriateness are based' (p. 19). Self-reflective learning focuses on a fundamental examination of one's identity, and transformation of the way one looks at oneself and one's relationships, through questioning 'dependency-producing assumptions acquired earlier in life' (p. 20).

According to Mezirow, three learning processes are operative in each of these domains. He acknowledges these are similar to those described by Bateson (1972), who suggested three levels, schematically: level one - learning; level two - learning how to

learn; and level three - learning how to learn how to learn. The parallel scheme of Mezirow is: learning within a set of assumptions (or 'meaning schemes'); learning new sets of assumptions which, due to their compatibility, complement existing ones; and, learning through re-organising and transforming sets of assumptions.

The first process is learning greater specificity of response. There is differentiation and elaboration within a taken for granted frame of reference. This process includes replication and "recipe learning", as well as rote learning. In the second process of learning, there is extension into new areas and a broader repertoire. The achieving of greater range includes transferring learning from existing to additional areas of experience. The third process of learning entails an examination of the sets of assumptions themselves and a critical reassessing in which experience is re-organised and new perspectives result.

In the conceptualising of different domains and levels of learning, formulations of learning processes become more complex. Instrumental, dialogic and self-reflective domains cannot easily be separated out in any given situation; and, no one level of learning is readily linked with a particular domain. Questions arise, then, as to the relations between and across these distinctions.

The domains of learning accord in social work with learning that is skills-focussed, learning which concerns 'organisational culture', and learning that is 'personal work' or self-exploration. Although such categories may be utilised in curriculum design, the accounts that social workers give of their learning suggests the utility may end there. This is not to say that the distinctions are not referred to

by practitioners but rather that the expressed interest is more with how they are to be constructed and related. Also, recent innovations in curriculum design, for instance 'thematic' or 'problem' based curricula, are in part aimed at removing the difficulties that are seen to arise from building an educational course upon such distinctions (Newble & Clarke, 1987).

There is similar interest about the ways in which processes of different levels are associated with different domains and with each other. As noted above, the criticisms of the 'learning by objectives' approach have to do with both the limiting of instrumental learning to first level processes, and the tendency either to ignore other domains and levels or to equate them with these two. Marsick (1987) refers to Lefkoe (1985) and a study of "context shifting" in which, rather than skill training by 'imitating with feedback a pre-defined model of good practice', Lefkoe 'helps individuals to first shift their view of themselves to the desired role and then try out behaviours consistent with this new image...Once trainees began to see themselves in the new role, they easily learned new skills' (p.19).

What emerges is the casting of doubt upon the independence of different domains of learning as pre-given entities, and the restriction of certain learning processes as intrinsically fitting to any one domain. The perspectives from which the doubt arises, and which appear to evaporate previous distinctions, do so through elaborating in particular concepts of "meaning" and "context". Before considering these further, comments have yet to be made upon relations between levels of learning.

Studies of 'approaches to learning', initiated in Sweden and of students in higher education, introduced the ideas of surface/deep

approaches (Marton, 1975) and atomistic/holistic approaches (Svensson, 1976). The distinction between surface and deep approaches are described thus:

The first way of setting about the learning task was characterised by a blind, spasmodic effort to memorise the text; these learners seemed, metaphorically speaking, to see themselves as empty vessels, more or less, to be filled with words on the pages. In the second case, the students tried to understand the message by looking for relations within the text or by looking for relations between the text and phenomena of the real world, or by looking for relations between the text and its underlying structure. These learners seemed to have seen themselves as creators of knowledge who have to use their capabilities to make critical judgements, logical conclusions and come up with their own ideas.

(Marton & Saljo, 1984, p. 40)

In the atomistic/holistic approaches the former involves 'focusing upon specific comparisons, focusing upon the parts of a text in a sequence (rather than on the more important parts), memorising details and direct information, indicating a lack of orientation towards the message as a whole'; whilst the latter involves a 'search for the author's intention, to relate the message to a wider context, and/or to identify the main parts of the author's argument and supporting facts' (Svensson, 1976, quoted in Laurillard, 1984, pp. 135,136).

Though the defining features of the two distinctions are very similar, Marton and Saljo (1984) see an important difference leading to the differing terminology: 'one dichotomy (deep/surface) emphasised referential aspects of students' experiences - their search for meaning or not, while the other (holistic/atomistic) concerned organisational aspects - the ways in which they organised the informational content of the article in their reading' (p. 44). Nevertheless, there are clear echoes with Bateson (1972) and Mezirow (1985) and their formulations of levels of learning. It is again, however, within subsequent discussion about the operation of these approaches that greater complexity arises (see Laurillard, 1979, 1984, Ramsden, 1979, 1984 and Saljo, 1982, 1984, 1987).

The approaches, from this further investigation, are not to be conceived as stable characteristics of individuals but rather as a consequence of the individual's perception of the learning task. 'Whether a student's approach to a learning task is to tackle it in a superficial way or to strive for meaning is very much affected by his perception of that task' (Ramsden, 1979, p. 426). For Laurillard, 'students' styles and strategies of learning are context-dependent: rather than applying to individual students, dichotomised descriptions of learning are more readily applicable to students in particular learning situations' (1979, p. 395).

The conclusion drawn by Saljo (1982) are that studies such as these substantiate the case for 'conceptualising learning as a contextual phenomenon' (p. 58). The policy implications for higher education seen by these researchers to arise out of such conceptualising concern attempts to avoid presenting a learning context which is perceived by students to require, or reward, surface approaches (Ramsden, 1984). Despite the emphasis upon perceptions, there remains nevertheless a possibility here of a swing from learning being conceptualised as the study of "underlying mental mechanisms" to it being the study of "learning environments". The implications pursued by Saljo (1982, 1984, 1987) lead away from the objectivism of both of these renditions. The interest he follows concerns 'the socially and culturally established conventions with respect to what counts as learning in specific educational environments' (1987, p. 104). He suggests:

Learning problems encountered in real-life are...communication problems and have to do with the diversification of knowledge and the rapidly increasing ways of understanding and explaining the world...The object of inquiry in studies of learning and thinking changes from 'mental mechanisms' and 'information processing devices' and is replaced by an equally fascinating study, as Goodman (1978) phrased it, of 'ways of worldmaking'.

(Saljo, 1987, p. 106)

Whilst Mezirow (1985) proposes different levels of processing, the Swedish studies indicate that different processing ensues according to how learning is being approached and that the way learning is approached is a consequence of the context of that learning and how it is perceived. Both are concerned with the place of 'meaning schemes' or 'ways of worldmaking' in formulating learning and differentiating learning outcomes. Accordingly, the significance of this is to be found not only in understanding what is learned - 'expanding intellectual repertoires to encompass new, and previously unseen, 'ways of worldmaking'' (Saljo, 1985, p. 107) - but also in how that learning occurs - for example, 'critical reflectivity' (Mezirow, 1985) and the 'construction of learning' (Saljo, 1985).

Action And Learning

'In this life it is generally a mistake to confuse *talking about* action with action itself' (Revans, 1983, p. 20). Revans describes how, in developing the combining of 'action' and 'learning' he was aware of the theory-practice disjunction in management education and of the historical gulf between 'the book and the tool' (Revans, 1980). He acknowledges that, when action learning is taken to be 'learning by doing', the response could be that it has nothing new to offer except perhaps underlining what everyone already knows through such expressions as "practice makes perfect".

Action learning addresses itself to learning to act differently whilst suggesting the way to do this is by learning through taking action.

It is the imperative to take action together with the way of reflecting upon that action before and after that are the distinguishing marks of action learning: 'it may, in essence, be no more than learning by doing, but it is learning by posing fresh questions rather than copying what others have already shown to be useful - perhaps in conditions that are unlikely to recur' (Revans, 1983, p. 14). The imperative to act arises not so much out of a supposed motivation to learn but rather out of a desire to find a better resolution to current difficulties. Although the learning is consequently task-oriented, it is reflecting critically upon the task and the actions to be taken that is given importance. This takes place primarily with a group of colleagues (the "set") who meet for the purpose of critically examining one another's perceptions and actions, values and self-disclosures, in conditions of mutual ignorance and risk.

Action learning is both a concept and a form of action that aims to enhance the capacities of people in everyday situations to investigate, understand, and if they wish, to change those situations in an ongoing fashion, with a minimum of external help. Action learning is concerned with empowering people in the sense that they can become critically conscious of their values, assumptions, actions, interdependencies, rights and perogatives, so that they can act in a substantially rational way as active partners in producing their reality. (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983, p. 9)

As a form of action, action learning has found expression in diverse organisational settings and across many countries (see Revans, 1980, Pedler, 1983, Winkless, 1987). Revans himself sees it as 'a method of building on the academic tradition, not a simplistic challenge to that tradition' (1983, p. 14) and he describes its applicability as attacking problems (with no existing solutions, no rights or wrongs) rather than puzzles (to which 'programmed instruction' can respond with pre-given, technical solutions and by developing puzzle-solving skills). In this sense, action learning is an elaboration of 'higher

level' learning processes and the 'dialogic' and 'self-reflective' domains. It reserves final comment upon the place and processes of 'instrumental learning'.

As a concept, action learning has been broadened through the elaboration of 'the idea that each and every one of us learns through action...we only live in and know about our world insofar as we engage it in 'some way' (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983, p. 9). As a form of inquiry, it advocates understanding through reflective action but action that is embedded 'within ongoing social contexts' such that 'people can be empowered to act differently if they so wish' (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983, p. 100). Action learning, then, admits of the possibility that people, in the course of their everyday activity, are already 'learning by doing' and so what it aims for is an acceleration of these 'natural' processes.

The 'New Paradigm' And This Study

My interest in these new theories about adult learning was originally stimulated through my research into practice and how practitioners reason about their methods. The starting point for this study was the ending point of its predecessor. That study had been concerned with the workings of a family therapy centre, specifically how what family therapists said about family therapy and their practice of it related to what they were observed to be doing (Jones, 1982). It was, then, a study concerned with the relation between 'theory' and 'practice', or (more broadly) words and actions. The conclusions suggested that conceptualising which kept these categories separate led to, at best, only a partial understanding of each.

I was left with further questions about the nature of theory and its place in competent social work practice. Debates over viewing the social worker as either applied social scientist or artist appeared only to compound the issue. The alternative that seemed most promising was not to presume the significance, or otherwise, of theory for practice but to pose a more general question. This might have taken the form: what are the training needs of social work practitioners? However, despite the topicality of that question within social work education, it did contain a restrictive presumption - that it is 'training' which is most important in producing competent practitioners. Therefore, a different question was posed which sought to avoid that restriction and to remain more open: how do social workers learn to do the job well?

As will become apparent, there have been a number of revisions to the connotations that questions carries, and to the sorts of finding to which it was expected to lead. At the time, however, the intention was to bypass developmental/educational theories and training strategies which implied a knowledge of how practitioners become competent. It was hoped that refreshingly new, and empirical, material could be contributed to the discussion. What has emerged is a strong scepticism towards any assertion made as a direct answer to the question, how do practitioners learn?

The reason for this scepticism has arisen both out of conducting the research and examining the status of the central concept 'learning'. At the outset, learning was thought of very much as a state-experience-activity-process which, albeit nebulous, would permit empirical investigation that could begin to uncover its inner workings. The

investigation of learning would be of a 'qualitative' nature (at least in the first instance) which, it was further assumed, would access experiences and processes and, on analysis, identify them systematically with learning. These assumptions were later thought to be misconceived.

So far this study carries a sense of promise unfulfilled. Indeed, there may well be disappointment for anyone expecting the study to reveal to them straightforwardly the ways in which social workers learn. More positively, however, what the study does accomplish is a re-working of how learning can be thought about and investigated. This steers away from a hope of unlocking learnings' secrets but ultimately does so by means that may assist us better to harness something of the potential and power of which the word speaks.

The research strategy was to conduct in-depth interviews with social work practitioners, using an interview schedule to focus conversation upon their learning. Thirty-seven interviews were included in the final sample and these were audio-taped and transcribed. An initial consideration of that material confirmed thoughts forming from literature study that this investigation of practitioner learning was going to be heading in a direction unanticipated at its inception. Some of the dilemmas raised at this juncture were documented in an article written at the time (Jones, 1990). A suitable entry point into the manner of the re-formulating which occurred is to consider how one approaches learning.

Approaching Learning

In comparison with 'teaching', learning is a more abstract, more nebulous concept. One can think of teaching as happening in an identifiable space and time, with more or less explicit aims in mind. Indeed, a common starting place for programmes of professional education is the (re-)defining of 'training needs'. The importance of understanding learning as distinct from teaching, however, is recognisable in such popular sentiments as, "just because it has been taught does not mean it has been learned". Even here, though, the association between the two is maintained - anyone who is concerned to teach well, it might be argued, would of course be wanting to assess their effectiveness and adjust their approach accordingly. The place for an investigation of learning becomes clearer once one begins to divorce it further from teaching, as occurring in the absence as well as the presence of teaching.

It is in part the assumption that learning occurs outside as well as inside the confines of teaching that makes its conceptualising difficult. The question introduced immediately is, what is to count as learning? There are clearly a number of ways to approach such a question but they can be grouped broadly under one (or more) of three headings. A process approach to de-limiting learning would be of the kind: learning occurs when these (X,Y,Z) processes (which constitute learning) occur. For example, from behavioural learning theory, processes of modelling and reinforcement equate with the presence of learning; or, from experiential learning theory, engaging in the learning cycle of reflecting upon action represents a learning experience; or again, from everyday expression, to live life is to learn. Although these examples differ in the specificity of the

processes they propound, their form is remarkably similar. If we could specify the processes behind learning, then the presence of these processes would tell us we were witnessing 'learning'.

Stating it this way exaggerates the tautology. For how can these processes be specified without some sense of what they are processes of, and how is one to distinguish between the successful and unsuccessful, faulty and accurate, enactment of these processes? A consequence of adopting this approach is that there is little check on an ever-expanding conceptualising of what is taken as the outcome of learning. The outcome may not be all that obvious but there has to be one because that is what the processes produce. What is learned is secondary to how it is learned.

The second approach to de-limiting learning, an outcome approach, emphasises the 'what' of learning above the 'how'. Preoccupation with outcomes, in the form of competences, can be seen in the current policy towards vocational qualifications. Clearly, to aid in de-limiting learning, checks of competency (as an example of outcome) would have to be made at points en route. Otherwise, one has simply a measure of current performance rather than a measure of a difference - the difference being that which has been learned. A major difficulty for this approach lies in determining solely by outcomes what it is that conceptually distinguishes learning from, say, socialisation, therapy or maturation.

The objection might be raised that there is nothing wrong with merging learning with other perspectives on human change. Of course, that is one response at this juncture: learning is (within wide, unspecified parameters) whatever you take it to be. That possibility, though

differently conceived, will be taken up later. There is a third and equally obvious possibility beforehand, the conjoining of process and outcome to de-limit one another, and so learning. What form might this take? It is the more highly developed models of learning which exemplify this option most clearly. Associating processes of learning and their outcomes does result in a rather more self-sealing approach than taking either separately. This is not surprising, however, in so far as such associations speak of a shared set of assumptions. Assumptions about 'the nature of man', be they humanistic, cybernetic, feminist, or other, provide limits to inquiries into learning - both the what and how of learning are pre-cast. The visibility of assumptions aids their debate, whilst the models they offer provide focus for thought and investigation. Yet what is evident immediately is a multiplicity of models. Are we to conceptualise learning as some aggregate of these? How do we manage their incompatibilities? Can we, by empirical research, hope to determine their validity or otherwise? This approach, though affording possibilities for greater precision and refinement within a given framework, does not address the issues of competing frameworks.

Consideration of the candidates for an approach to the question 'what is to count as learning?' illustrates the slipperiness of the term. An approach which emphasises processes of learning leaves unfixed the ways in which one might identify whether or not - and, if so, what kind of - learning has taken place on any given occasion. The emphasising of learning outcomes (in terms of greater, deeper, better knowledge, ability, judgment, etc.) serves to define a change but, without recourse to the supposed determinants of this change, makes it difficult to decide on what basis these are outcomes of learning and not something else.

The way forward would seem to be a combination of these two approaches. The shape this takes can be seen in dictionary definitions: to learn is to gain [knowledge/skill] by [study/experience]. Solely to add the two together does not overcome the drawbacks of each. It is by positing a relationship between the two that learning becomes contained within a framework or model. In this third approach, then, there is an appeal to an underlying set of assumptions through which the relationship is forged.

Despite the attractions of this third option (clarity, orderliness, circumscribed inquiry), it is not the approach adopted here. There are, arguably, already more than enough 'models of learning' in circulation. But of more concern is that each model effectively presumes itself to be the 'right' one. In being a model of learning, each is making an implicit claim that its own underlying assumptions best capture the essence of learning. Two questions arise. One has to do with the bewildering variety and nature of the assumptions themselves (a situations unassailable from within any one model). Secondly, and more fundamentally, a question can be asked about the sense in which there is an essence to be captured.

Presenting learning as an elusive concept, difficult to delineate, slippery, and so on, conveys a sense of something out there to be captured - if only one was up to the challenge. Without denying that some models appear to respond better to the challenge than others, the rather ghost-like quality learning assumes when pursued in this way might prompt one to pause for thought. What if the essence of learning was to lie in its elusiveness? Rather than attempting to probe beyond the elusiveness to find certain defining characteristics

of learning, one would instead explore the characteristic of elusiveness itself to find out something essential about learning.

It is this turn around which provides another approach, and the one taken up here. How then does this elusiveness operate? As will be apparent by now there are (at least) three faces to learning's elusive quality. Firstly, defining learning in terms of processes divorced from any specified outcomes ('one learns by...') leaves no basis for refuting almost any state of being or doing. It is only lack of imagination that curtails the learning that could be seen to be produced ('I must have learned something when I was/did...'). Secondly, although defining learning with reference to outcomes (but not processes) would appear to be more promising as regards 'pinning it down', it is not at all difficult to associate any given learning outcome with more concepts than learning alone. Learning becomes indistinct within any number of disciplines concerned with human change. And thirdly, including both processes and outcomes in the defining of learning ('learning is the acquisition of...by...') either results in very broad categories (skill or experience or...) that do not evade the difficulties above, or results in a multiplicity of more tightly conceived models of learning which lack the means of assisting with their bewildering array. Crudely then, the elusive quality of learning is its quality of being everywhere, nowhere and lots of separate places at the same time.

If one were to continue by presuming that it is this elusiveness which is an important defining characteristic of learning, where would this take the inquiry? There are three (inter-connecting) doors which now, I suggest, are opened. The first of these leads to the possibility of inquiring into learning by inquiring into the discourse in which it is

embedded. The second leads to inquiring into the rhetoric whereby learning becomes persuasively present. The third leads to inquiring into the power-broker position that learning occupies.

Before looking a little further into what each of these entail, it may be worthwhile pausing to consider briefly what they have in common. What they do not attempt to do is identify 'transcendental' features of learning, features which are present in all circumstances at all times. Rather than approaching learning as if it transcends context, learning becomes very much a matter of context, a set of beliefs and practices which are historical and cultural, and which are examinable as such. Instead of aiming to unmask some intrinsic, unalterable rules and properties of a supposed entity ('learning'), the status of that entity is called into question. There may be a set of beliefs and practices whose subject is learning but this is different from supposing an entity which has an existence independent of them to which they approximate more or less closely. The difference means that attention becomes focussed on how learning is constituted by these beliefs and practices, that is, upon learning as an historical and cultural product (and producer).

What informs this kind of inquiry into learning, from where are the ideas drawing? The break away from seeking immanent rules and properties is associated commonly with Husserl and his assertion that the 'objects of our consciousness do exist as *objects of consciousness for us*, whatever other existential status they may have or lack' (Magee, 1987, p.254). In his phenomenology, a systematic analysis of consciousness and its objects, Husserl develops the notion of 'intentionality' - that consciousness is consciousness *about*, that the mind is directed toward something outside itself. Despite the

bracketing of the existential status of that which is outside, there is still preserved the sense of a subject-object relation - an object known through the meaning it has for an apprehending subject. It was one of Husserl's followers, Heidegger, who questioned whether that was an adequate description of the human situation. In Heidegger we find an inversion of the knowing/being polarity. The human situation is better described, he asserts, in terms of everyday practical coping in which consciousness is relegated and in which 'subjects knowing objects' is of secondary concern. What this everyday practical coping speaks of is an understanding of being as being in and of a world of shared meanings and practices.

Approaching learning in the way proposed, then, implies that the inquiry will be guided by considerations of meaning, practice and context. Clearly, these considerations have been developed, revised and transformed since Husserl and Heidegger, and I shall be appropriating different themes, different arguments, in the attempt to conceptualise learning from a standpoint which may appear at first frustratingly evasive of the question, "Yes, but what did she learn and how did she learn it?".

Learning as discourse itself incorporates several related ideas. Starting with the notion of a set of beliefs and practices whose subject is learning, an inquiry into this discourse suggests a recognition of the historical and cultural quality of these beliefs and practices. One way of following this through is to view learning as regulated by institutional forms and so make an explicit connection with the operation of power. This will be taken up when looking at learning as power-broker. Participation within, and continuing renewal or revocation of, discursive forms alerts one to a different

aspect, the 'social construction of learning' (Saljo, 1987). Here, drawing especially from studies in the sociologies of science and knowledge, the 'what' and 'how' of learning are viewed in terms of their manufacture in the everyday activities of 'social actors' (Knorr-Cetina, 1981). Moreover, the accounts that social actors give of their activities are viewed not as a window onto 'what really happens' in their worlds but as a particular and salient instance of the constructing in which they are engaged.

Learning as rhetoric. Rhetoric here is not being employed to mean a persuasive argument with scant regard for 'logic' or 'reason'. Rather, it is the more classical sense that is being invoked - rhetoric as that which renders an argument reasonable (and so persuasive) to its audience (Ricoeur, 1978). Why is this seen to be especially relevant to an inquiry into learning? In so far as learning is perceived to concern human change, then one could expect any declared incident or episode of learning to have to be persuasive that change had occurred. The presumption is that the scope and meaning of any human change is not self-evident or transparent and that its 'demonstration' is achieved through the use of rhetoric.

The significance of rhetoric is clear from earlier comments on the elusiveness of learning. Elusiveness is not necessarily the appearance learning assumes in everyday discussion and social exchange on the topic - controversial, debatable perhaps, but uncommonly elusive. An inquiry into the rhetoric of learning involves exploring those operations whereby learning assumes a more fixed quality. The means which render learning persuasively present can be examined in terms of rhetorical figures and moves that are within argumentation and expression (Culler, 1983; Edmondson, 1984).

Learning as power-broker There are implications from the rhetoric of learning that invite considerations of the play of power. The suggestion of a 'fixing' process in learning implies subjugating some possible versions of learning in the fixing of others. If hierarchies of subjugation and marginalisation pertain within the 'textuality' of learning, then the play of power is already opened up to inquiry (Rabinow, ed., 1984). It can be opened further by examining closely what those hierarchies are, what sustains them, and with what consequences for whom. The suggestion is that learning is embedded within a network of power relations (an 'inter-textuality'). A shift in the 'what-and-how' hierarchies of learning would therefore mean a shift in power relations and could consequently expect to encounter unreadiness and resistance.

The predominance of certain hierarchies in learning, then, can also be taken as the established beliefs, practices and institutional forms which constitute learning. In this sense, learning is a regulating discourse but one that is itself regulated by a network of hierarchies in which it is embedded. Indeed, learning could be viewed as a most significant conjunction in the play of power, associated as it is with the textuality and discourse of 'human change'. The 'politics of learning', from these considerations, becomes a further instance of the 'politics of difference' (Boyne, 1990).

Approaching learning as discourse, as rhetoric and as power-broker, is rather a different matter than approaching it as an examinable entity with its own distinctive processes and outcomes. But what is not yet clear is how this manner of approaching learning coincides with the re-thinking that was prompted by an initial consideration of the

interview material produced in conversations with social work practitioners about their learning.

In order to clarify this, it is necessary to recognise first the tentative conclusions which were being drawn after consulting other literature - that on the practice of social work. These conclusions pointed to certain issues in the 'topography' of social work, issues which were reflected in the initial consideration of the interview material. The issues, ones of meaning, practice, and context, provided a meeting ground with developments of learning as discourse, rhetoric and power-broker (Jones, 1990). These themes will be addressed in the next chapter.

Reflection-In-Action

It is a well known axiom of doctoral research that a thesis should produce original material and ideas, but not too many of them. Above all, it should not try to create a new intellectual framework for the understanding and evaluation of data. Such 'paradigm shifts' do occur, in the natural as well as the social sciences, but they are well beyond the scope and status of doctoral students (Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend, 1975). The purpose of the 'literature review' in a doctoral thesis is to locate the data and their analysis within the traditions of the discipline(s) in which it is being written. A thesis is - indeed, these theorists would argue, can only be - evaluated through the shared understandings of an academic and research community, the 'practice' constituted by the discipline(s) in which it is written. My ground is all the shakier because, of course, I am arguing for an analysis of practice which deals exactly in such a

concept of community as the basis of knowledge and evaluation - practice as 'practice' (MacIntyre, 1981; Jordan, 1989).

Hence it is important, at this point, to try to make some links between the 'new paradigm' of action learning and the world of social work education. Fortunately one such narrow bridge has recently been constructed. It relates to the work of Donald Schon, whose research over fifteen years into professional practice has hitherto been influential mainly in the field of education. Writing about human service occupations in general, Schon proposed:

Let us search for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict.

(Schon, 1983, p. 49)

In his search, Schon contrasts a model of reflection-in-action with the model of technical rationality which he argues has dominated epistemologies of professional practice quite inappropriately. The new epistemology begins with the premise that knowing is in action rather than presuming that intelligent practice is the *application* of knowledge to instrumental decisions. Moreover, he suggests that the everyday working life of the professional depends upon tacit and implicit knowing and that it is this knowing-in-action which is in operation when practitioners manage the messes of uncertain, unique and unstable situations.

Nevertheless, according to Schon (1983), there are still those points at which professionals do 'think' about what they are doing and it is the manner of that reflecting-in-action which is of particular interest to him. '[It] is central to the art through which practitioners sometimes cope with the troublesome "divergent"

situations of practice' (p. 62). He suggests that at these points the practitioner becomes a researcher in the practice context in the sense of carrying out 'experiments' which generate new understandings whereby a 'theory of the unique case' (p. 68) is created. This exploratory, on-the-spot experimenting is seen to have its own rigor, involving a 'conversation with the situation' (p. 148), probing and responding to 'back-talk', trying out metaphors from one situation to an entirely different one (or, 'seeing as'), and looking for 'affirmation' of each move and change.

The link with social work education is forged in an article by Nick Gould (Gould, 1989). He criticises the model of learning in social work practice that requires students to demonstrate 'that theory is selected and deductively applied to meet the contingencies of the case and the context of practice' (p.9). Drawing on Schon's ideas about reflective learning as reflection-in-action, and linking them with Kelly's personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955); he argues that models of experiential learning can be constructed which overcome weaknesses and contradictions in the accepted orthodoxy of 'technical rationality'. Above all, they can rise to the challenge of the 'exceptional case'. Schon's contribution focusses on professional practice as operating in an 'indeterminate zone', where messy, fluctuating situations cannot readily be classified as coming within known categories of theory and technique - they are 'not in the book', as he puts it.

These indeterminate zones of practice - uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict - escape the canons of technical rationality...And in situations of value conflict, there are no clear and self-consistent ends to guide the technical selection of ends.

(Schon, 1987, p. 6)

Gould endorses Schon's conclusion that training should concentrate more on coaching students to reflect on their practice, to assimilate the resulting understandings into their stored repertoires of schemas, and then to experimentally apply this extended understanding in practice. In this way, practice becomes a form of artistry, but one related to everyday competences: it rests on 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1966). We are often unable to explain what we normally do: we can be competent without being able to offer a theoretical account of our actions, and it is sometimes easier to explain mistakes and deviations from the norm than normal behaviour. Much professional skill is 'know-how' - 'knowing-in-action' - and innovation occurs through on the spot experiments, a kind of action research with ad-hoc modifications during step-by-step processes, through which existing repertoires are extended. Such knowledge, and the ability to improvise and reflect, can only be learned through practice itself. Gould points out that 'theory-in-action' requires a different vocabulary and form of explanation from the kind of rationalist discourse that is used in training, which he describes as 'usually post-hoc rationalisation of practice' (p.14). He links this with the research of discourse analysts on natural scientists' formal and informal accounts of experiments (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984).

Gould concludes that these theories of knowledge and learning in practice have considerable significance for social work education.

To place the practitioner centre stage as the primary creator and bearer of theory carries radical implications. Such a conception challenges conventional understandings of the function of the professional academic as the primary producer and distributor of knowledge ... Perhaps, most importantly, certainly for Schon, the practicum becomes the primary site of learning, requiring practice teachers to develop the highest level of pedagogic skill, not in methods of didactic teaching but in techniques which Schon sees as analogous to sports coaching.

(Gould, 1989, p. 17)

Gould's strongly asserted critique of the assumptions behind social work education for practice, and CCETSW's version of the theory-practice link pose a serious challenge. Furthermore, it is one that is thrown down at exactly the point in time when training is being reorganised in line with strongly technical rationalist assumptions. Can social work education as an academic community allow such heretical ideas to be considered within its domain? Clearly, in one sense it can, since Gould's work was published; but perhaps it cannot afford to allow such ideas to hold up a process of educating practice teachers for a new, more didactic role, in line with the requirements of the Dip. S.W.

As a social work educator, I recognise the dilemma here, since I am involved in practice teacher training under the reorganised requirements. The challenge of this thesis can be more modestly put. The social workers who were interviewed for this study were exactly the kind of practitioners who are recruited to be practice teachers. As such, their views of how they learned to practice well deserve respect. Rather than requiring them to be taught how they *should* have learned to be good practitioners, we should perhaps attend more carefully to their accounts of how they understood the process.

Having attempted to legitimate the application of the 'new paradigm' to social work education, I shall return in the rest of this chapter to the development of a theory of learning aligned with new insights on professional practice.

Adult Learning and New Relations

Contributions within the 'new paradigm' have nudged conceptualising of learning into a new and intellectually and personally challenging arena. Marsick (1987) suggests this is consonant with the emergence of the post-industrial era and changes in organisational forms and workforce composition. Saljo (1987) points more to a proliferation of different forms of knowing found in 'postmodern' times. Technical rationality becomes an outmoded form of learning and is relegated by the 'new paradigm' to having subsidiary importance (Schon, 1983).

Some attempts to align this re-conceptualising of learning with intellectual developments elsewhere are evident: Mezirow (1985) refers to Habermas and Foucault; Marsick (1987) to modern phenomenology and critical social science; Morgan and Ramirez (1983) to Bateson and Freire; Saljo to Goodman. Also, there is some acknowledgement of the earlier stirrings in the history of this so called paradigm shift, in references notably to Dewey and Lewin. However, in a number of respects, remarkably little has been appropriated from related developments despite their potential for enriching and criticising this re-conceptualisation. The most salient points of connection are sketched below.

Learning As A Social And Cultural Activity The move away from understanding learning in terms of 'underlying, internal mental mechanisms' places its study more firmly within perspectives which view the social dimension as pervasive. This is not to say that learning become subsumed under the 'sociology of education' but rather that the arena is open to, for example: recent sociological

theorising which addresses related issues - the action/structure dichotomy (Clegg, 1989, Fielding, ed., 1988), socialisation and ethnomethodology (Fielding, 1988, Livingston, 1987, Pithouse, 1987), organisational analysis (Morgan, 1986, Reed, 1985), and the sociology of knowledge and science (Barnes, 1982, Latour, 1987, Paley, 1987); and to poststructuralist formulations (see Baynes et al, 1987, and Featherstone, 1988 for two collections), and their effect upon other fields of inquiry (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, and Parker, 1989, in social psychology, and Banton et al, 1985, in mental health).

The Individual And The System Within the 'new paradigm', outcomes of learning are still for the most part focussed upon the individual, who is seen to achieve a greater range and variety of repertoire, greater self-directedness, and so on. Alongside the retention of individuality, possibilities for the occurrence of learning feature organisational and group contexts and socially derived beliefs and values. The relation between the individual and the system is therefore at issue: how are responsibility and autonomy to be conceived; in what sense are individual learning and organisational change separable? More broadly, such questions are debated elsewhere, in terms of, for example: the 'micro/macro' relation (Knorr-Cetina, 1988, Wardell & Turner, 1986); and the 'experience/structure' relation of feminist perspectives (Harding, 1987, Moi, 1986, Rowbotham et al, 1979).

The Existing And The New Generally, the occurrence of learning is formulated in terms of "difference" and that difference represents a change from an existing to a new state of affairs. The manner in which these two 'states' are defined and distinguished (and learning held to have taken place) is called into question when learning is

conceived as a social and cultural activity, as is the manner in which the transition from the existing to the new (the 'learning process') is explained. A particular issue raised by 'learning through action' in this latter respect has to do with the requirement in higher order learning both to relate to the world through existing ways of acting and perceiving whilst subjecting these ways to the possibility of revision. This double manoeuvre is an issue which finds expression within new hermeneutic approaches (Gadamer, 1975, Warnke, 1987), literary theory (Culler, 1983) and recent investigations into meaning and language (Davidson, 1984).

Construction Of Learning The 'new paradigm' counters a conceptualising of learning which would view the organism assimilating and accomodating to the environment, or as items of knowledge and skills being transmitted from one person to another. To view learning in this way is to posit the existence of discrete entities of inherent form and content which react with and to each other in ways that conform to the conditions prescribed by the process called learning. To study learning is then to investigate, capture and specify those processes which constitute the essence of learning and to identify the properties of those entities subject to it.

The criticisms from the 'new paradigm' are that this amounts to turning a concept ("learning"), which is a social invention, into an object of reality and that this reification is compounded through the subsequent investigation of that supposed object and declarations of its essential properties and processes. The alternative proposed is to study learning as a social construct, and hence to utilise notions such as 'meaning' and 'context', and to emphasise the social character of that which is 'learned' (as seen in the emphasis upon reflecting on assumptions and perceptions).

Learning as a social construct, however, can be taken further than this to include learning tasks, learning environments and learning processes. Contributions from constructivist approaches (Goodman, 1978, Knorr-Cetina, 1981), narrative discourse (Herrnstein Smith, 1980) and discourse analysis (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984, Potter & Wetherell, 1987) are of particular relevance, together with those approaches available to elaborate learning generally as a social and cultural activity.

LEARNING TASKS The concept of 'novelty' is important to learning in the sense that learning is seen to involve encountering that which is novel or new. Novelty, however, rather than being an intrinsic property of a situation depends upon the way in which the situation is construed, the meaning attributed to it. Constructing 'sameness' and 'difference' therefore has great consequence for learning, and of course, great potency generally.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS Investigating whether or not an 'environment' is conducive to learning, or causative of a particular kind of learning, is suggestive of a search for intrinsic properties which have a determining effect. Whether or not a given set of circumstances are conducive cannot be established by reference to the circumstances alone: 'conduciveness' does not reside within circumstances. It is the relation formed between the 'learner' and her 'environment' which a constructivist approach highlights, and this includes both how the environment is conceived and the capacity to act back upon circumstances. The relation between 'learner' and 'environment' is, moreover, seldom confined to matters of learning, and is therefore likely to be defined and re-defined according to a multiplicity of purposes.

LEARNING PROCESSES That people do conceptualise learning to occur in particular ways (be they 'learners' themselves, or students of learning) is evident. It would be misguided to equate these formulations with "how learning actually happens". It is not just that any given model may be consonant with certain interests (adult learning, and the professionalising of adult education) but more that the 'maps' are of a 'territory' that itself is a social construct. That learning processes are conceptualised in one form rather than another, then, is to be understood alongside constructions of learning situations and learning environments. Ways of discoursing about learning processes become part of a wider constructing that represents accomplishments which go far beyond learning alone.

Reflection And Interpretation The concept of reflection has a long philosophical history and though it is not the intention to undertake a resume of that history there are themes from it pertinent to these considerations. The questions raised concern primarily the premise of a 'self', or 'I', which pre-dates and transcends that which is to be reflected upon, and the related premise of knowledge being a (mirror) reflection of the objects of its inquiry. These questions have been pursued within contemporary philosophy: the former in terms of, for example, post-structuralist ways of thinking (Dews, 1987, Gasche, 1986, Harland, 1987, Norris, 1988); and the latter in terms of, for example, historicist and relativist ways of thinking (Feyerabend, 1987, Rorty, 1979) and new hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1975, Warnke, 1987).

In relation to reflection and learning, the import of these formulations are several. The idea of the self being the centre of reflective activity becomes a perspective rather than a rehearsal of a

natural state of affairs. The 'I' doing the reflective work is a version of identity in which self-governing and self-defining characteristics are attributed to that identity, and in which the 'other' becomes displaced. Deconstructive thinking (Culler, 1983, Derrida, 1985, Gasche, 1986) suggests that a reversal is just as possible, and identity as much about 'other-ness' as 'self-ness': one does not reflect alone; language is not privately owned. Reflection (or, more appropriately, critical reading) then has more to do with a loss of 'self' - except in so far as 'self' and 'other' become joined in a new attribution of identity.

Not unconnected is the issue of the interpretative quality of reflection. The sense of a 'public' aspect to even the most 'private' of reflections is emphasised further by considering how when one is 'reflecting' one is engaged in an interpretative act. Accordingly, understanding proceeds by virtue of the traditions of our historical and social circumstances, and though these traditions are not unalterable, they are seen to be inescapable: reflecting may change our perspective on the world, but only for replacement, not eradication (see Warnke, 1987, also Rorty, 1979). In reflecting from within particular traditions, an issue with respect to learning is the openness with which potential challenges to one's views are approached and the possibilities through 'conversations' between traditions for new modes of self-description and the recognition of diversity.

Reflexivity And Learning

"The lesson is: we cannot teach you."

"Reflect critically on everything you are told."

"The way to proceed is not to look for formulae about the way to proceed."

"The theory to apply is that theories are not to be applied."

The reflexive paradox (Ashmore, 1985, Woolgar, 1988) of the 'new paradigm' is that found in other fields of inquiry which describe the historical and social situatedness of knowledge: the supposed relativistic trap concerning bases for their own assertions. The particular twist reflexivity assumes here, however, arises from the claims of learning through action: that generalised theories and methods represent interests of those other than the practitioner; that practitioners are not following prescriptions when acting with the uniqueness of each situation; that learning 'about' is not the same as learning 'to'. These claims are against general theories, prescriptions and cognition yet are being made in the very form they criticise. Aware of this reflexive trap, some contributors attempt to employ different forms of expression. Brookfield (1987) offers examples of himself at work by way of a 'model'; Revans' style (1980) verges on the autobiographical; Argyris and Schon (1974) and Schon (1983) use a liberal sprinkling of transcript material. Imaginative use of different literary forms is one way to be seen to be trying to avoid making final and certain claims about claims of indeterminacy (Mulkey, 1985, Woolgar, 1988).

SUMMARY

The conceptualising of the 'new paradigm' has introduced new possibilities for understanding learning and especially for a more sophisticated understanding of learning for practice. Arguably, previous dichotomies have been broken down and re-formulated (Morgan &

Ramirez, 1983), notably that of thought/action (Schon, 1983, 1987, Brookfield, 1987). Generally, this is an aspect of wider developments which address the contingency of our ways of knowing and practising (Rorty, 1989) and afford opportunity to question their "centricities" (Featherstone, 1988, Derrida, 1982, 1985).

There is, however, a further aspect of reflexivity in play: the interpretative activities associated with learning apply also when the object of learning is "learning". Learning is constituted within different perspectives, acquiring different meanings and implications as it is re-cast from alternative viewpoints, and altering those perspectives in the process. It has been suggested that, although important introductions have been made, the conversation between learning and the different perspectives of the 'new paradigm' has in many respects only just begun. Some indications have been given both of the different understandings of learning that are being constituted, and of how the perspectives are being shaped. The 'conversation' involves the constructing of a 'new paradigm', through appropriating recent sociological theory and contemporary philosophy and the conceptualising of learning as a social and cultural activity.

Pursuing the developments in this way may appear to be making unnecessarily heavy weather of endeavours to achieve "better learning". Why not let the conversations take a more practical turn? It is argued that, in relation to social work, a thoroughly practical activity, the elaboration of learning in the way indicated accords with the analysis of social workers' accounts of their practice and learning. I turn now, however, to the professional and research literature on social work where I shall pursue my argument that social work be understood as a practice. It is this reading of social work

which confirms the importance of the new approaches to learning that have been the subject of this chapter.

Notes

¹ Knowles (1972) provides an early illustration of the innovatory proposals andragogy is seen to make for social work education.

² Brookfield (1987) pursues this line strongly in his suggestions for 'developing critical thinkers'. Witness also Jarvis' (1987) title, 'adult learning in the social context'.

2 SOCIAL WORK: PROFESSIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

The aim of this chapter is to counter what could be seen as two weaknesses of the argument so far. In the introduction, I suggested that insufficient attention has been given to practice - what is done by social workers as members of an occupational community - in the study of how competence is acquired. In the previous chapter I reviewed recent developments in the theory of adult learning, and particularly in learning about professional practice in human science work. I argued - following Schon and others - that 'knowing-in-action', based on experimental extensions of practice repertoires, with practice teacher as 'coach', and working team as members of the relevant evaluative community, provides an alternative paradigm to the rationalist-didactic model of learning.

Two objections can at once be made. The first is that, although I have quoted from CCETSW literature on training, I have not yet adequately analysed the relationship between theory and practice in social work. The model of learning, and the relation of theory to practice, so far criticised might be something of a 'straw man' - a kind of CCETSW Aunt Sally. It is important, therefore, that I should try to locate this view of practice and how it is learned in the wider literature of social work, and to identify strands in thinking about training and learning (in addition to Gould's (1989) paper) which link with the experiential versions given by the interviewees.

The second objection is potentially even more serious. In the introduction, I criticised the view that practice demonstrates the

acquisition of knowledge, values and skills acquired through learning and training, and that it uses these in ways that can be identified as general principles. I also argued that the didactic and technical rationalist versions of learning are based on attempts to abstract practice from its context, and that this contributes to a misunderstanding of what practice is. The interviews, I have suggested, allow practice to be studied in context, through members' accounts of what it is and how they learned to do it well. In this way we can understand better how a practical activity is constructed, sustained and regulated within the community of practitioners who do it.

However, there are of course other ways of studying practice in the sense that I have employed the term. For many years, sociologists have indeed carried out studies of social work agencies as working organisations, and these present a vast literature of practice, showing how they perceive, manage, allocate, classify, work with and disengage from people with human needs. So far, I have not engaged at all with this literature, and the suspicion may arise that I have reasons for not doing so. The difficulty that it poses for the view of practice and learning that I am arguing is this: studies of social work agencies as organisations show professional workers as a certain kind of interest group within them, using their status, power, discretion and informal negotiating opportunities to control their work, to pursue it in certain ways, to avoid certain tasks, to employ certain (often routine) methods, and so on. It shows social workers as embedded in bureaucratic structures, using office procedures, protecting themselves from stresses, adopting defensive manoeuvres, and so on. It does not show them engaged in evaluating or improving practice to any significant degree. Seeing practice in context, it

would seem from these studies, is seeing it as procedural, routinised, defensive, partisan, stereotyping of clients - hardly a satisfactory path to understanding ways of learning to do it well.

Social Work Training: Theory And Practice

The finding from the interviews conducted for this study that practitioners make little direct reference to theory in their accounts of their work is not an original one: it is common to virtually every study of practice that has been conducted. Stevenson and Parsloe's (1978) observation that local authority fieldworkers felt 'ambivalent' about discussing their work in theoretical terms, and rarely incorporated theory into descriptions of practice, is echoed in all of the researches reviewed in the second half of this chapter.

In the section that follows this one, I shall address the question of why this should be, and how theorists and trainers have sought to explain it. First, however, I shall tackle the more general question of the place of theory and knowledge in social work training, in order to establish a clearer view of what the relationship between these is and should be.

One way into this discussion is to ask what a training course for social work which understood 'learning to practice' within the 'new paradigm' of adult learning set out in the last chapter would look like. How might it differ from existing courses, or the programmes being designed for the coming Dip.S.W.? In line with the perceptions of practice advanced by Schon and Gould, it would not start with the aim of substituting a theoretically informed way of doing things for a

naive or commonsense one. Assuming that trainees already had experience of practice, or at least of relevant similar activity, it would aim to extend their range of responses to the situations they encountered, to allow them to develop ways of handling more complex and demanding situations than the ones they had hitherto encountered, and to identify circumstances in which they performed poorly (by their own best standards, and by those of experienced peers), and in which they could improve, by developing new responses.

It has already been suggested that the practical placements would be a crucial part of such a programme, and that in the 'learning by doing', the role of the practice teacher as 'coach' - helping the trainee to adjust performance by reflecting on practice, rehearsing and developing a range of 'experiments' in methods - would be central, as would the 'learning environment' of the working team. But what about the classroom-based part of the course? The new paradigm would indicate that learning could take place on a number of different levels, and that these may occur simultaneously rather than sequentially. Thus students might be involved in:

- (i) instrumental learning - task-oriented, problem-solving, technical skills and factual information, including for example, learning about areas of work that they had not previously experienced;
- (ii) dialogical learning - critical questioning of assumptions about the best way to do things, and of rules of thumb; reflections on previous experience, practice wisdoms and agency policies. Often this could be accomplished in debate with oneself, a tutor, or other students;
- (iii) self-reflective learning - developmental work, personal development, focussing on fundamental identity and relationships, questioning basic value assumptions from early experiences and

socialisation, for example, over 'race', gender and the processes of giving and receiving help.

The purpose of the programme therefore comes to be focused on the students' responses in practice, though a variety of methods, from formal training to workshops, role plays and experiential exercises, contribute to the process of learning. Thus learning at all these levels contributes to:

- (i) learning more specific, precise and accurate responses;
- (ii) learning a wider range of responses, and transferring skills from one field to another, for example, ideas, feelings and strategies from personal to professional life;
- (iii) critical reassessment of the way in which experience is organised, reorganisation after evaluation, and new perspectives.

Clearly the learning environment and context are different in the college-based part of the programme from the practical placements. One difference is that the *community* in which learning takes place includes academics and fellow students (who are drawn from other communities of practitioners), as well as practitioners from 'outside' who come to contribute to training. It might well be that the aim of the programme would be to create a community whose membership is committed to learning to practice well, and to sharing 'know-how' on good practice.

However, all this still requires one to define the role of theory in this process. How do the wide range of social science disciplines and social work perspectives that make up the theoretical literature contribute to learning? There are various ways in which this question might be addressed: what I do not intend to do is review the whole

literature on social work training, or evaluate all the theoretical traditions that claim to influence practice. Instead, I shall address the central issue of the relationship between theory and practice in social work.

My task is simplified by the recent appearance of an authoritative and comprehensive review of social work theory, which contains a strongly and clearly stated view of what its relationship to practice should be. David Howe's 'An Introduction to Social Work Theory' (1987) is indeed more than an introduction: it is an overview which seeks to classify social work theories and theorists, and to show how they seek to prescribe perspectives and methods for social workers. But for the purposes of this thesis, and for my argument at this point, it is his version of good practice that is most importantly at stake.

Howe starts by presenting a consumers' view of social work, which emphasises the need for *empathy* and *clarity*. 'Many clients felt confused, baffled and even irritated by social workers who were vague or unclear about their intentions' (p. 2). Howe quotes with approval Fischer's (1978) conclusion that, in addition to being caring, inspiring trust, and being responsive,

They must employ clear and explicit procedures. The purpose of the worker's involvement must be understood by the worker and the client. Good practitioners make deliberate use of well-articulated theories and methods which organise, order and direct practice in a way that is reorganised by both worker and client. Social workers should be 'systematic'.

(Fischer, 1978, pp. 222-3)

Since this is the basis for a great deal that follows, it is important to enter a reservation about this first conclusion in Howe's analysis. It is true that some social workers have been criticised by clients for vagueness and lack of focus, and Howe quotes consumer studies by

Sainsbury (1980), Meyer and Timms(1970) and Rees (1978) in support of this view. But it is also true that other social workers have been criticised for dogmatism, rigid adherence to fixed positions, and an adversarial approach to clients, derived from unquestioned assumptions. For example, Packman et al. (1986) in their research on decisions about the admission of children to care, found both of these responses from consumers. Among the reactions of parents asked about whether they found interventions helpful were:

'they haven't gone about things the right way. They have had no compassion in the way they have handled things. We've been done an injustice.'

'Social Services are very powerful. The social worker actually said "I'm very powerful and you must ask my permission"!'

'I think she caused some of the trouble to begin with, more than helped.'

In particular, they noted that

Parents of children in compulsory care continued to feel that matters had been taken out of their hands. They spoke much more frequently of being told what was to happen, rather than being asked - or of not having matters discussed at all...Many also felt impotent to influence social workers' plans for their child, and a third of the compulsory group expressed considerable anger at the nature (or sometimes the lack) of such plans.

(Packman, 1986, p. 181)

This theme was, of course, taken up in the inquiry into child abuse investigations and the removal of children in Cleveland, and more recently in the Orkneys, where parents accused social workers of having preconceived theories about the causes and the nature of abuse, and of refusing to listen or consult with them. Indeed, one of the principle aims of the Children Act (1989) is to reduce the amount of work which employs adversarial, court-based methods, and increase negotiation and consultation with parents and children. To quote the practice guidance issued by the Department of Health:

The development of working partnerships with parents is usually the most effective route to providing supplementary or substitute care for their children. Measures which antagonise, alienate, undermine or marginalise parents are

counterproductive. For example, taking compulsory powers over children can all too easily have this effect though such action may be necessary to provide protection.

(Department Of Health, 1989, p. 8)

Hence it seems that the kind of clarity that clients are looking for is probably not certainty derived from an external frame of reference (such as a theoretical account of child abuse) but an ability to explain their role and the particular methods they are using in a way which makes sense to those being assessed or investigated. It is not so much a skill in communicating the workers' assumptions and principles as a way of engaging with the client's world, and making social work's powers and resources intelligible and relevant to it.

The next link in Howe's argument concerns the *inescapability* of theoretical commitments. He suggests that it is impossible to understand and act in the world without theory, because it underpins all our perceptions, descriptions and decisions. Theories provide workable definitions for living, giving phenomena a shape and meaning. Hence social workers who deny that they are using theory, or are unaware of using it, are either using something else (common sense, prejudice) or using some version of theory. Howe castigates practitioners who promote theoretical ignorance to professional virtue.

If drift and purposelessness are to be avoided, practice needs to be set within a clear framework of explanation; the nature of which leads to a well articulated practice... We need to declare our position so that others, particularly those with whom we work, can see what we are about and where we want to take them.

(Howe, 1987, p. 17)

The final sentence in the book puts this even more strongly, 'Quite simply, there is nothing better than a clearly held theory to give the worker a good idea of place and a strong sense of direction' (p. 169).

So, Howe takes what appears to be a strong line in relation to the theory-practice relationship, encouraging social work trainees to use their educational opportunities to identify and firm up their theoretical commitments, not in a pragmatic and eclectic way, but by choosing between the various models he offers. He insists, following Burnell and Morgan (1979) that the different models define fundamentally different perspectives for the analysis of social phenomena, and generate different concepts and methods:

Practitioners cannot tip-toe quietly by the assertion. The broad claim is that practice is saturated with theory no matter how much the social worker speaks of her simple reliance on commonsense or intuition...Thus, in any piece of work, the problems perceived, explanations offered, the aims devised and the methods used will vary fundamentally for each paradigm and its associated theories.

(Howe, 1987, p. 48)

The first comment to make on this part of the analysis is that it must apply to everything else, not just social work. If we are incapable of perceiving, describing or acting without theory, then this goes as much for football, motor-cycling, family life, dining out or fighting a war as it does for social work. Yet it is by no means obvious how theory relates to practice in any of the activities just listed. Some observations can be made however.

1. All of them are 'practices', in the sense of activities performed by members of communities, with diverse traditions which regulate them by informal methods. The cultures within which bikers dress for riding, maintain and embellish their motorcycles, ride them, and celebrate their riding are as complex and normative as the cultures which regulate gourmet dining or Malaysian family life. Far from being 'common sense' or 'pragmatic', they are intricate and impregnated with meaning and value for members - though these are seldom fully accessible to non-members.

2. All are also the subject of much theorising, and the theory about each takes many forms. For instance, the theory of football includes technical manuals of how to trap the ball, shuffle, pass, shoot, etc; strategic theory about attacking and defensive formations; theory which is concerned with the psychology of team-building and morale; theory of management; theory of crowd control; theory about hooliganism and the place of football in society and so on. The same list could be replicated in the case of the other practices.

3. The relationship between theory and practice in all these fields is complex. People learn these practices through processes which include participation, activity, socialisation, initiation, ceremony and ritual, and training. Formal instruction is not an essential feature of membership in most of them, though it is available in all. Excellence probably requires some study and reflection, and this may well include a period of formal training. However, in all of them, theory stands to some extent, outside practice. Experts who write theoretical accounts are not necessarily members (some family therapists are celibate, many football reporters have never kicked a ball, strategic theorists have not necessarily seen wartime service, and so on). It is not obvious that good theorists make the best practitioners, though good theory may well stem from close observation of, and attention to, the details of good practice.

Trying to apply this to learning to be a social worker, the relationship between theory and practice seems equally complex and multifaceted. While it is quite true that all practice is underpinned by the practitioner's beliefs, assumptions and principles about the nature of human beings and society, the web that makes these up is too intricate to be fully accessible to introspection or outsiders' analyses. While these can be questioned and modified, particularly in

interaction with trusted others, they cannot be totally dismantled and reassembled. Hence the very broad 'models' and theories that Howe distinguishes in his book are schematic abstractions, which probably do not correspond with trainees' commitments, certainly do not match existing practice communities, and perhaps cannot be learned as practices, even though they may be interesting as coherent principles which codify certain aspects of experience.

There is evidence that Howe acknowledges some of this in the final chapter of the book, when he distinguishes between 'theories for social work' and 'theories of social work'. The former are models for practice which explain people and their situations, and 'inform practice'. The latter are about the nature and purpose of social work (p. 166). He acknowledges that most practice fits within a relatively conservative framework, concerned with maintenance and support for existing arrangements. However, by contrast, theory is currently diverse and conflictual, with a multiplicity of ideas and models. He relates this to structural forces in society.

As relationships (political and moral, economic and technological) between the individual and society become more complex, multi-faceted and contentious, so the theoretical expressions of these relationships become more varied... The relatively simple relationship between the client and the social worker, the citizen and the state, which once was served by a limited number of basically similar theories, has now become much more fluid... There are no simple models of social work any more.

(Howe, 1987, p. 168)

This comes perilously close to saying that theory changes when practice changes. The worlds of politics and social relationships which Howe describes as being in flux are all, of course, 'practices' in my sense: they are live communities of activity and relatedness, regulated through culture as well as through the formal processes of government. What Howe seems to be saying here is that changes in the

world of practice can cause turbulence and fragmentation, leading to new fusions and forms, in the world of theory. This is very much in line with the view I am advancing.

My argument so far should not be read as anti-theoretical. I am certainly not suggesting that practice should be learned in isolation from theory, or that there should be no attempt to relate the one to the other. One difference between social work and some of the other practices discussed in this section is that its members are more publicly accountable for their actions than are most motor cyclists, family members or soldiers. But trainers are, of course, implicated in the shortcomings of practice, and become accountable in this way also - for instance, by being criticised by committees of inquiry into child care scandals. My point is that theory and practice are interdependent in quite complex ways; practice is not simply required to demonstrate theory, or be informed by it, and academics have commitments to their community of researchers and social scientists as well as to practice

So far, the aspects of social work theory whose relation to practice have been addressed fall within CCETSW's category of 'models and theories'. To conclude this section, I shall briefly sketch some points about the other categories listed in the Dip S.W. requirements.

Knowledge From Social Sciences: The relationship between the social sciences and social work has been the subject of much debate since the inception of professional social work training. Rather than review this discussion, it would perhaps be more productive to consider a particular example of where social workers have been perceived as needing guidance from research and theory - child abuse. Criticism of

social workers in scandals over the death of children under their supervision has accused them of being ignorant of the available research-evidence and knowledge base. For instance, in the Jasmine Beckford inquiry, a member of the social services department was castigated for failing to recognise clear signs of child abuse:

His failure to appreciate that at the time is no more than a commentary on the absence of knowledge about child abuse generally among social workers. The yawning gap in that knowledge should now be filled by the publicity given to this case during the public hearings and, we trust, by the publication of our report.

(London Borough Of Brent, 1985, p. 83)

In a scholarly review of the state of knowledge about child abuse, Nigel Parton (1990) takes up this theme. He points out that 'while a familiarity with research findings may provide important new insights, they cannot substitute for sound professional judgement nor can they solve some of the inherent tensions and ethical dilemmas inherent in this area of work'. He sees research as 'an aid to increasing enlightenment and not as providing the answers. Practitioners and clients are the best experts on their problems, so researchers need to make a greater effort to learn from and listen to practice'. The attempt to find causes and correlations between social and psychological factors and child abuse is beset by problems. The ultimate aim - to be able to predict particular episodes or select abusive parents - is misconceived: 'it is now recognised that research on such prediction falls down in terms of both its reliability and its validity. Whatever method of screening is used, prediction rates rise no higher than two wrong judgements for every right judgement.'

Parton's conclusion is that the evidence points towards an interactionist approach, where child abuse usually occurs among a great many other disturbed behaviours in highly stressful situations

and relationships, and where the responses of the social workers and other officials are some of the influences in outcomes. Hence in this key area of the theory-practice interface, the claim that reliable guidance is available from research is misleading. Parton's modesty and respect for practitioners' expertise seems an appropriate stance: social scientists can probably help social workers to learn practice better, but they cannot provide them with the knowledge that will unlock the puzzles and dilemmas of this most difficult sphere of practice.

Values: In the last chapter, it was noted that Schon saw value conflict as an important feature of complex human situations which is addressed in skilled practice. The CCETSW requirements for Dip S.W. place a considerable emphasis on values: students are required to show 'knowledge and understanding of the origins and justification, meaning and implication of the values of social work, ethical issues and dilemmas in practice, including the potential for conflict of interests and rights'. Among the values listed as to be upheld are rights to dignity, privacy, confidentiality, choice and protection against violence and abuse (CCETSW, 1989, 2.2.2.) But students are also required to develop an awareness of structural oppression, to understand and counteract discrimination, demonstrate anti-discriminatory practice, and seek to promote policies which are anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive (2.2.3).

Jordan (1990) has pointed out the tension between these two lists. The first addresses individuals in terms of their liberty, self determination, independence, conscience, critical responsibility for the success of their own lives, and respect for the same rights for others. The second list addresses social structures in terms of

power, privilege, prejudice, inequality, injustice, exploitation and oppression. Social work students are both required to respect existing rights to personal autonomy and private property and to challenge the consequences of such arrangements in issues over the distribution of resources and power.

Jordan points out that social workers' limited powers and responsibilities involve them in small-scale social relations at the level of family and neighbourhood, in which they employ face-to-face methods of negotiation and informal mediation. While concepts from moral and political theory help to clarify some of the issues, what practitioners most need is a framework in which people with conflicting interests can reason and reach agreements over disputed claims on each other and the community. He points out that social work teams and training courses are themselves groupings in which the principles and methods of these forms of reasoning and negotiation can be rehearsed and learned. The basis for this is the idea of a community, with common interests in a good quality of social relations as its shared life.

In the final chapter of the book, Jordan provides an analysis of moral dilemmas and value conflicts given at the start of the book. But he does not attempt to 'resolve' these in terms of moral theory or the application of general principles. Rather he gives verbatim versions of the 'conversations' between social workers and clients, in which they try to negotiate an agreement over the issues at stake. The implication is that in practice value conflicts arise in unique and personal forms, and need to be talked through in the context of the clients' situations and in tune with their life experiences and commitments.

Law: In the interviews for this study, legal knowledge was one of the few areas of formal expertise mentioned. Social workers were aware that they needed to know the law and how to use it. This reflects a strong trend in training, launched in CCETSW's recognition (CCETSW, 1987) that research had revealed serious shortcomings in the legal training of newly-qualified workers.

There is a certain irony in this being the main field in which formal training and knowledge was seen as related to practice, since the whole legislative framework of social work has been altered since the research interviews took place. The aim of the new Children Act (1989) and Health Service and Community Care Act (1990) is to transform the basis of practice in these fields; it is to change attitudes and methods, and not simply procedures and rules. In the case of the Children Act, very detailed guidance for practice has already been published (Department Of Health, 1990) with the paradoxical intention of steering practitioners away from a reliance on the law and courts, and towards a greater use of informal, negotiated agreements. Whereas much of the criticism of social work, especially in child care in the early 1980's, suggested that bad practice stemmed from ignorance of legal provision, more recent criticisms from Cleveland, Rochdale and the Orkneys focused on social workers' excessively adversarial and high-handed methods.

What the interviewees show in their accounts is an awareness that the law is rather a blunt instrument. Good practice involves its careful interpretation, and translation into terms relevant for clients' lives. Practitioners recognised this as one of the skills they needed to develop to practice well.

Practice Theory

In this section I shall turn to the explanations that have been offered by social work theorists and researchers into practice for the absence of theoretical references in practitioners' accounts. How has this absence been accounted for in the literature? We have already noted that there is diversity among theorists' and researchers' analyses. Recognising that practitioners are uncomfortable and embarrassed about it, some are disposed to accept the explanation offered by some social workers, that they have 'absorbed' theory, or use it 'unconsciously' (Barbour, 1984). Parsloe, for instance believed that it was 'used without being consciously named, for if theory and practice are truly integrated, one may not be aware of what one does from moment to moment' (Parsloe, 1977).

Various attempts have been made to create an intermediate sphere between the two worlds, in which theories and principles are converted into user-friendly entities. Evans (1976) developed a concept of 'practice theory' which is *implicit* in what social workers do, and derived from experience. Curnock and Hardiker (1979) employed this concept, but believe that it can be developed to identify general principles which can be used in the instruction of students. Hardiker and Barbour (1981) attempted to illustrate how practitioners 'select, use and integrate different types of knowledge' in conducting assessments. Siporin (1975) considered that social workers needed 'foundation knowledge' on which social work practice theory could be built, to show how they should intervene in social situations.

A radically different approach to these questions is taken by Paley (1987), addressing them from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge. He draws on Gilbert and Mulkey's analysis of how scientists talk and write about their work, and the distinction made between two 'repertoires': the 'empiricist repertoire' of formal experiment, measurement and written report; and the 'contingent repertoire' of the personalities, circumstances and accidents of the laboratory situation. Paley makes the parallel between the repertoires of theory and practice in social work, and sets out to analyse the relationship between them.

Paley locates his discussion in Wittgenstein's (1953) account of rules and rule following, in which there is nothing in virtue of which someone can know that a rule has been successfully followed, other than the agreement of members of a rule-following community that has been accomplished. Hence rule-following only makes sense in the context of a community that monitors its application, and rules are grounded in practices, instead of practices being justified by rules. He quotes my own (Jones, 1982) and Ellis's (1986) studies of how practitioners interpreted (respectively) family therapy terms and a practice assessment guideline to illustrate how different meanings and criteria are attached to the same words and instruments in different communities.

Hence the focus for the study of good practice shifts from academic knowledge to how practitioners distinguish what is good within their membership group. The relationship between the 'contingent' practice repertoire and the academic is seen as a topic for further research and analysis, not one to be settled in advance. Disputes between academics and practice teachers over the merits of particular students would provide evidence for such a study.

Paley's approach is closely aligned to the one taken in this thesis. My starting point is that the academic, theoretical repertoire of training is the version of social work which has been developed by theorists and researchers in their community, and which has been used to assess students in certain aspects of their training. The practitioner's repertoire has been developed in agencies, among those working with clients in the context of law, regulation, rationing and adversity. Academics and practitioners may under certain circumstances become accountable to each other, as during student placements. The challenge of the 'partnership' required by CCETSW for the Dip S.W. is that it means that they must, for some purposes, reconstitute themselves as a single community of trainers.

Paley's analysis suggests that partnership is not best served by academic imperialism. Although CCETSW nominally seeks to increase the influence of practitioners in training, the dominance of theory over practice is assumed in the requirement that practice must demonstrate theoretical principles. Taking practice seriously might better start from treating the discourse of practitioners - the repertoire of practice - with more respect.

ORGANISATIONAL STUDIES

The second part of this chapter will attempt to relate the view of practice that is advanced in this thesis to the study of social work agencies. The literature of this subject is enormous; it includes

research done within a framework of historical sociology (Parry, Rustin and Satyamurti, 1979), the sociology of work (Satyamurti, 1981), the sociology of organisations (Warham, 1977), and the sociology of professions (Wilding, 1982). What most of these studies have in common is an attempt to understand how the structure of agencies influences the actions, decisions and perceptions of social workers - the way they do their work - and how in turn the individual, subjective and personal elements in practitioners' daily interaction with clients are reflected in and influence organisational processes.

Social work agencies are part of the State's system for defining people in need, delivering services and regulating social relations, particularly household relationships. At the most general level, social theorists seek to clarify how the development of such services relates to class interests and the role of the state. For example, Wright (1976) sees workers in the welfare services as having a 'dual class' identity, deriving from their state employment and their involvement with deprived working class individuals and communities. They are seen as having interests of their own, concerned with advancing their occupations and expanding their services, which contribute rather indirectly to the interests of the subordinate class, through the provision of some employment, and the defence of welfare state expenditure (Parry, Rustin and Satyamurti, 1979, p.164). According to this perspective, all welfare workers in all the social services can be understood as having structurally-determined interests in expanding their sector of employment and provision, which influence their daily interaction with their employees and with service-users.

However, social services organisations in general, and social work agencies in particular, are by no means homogeneous. They are made up

of differentiated groups of managers, administrators and direct service workers, who interact within a formal system in the process of undertaking their tasks. Studies which analyse these systems address the ways these groups relate to each other, and how their interaction modifies the way the tasks are performed. The framework in which such research takes place is the Weberian sociological tradition, and particularly the study of bureaucracy. A common starting point is the 'ideal type' of bureaucratic, hierarchical organisation. For example, Smith's study begins from a summary of the relevant characteristics of a bureaucracy, as follows:

- (1) A hierarchical authority structure based on official position rather than the individuality of the incumbent.
- (2) A system of rules governing the rights and duties of these positions.
- (3) A detailed system of rules and regulations for dealing with each particular case.
- (4) A clear-cut and highly specialised division of labour.
- (5) Impersonal social relations, with management based on written documents (the 'files')
- (6) Recruitment of officials to a salaried career with security of tenure on the basis of technical qualifications.

(Smith, 1970, p. 23)

Studies which take this model as their starting point investigate the extent to which social work agencies can be understood as bureaucracies (Warham, 1977), or the tension between bureaucratic and professional interests within them (Glastonbury, Cooper and Hawkins, 1980). The latter approach identifies 'viscious circles' within organisations, stemming from their size, the proliferation of sub-systems and poor communications, as individual workers strive for autonomy and discretion, while managers seek procedures for supervision and standardisation (pp. 119-20). Attempts to balance individual responsibility and institutional control lead to internal conflict which is unproductive and inefficient. Glastonbury, Cooper and Hawkins argue for clearer professional responsibility and the

primacy of social work and service values over bureaucratic ones
(p.174)

However, this endorsement of professional interests is more critically scrutinised in other studies. Field social workers with professional qualifications are in a fairly strong position to organise their work and select their clients. Studies such as those of Goldberg et al. (1977 and 1978), Stevenson and Parsloe (1978), Holme and Maizels (1978) and Howe (1986), found that social workers were able to include certain client groups and exclude other groups from their caseloads, although they worked in nominally generic terms. Hence Stevenson and Parsloe's findings on social workers' preference for work with children and families were reflected in the composition of caseloads, and the relative lack of qualifications, and large workload of those working with other groups. Howe drew attention to professionals' ability and willingness to 'ditch the dirty work', in line with their preferences for more complex and rewarding tasks (Howe, 1986, ch.3). Conversely, less popular work involved routine surveillance and practical assistance, and was characteristic of work with elderly and handicapped clients (Goldberg et al., 1978; Corby, 1982).

Howe's study went further than most others in investigating the relationship between organisational control and professional discretion. Using the work of Johnson (1972) and Wilding (1982), he analysed social work practice in terms of the relative power that professionals seek, to control the content and the resources of their work: 'the strongest professions are able to define both with the nature of the problems which come their way and the type of response deemed most appropriate' (p. 121). His interviews with social workers indicated that

key areas of practice were controlled by managers as they interpreted and operationalised the political and legal remits of the personal social services. Although the manner of practice was open to interpretation by fieldworkers, control over the content of practice lay outside the purview of practitioners and rested with managers.

(Howe, 1986, p. 94)

Howe pointed out the connections between the phenomena observed in other studies - standardised responses, particularly in work with elderly clients, the prevalence of administrative procedures over professional discretion, and the concentration of professional workers around certain client groups - and analysed these in terms of social workers' control over their work. 'practice and organisation are understood as intimately linked phenomena' (p.140). Hence criticisms of 'bureaucratisation' and attempts to promote 'professionalism' were largely misplaced, and the dominance of the welfare manager must be understood in terms of an interplay of occupational interest groups. Social work's 'existence, its characteristics and style are a product of time, place and the balance of power between those occupations interested in tackling certain types of behaviour and social concerns' (p.160). His recommendation was that, 'rather than fight SSD's, the state and management, social workers are likely to gain in strength by recognising the name of the game, the basic preconditions that surround their work'. Quoting the projects reported by Hazel (1981) and Challis and Davies (1980), he argued that workers should seek more control by demonstrating competence 'to design services and responses around the needs of the client; their chances were best where 'workers became assessors, managers, co-ordinators, in short "practitioner-managers"' (p.163).

Organisation and Practice

The studies quoted so far addressed structure, process and attitudes: they looked at how agencies worked as organisations, how staff related to each other, and what workers thought about their work, and the way it was organised. While they reveal much that is of importance about the context of practice, they do not focus on the activity of practice, except as it is measured in quantified agency statistical data, or through interviews with staff. Another group of sociologists have addressed practice more directly, sometimes looking closely at case files, as well as interviewing workers about their thinking in specific cases, and in some instances talking to clients.

The picture that emerges from these studies is of an activity that is structured by routine procedures and uncritical rules-of-thumb. For instance, Black et al.(1983), in their study of three social services teams, note

the absence of explicit theoretical models in the way social workers described their practice. Rather they were guided not by intuition but by a common-sense framework based largely on their own individual experience of training and subsequent work with clients. Work was client-centred and focussed on the interpreted needs of individuals, though heavily constrained by legal requirements and available resources.

(Black et al., 1983, p. 193)

They conclude that there was little evidence of teams significantly adapting organisation or practice to local conditions. Social workers knew about structural economic and social problems, but any attempt to address them was left to individuals in their casework. Collective issues for clients were not tackled through groupwork or community work to any significant extent, and team members did not co-operate over such issues. They made little use of volunteers, and had few contacts with voluntary agencies: liaison was again over individual

cases, and mainly with other statutory agencies. Needs were interpreted in line with departmental categories and workers skills. They conclude that the 'similar and rigid responses' they discovered in three teams, located in contrasting areas of different authorities, were attributable to the political and organisational context of social work.

Local authorities have mandatory statutory obligations to discharge and such discretionary powers as they are prepared or able to pursue...The political context serves to define legitimate needs and their resolution. Thus, the reluctance of social workers to depart from a relatively narrow interpretation of their role simply reflects the occupational mandate they have been given and their accountability to their employer...it seemed that some of the features of social work we observed could be described as survival strategies. Field social workers coveted the freedom they had as individuals in their work with clients. Through working their own case-load, practitioners sought to maximise their own job satisfaction while at the same time remaining within their mandate.

(Black et al., 1983, p. 222)

This finding echoes the earlier study of a child care team by Satyamurti (1981), who saw their response to a difficult occupational environment as being primarily concerned with survival, and the assumption of individual responsibility for a limited caseload as being the just means of achieving this. Social workers' thinking reflects rather than modifies this process, researchers suggest. Rees (1978) talks of 'practice-oriented ideologies' which develop categories of cases and ways of dealing with them. He suggests that these incorporated work routines and staff roles, enabling workers to manage large caseloads and resource shortages.

This theme is taken up in Giller and Morris's (1981) study of social workers' decisions about delinquents. They use interview material to argue that social workers employ practice ideologies to typify issues, events, people and behaviour, to identify and cope with pressing problems.

By posing the question "What type of case is this?" social workers categorise the problems and work priorities involved in each new referral. In this way, cases become identifiable as "easy" or "difficult", "short-term" or "long-term", "hopeful" or "hopeless"... By locating the "real problems" of the case within the family setting and coopting the clients to look within it, the social worker is able to contribute directly to the remedy. Such cases provide "good work". Cases capable of being interpreted in this way not only provide social workers with the opportunity of exercising techniques which they favour but also of acting in a way which is highly regarded by their colleagues.

(Giller and Morris, 1981, p. 103)

What do such studies add to the organisational research reviewed in the previous section? Like the latter, they analyse what social workers do and how they do it mainly in terms of a tension between the structural constraints of a modified bureaucracy, and the interests of a professional group which is trying to control the content and context of its work. What they further analyse is the understandings they bring to the work, and the reasoning they provide in justification of their methods and decisions. However, in the absence of the kind of theoretical principles or general rules of method that they as researchers seek in these accounts they classify the responses either in terms of 'common sense' categories, or else in terms of organisational or procedural definitions. This analysis is tautologous, since its framework for understanding the organisation (bureaucratic constraint versus occupational autonomy) is then imposed on what social workers say about practice, 'explaining' their reasoning by reference to agency structure and sectional interest. Social workers' accounts of particular cases and decisions are read as 'routine remedies' (Giller and Morris, 1981, pp 53-4) because they rely on a fairly narrow range of methods (casework, family work) or the use of standardised resources. But this entirely misses what the social workers are trying to say about the uniqueness of each case, and of their attempts to grapple with it

In support of their analysis in terms of 'practice ideologies', 'common sense' or 'routine', all these researchers mention the failure of respondents to use theoretical concepts in their accounts of their work. For example, Black et al. write of 'the absence of explicit theoretical models in the way social workers described their practice' (p.193), while Giller and Morris quote from Browne (1978), speculating 'perhaps it is because the concepts... of most practice theories are too general and therefore not readily translated for application that social workers make scant reference to theory' (p.102). Given that they approach the interview data from the perspective of academic theory, and accord no significance to practitioners' reasoning from their own experience, or from the details of their clients' situations, it is not surprising that they fall back on an understanding of these accounts derived from organisational criteria.

However, another group of studies do develop the analysis of practice beyond these circular explanations of social workers' reasoning. Instead of perceiving occupational groups as striving solely for control over their working environment, they understand practice as an attempt to fulfil complex discretionary tasks under adverse conditions. Michael Hill has summarised the role of the 'front line' social worker as follows:

His job is characterised by inadequate resources for the task, by variable and often low public support for his role and by ambiguous and often unrealistic expectations of performance. His concerns are with the actual impact of specific policies on his relationship with specific individuals; these may lead him to disregard or fail to understand the wider policy issues that concern those "higher up" in his agency.

(Hill, 1983, p. 99)

Similarly Lipsky (1980) defines 'street-level bureaucrats as public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of

their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work'. They mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state (shaping expectations, determining eligibility for benefits and sanctions, overseeing the service). Thus they 'hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship', through their relative autonomy from organisational authority. They are constrained by the rules, regulations and directives of their agency and by the norms and practices of their occupational group, but the sheer volume of formal guidelines and procedures, and contradictions within them, allow room for manoeuvre; situations are too complex to reduce to programmatic formats; circumstances require responses to the 'human dimension'; and discretion promotes workers' morale and allows clients to see them as important for their well being. Hence street-level bureaucrats practice in a way that reconciles resource constraints with need, by giving a personalised service, using informal methods of regulation and classification; based on their working experience and the culture of their occupational group.

This analysis seems far closer to the accounts of practice given by the interviewees in my study. It acknowledges both the purposeful nature of practitioners' perception of uniqueness and complexity in situation, and the functional nature of their claims of discretion for the organisation itself. It suggests that informal, personal aspects of practice are not incidental but essential to the role of direct service work, since this level of staff is concerned to mediate between formal organisation and official classification on the one hand, and the informal structures of the world of needy individuals, families and neighbourhoods. Practitioners do not seek to individualise or to identify family problems to gain control and exercise technique, but to negotiate the terms in which what the

agency offers or insists upon can be made intelligible, useful and relevant for clients.

This interpretation of practice is in line with the work of Pithouse (1987), whose study aimed to display the way social workers themselves perceived and created their occupational arena. It focussed on the orderly and careful way social workers make sense of their daily tasks and problems. Their assumptions about clients were derived from working experiences of 'doing the job', developed into mythologies about worthy and unworthy aspects of behaviour which could be selectively invoked to manage cases and explain outcomes. This folklore provided workers with a source of wisdoms and precedents for decision-making, and sustained their working contacts with service users. He showed that social workers did not match their efforts to the 'book', whether formal theories of practice or the official regulations of the department. Indeed they drew upon shared occupational experiences and beliefs to substantiate and validate practice. Team members demonstrated their competence not by reference to formal social work methods or theory, but to the shared assumptions and understandings of colleagues. Pithouse placed special emphasis on colleague relationships, asserting that learning to be a competent member of a social work agency entailed 'on the job learning of the obligations and rights of everyday membership that shape practice and occupational identity' (p.52). Because work has to do with 'invisibles' - relationships, risks and emotions - attention was paid to oral accounts, which generated oral traditions and interpretive procedures to guide them in making sense of people and situations. Processes of learning, from this perspective, concern initiation into a community membership and participation in the traditions of that community.

Although conducted within a different methodological perspective, Packman et al.'s (1986) study of decision-making over admission to care shows a similar sensitivity to and respect for practitioners' views. Commenting on their attempt to elicit reference to departmental policy on training and research literature, they say:

We experienced the asking of such questions as an awkward and uncomfortable point in what were generally absorbing, long and free-flowing interviews. Linking the particular case to any general rules, whether of policy or principle, was apparently not easy; and perhaps our questions were clumsy and implistic in their assumption that such links existed, or were readily identifiable.

(Packman et al., 1986, p. 100)

Many social workers questioned whether their agencies had policies in the relevant field, or whether they were known. Among the comments made were: 'it's difficult to know if it's Shire's policy, or just practice'; 'you tell me what the department's policy is and I'll tell you if it fits'; and 'it's a professional, on the spot decision and in the end its down to the ground worker' (p.101). They conclude:

Policy presupposes that people, or the situations they are in, can be categorised and that general statements can be made about how to deal with this or that sort of case or set of circumstances. Yet a basic tenet of social work is that help must be tailored to meet individual need, that each person is indeed unique, and that it is to this uniqueness that a truly personal service must respond. But, against this, the strain of judging each case on its merits and 'from scratch', with no guiding framework, can be considerable. So, while practitioners may resist the notion of policies, they may nevertheless construct their own categories and concepts in order to simplify and make sense of decision-making.

(Packman et al., 1986, pp. 101-2)

This reference to the fundamental values and purposes of social work is surely very much to the point. Organisational studies which attribute 'routine remedies' and 'survival strategies' to social work practice because of practitioners' failure to specify general

principles and methods are overlooking the most fundamental principle of all. Social work is a rather labour-intensive and time-consuming way of giving services in which the practitioner attempts to match scarce resources to diverse human needs. The assumption behind all such provision is that people with special needs and especially those in distress, require individual attention; explanation and negotiation in order to make the best use of what is available. Furthermore, since part of the task of social work is to regulate conflict and protect vulnerable individuals, an added principle is that it is desirable to engage clients' co-operation and trust, and to reach agreements rather than impose enforced solutions. Hence open-ended discussions, dialogue and mediation are its stock-in-trade: these informal methods can seldom specify techniques or outcomes in advance, and rely on improvisation and lateral thinking. These methods are debated and refined through anecdotal conversations and ad hoc forums in the workplace; social work teams are themselves regulated largely by informal discussive processes through which 'know-how' is passed between members.

Finally, implicit in the critical stance of many sociological researchers towards social work practice is the notion that workers pursue their own interests without reference to those of clients, and do not subject their practice to evaluative study. In the chapters which follow, I shall argue that this criticism is also misplaced. Researchers do not recognise the framework in which this evaluation is constructed, because of their focus on theoretical principles, formal goals and organisational structures. This is because practitioners do not frame their criteria for evaluation in such terms. They evaluate by reference to a *self* - a person with a history and biography outside the occupation - and to the standards of the occupational community

(and especially the team). Far from being concerned only with routine and survival, the interview data in my study show them striving to sustain standards which are personal, and which reflect on their integrity and identity as individuals, and not merely as workers. They also show the culture of teams to be something more creative and developmental than a mere accommodation to organisational conditions and structures: it emerges as the medium for understanding and improving practice, for sustaining collective standards, and for learning to practice well.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have tried to counter two possible objections to the view of practitioners' accounts of learning developed in this thesis. In the first part of the chapter, I addressed the relationship between theory and practice, arguing that it is far more complex than many theorists have allowed. If we understand practices as intricately constructed systems of meaning and value, sustained by members engaged in shared activities, then theory can certainly contribute to excellence and the refinement of accomplishments, but only if it is sensitive to and respectful of the content and context of the community's culture. Academics and researchers are themselves a community, with practices of their own: the dialogue between members of the two occupational groups about good practice calls for understanding from both sides of each others' commitments and standards.

In the second part of the chapter, I reviewed the research literature on social work organisations and their influence on practice.

Although these provide important insights into the context of the practice, some studies show deficiencies in sociological imagination: practitioners' repertoires of accounting for their decisions and methods are treated as 'commonsense' or 'routine' rather than analysed for the clues they give about the informal structures and processes of regulation in the practitioner community. Fortunately, some recent studies do not fall into this trap, and hence give support to the method of analysis I shall be adopting in what follows.

In the next chapter I shall set out the methodology of the research and describe how the interview data were gathered and analysed.

3 INTERVIEWING SOCIAL WORKERS

Introduction

Introducing their book on ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) felt bound to start with the distinction between positivism and naturalism. They note the tension felt by all social researchers between research modelled upon (supposed) practices within the natural sciences, and research which takes the social world to be fundamentally different, and requiring different methods of investigation.¹ As they remark, this tension is presented often as a choice between two conflicting paradigms. Positivism is characterised by its alignment with the natural sciences and as privileging quantitative methods; naturalism is characterised by its emphasis upon the meaningful nature of the social world and as promoting qualitative methods. The former is associated with finding causal laws of human behaviour whilst the latter is associated with capturing the meaning of everyday human activities.

It is the contention of Hammersley and Atkinson that this well worn distinction and rivalry between the two paradigms has outrun any useful course it might have had. They suggest that it obscures rather than highlights the drawbacks which both share, for example, maintaining a separation between social science and its object. The key epistemological questions of the day are no longer served by posing an opposition and choice between these two traditions (p. 3). Whilst in broad agreement with their proposition, this discussion of

the methodological basis of the research will begin nevertheless by locating it within 'the qualitative tradition'. From there, it will be possible to examine how that tradition is being re-worked so as to separate itself from the dichotomy of the 'two sociologies'².

'A Piece Of Qualitative Research'

As will be described later, the empirical data for this piece of research was generated through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. As such, it would appear to qualify for inclusion within the qualitative tradition (Walker, ed., 1985). This is not entirely clear, however, since the 'depth interview', according to one definition, utilises at most an 'aide memoire' rather than an 'interview schedule'.³ It would seem that the degree of structure imposed by the researcher upon the interview is employed as a key determinant in deciding whether or not this research method is, after all, qualitative: the 'semi-structured interview' appears to lie in somewhat of a grey area. Certainly, though, the empirical data that is generated through the interviews is not made subject to statistical analysis. Whatever the status of the interview as a method, it is not a statistical survey and does not rely upon the manipulation of quantities in its analysis. What is clear at least, then, is that this piece of research does not follow, or aspire to, the quantitative tradition.

In his discussion of the qualitative tradition, Hammersley (1989) suggests that what we would today call qualitative methods have had their advocates over the past two hundred years. Following Blumer (1969), he ascribes the development of symbolic interactionism to

pragmatist philosophers (notably, Pierce, James and Dewey). In his account, pragmatism is

a loosely associated set of ideas centred on two key elements: a phenomenism that treats the whole of our experience as constituting the world, or at least as all that can be known of the world; and a naturalism that views humanity, including rational thinking, as part of nature, and seeks to interpret cognitive activities in terms of their function in human life processes.

(Hammersley, 1989, p. 64)

Placing experience and social action centre stage, symbolic interactionism portrays human beings as living in a world of

meaningful objects - not in an environment of stimuli or self-constituting entities. This world is socially produced in that the meanings are fabricated through the processes of social interaction. Thus, different groups come to develop different worlds - and these worlds change as the objects that compose them change in meaning.

(Blumer, 1966, p. 540 quoted in Hammersley, 1989, p. 138)

In this view, the defining nature of 'naturalistic research' is that it respects the nature of the social world.⁴ Hence, research methods must aim to be appropriate to that nature, and need to give access to the meanings that guide social action.

Qualitative methodology is no longer commensurate with the veneration of meaning and the pursuit of naturalism. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) summarise some of the criticisms of naturalistic research: a method, no matter how exploratory, has to be employed to discover the nature of the social world, and so all research involves selection and interpretation; social research is limited to cultural description; there is an inconsistency in the theories applied to the way social researchers vis-a-vis culture members make sense of their social world (pp. 12,13). Similarly, Silverman (1985) describes how the impasse between those who championed 'structural factors' and those who championed 'meaning' has been 'quietly overcome' over the past fifteen years. He suggests that

empirical sociologists...[were] happily mixing concepts drawn from apparently competing theoretical schemes;...[that] a new

generation of theorists...recognised the role of 'meaning' in social life without accepting that this dissolved the constraining power of social structures;...[and], a more careful reading of the sociological tradition revealed that past scholars were not so opposed to each other's ideas as had been suggested by the simplified versions presented in undergraduate courses.

(Silverman, 1985, pp. 29,30)

Meanwhile Corrigan (1990b) questions what it may be about the social practices of sociology that it played out this polarity between individuals/meanings/subjectivity and society/structures/objectivity.

As Silverman (1985) observes, naturalistic inquiry has considered interview data to be 'contrived', providing at best rationalisations of behaviour which have an uncertain relation to 'actual' situations (p. 16). However, given that qualitative methodology is not being equated within this piece of research with naturalistic inquiry, on what aspects of the 'new' qualitative tradition does this research draw? What kind of 'research instrument' do interviews provide, and how is the 'empirical data' they generate to be conceived?

Qualitative Methodology And The Research Interview

Once we rid ourselves of the palpably false assumption that interview statements stand in any simple correspondence to the real world, we can begin fruitful analysis of the real forms of representation through which they are structured.

(Silverman, 1985, p. 16)

Interviews As Situated Encounters

The interview situation is a particular social situation. From an interactionist perspective, it is a situation to which the respective interactants attribute meaning and which is sustained through the processes of their mutual (though not necessarily equal) constructing

of the social reality of an interview. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) put it this way.

Interviews must be viewed, then, as social events in which the interviewer (and for that matter the interviewee) is a participant observer...Interview data, like any other, must be interpreted against the background of the context in which they were produced.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 126)

The context of the interview and the meanings of the participants are stressed. What is 'said' has to be understood within the context of its production, including any latent identities the interviewees might attribute to the interviewer. In this sense, then, the focus is on the force of what people are doing and saying, rather than the content, on displays of perspectives not reports upon them.⁵

The difficulty in maintaining consistently this approach towards interviews is that found within interactionism generally, and has to do with the nature of 'meaning'. If one is concerned with the meanings that events and people hold for interviewees, with the manner of their interpretations, then this would seem to suggest as an aim that the interview should be so conducted as to enable the interviewer to enter, as far as is possible, the perceptual world of the other. Hence, there is an emphasis in discussions of technique and validity upon the interviewer allowing the interviewee to communicate their meanings, to talk about their experiences in their ways, and to facilitate the possibilities of the interviewee disclosing significant rather than superficial beliefs, intentions, views, and so on.⁶ This leads to the notion of potentially invalid encounters: the 'meanings' are more those of the interviewer than the interviewee; or the interviewee has not communicated their more significant ('real/genuine') meanings. Such a position is contrary to the central principle of interactionism, that all meanings are context-dependent, and so could not be 'invalid' on this basis. The tendency to so label

them arises from the shift away from considering the interviews in terms of 'what people are 'doing' with their talk'⁷, and a shift towards taking the interview to be a neutral medium for the expression of meaning.⁸

Interviews As Accounting Practices

Garfinkel (1967) begins his studies in ethnomethodology by asserting that

...the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs are identical with member's procedures for making those settings 'account-able'. The 'reflexive', or 'incarnate' character of accounting practices and accounts makes up the crux of that [ethnomethodological research] recommendation.

(Garfinkel, 1967, p. 1)

The domain of ethnomethodology ('the study of people's methods') is that of practical action and practical reasoning whereby 'people make of the things they are doing the things that they accountably are'⁹. Accounts, here, and their practical adequacy, are viewed as essentially tied to the activity of which they are a part. They are an aspect of the practical accomplishment of everyday activities. Considering interviews in this light, the concern is with the production of the interview itself.

Interview data report...on the internal reality constructed as both parties contrive to produce the appearance of a recognisable interview.

(Silverman, 1985, p. 165)

The focus upon the practical accomplishment of an interview again diverts attention away from the content of accounts to the practices employed. Connections can be made with the work of Goffman (1959), for example, on 'presentation of self'. However, there is an implication, particularly when attention narrows down to

conversational practice, that the issues concerning 'accomplishment' are treated as context-free. There are other approaches which attempt to bridge the aspects of accounting practices and cultural particulars.

Interviews And Discourse

The concept of interpretive repertoire is concerned with accounting systems and their functions within specific contexts. Potter and Wetherell (1987) define interpretive repertoires as

recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena. A repertoire...is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organised around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes).

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149)

The analytic use of interpretive repertoires is demonstrated most clearly in the series of studies of biochemistry by Mulkey and Gilbert (1984). Their concern is with the interpretive procedures employed by scientists and the relationship between the construction of discourse and the particular ends to which it is put.¹⁰ The crucial feature of this approach to 'scientists' interview talk'

...is that we are not using interviews, or any other source of data, to build up an accurate picture of the actions and beliefs of participants in specific domains of social life. Rather, we are using interviews as a technique for generating interpretative work on the part of participants, with the aim of identifying the kinds of interpretative repertoires and interpretative methods used by participants in accordance with changes in interactional context.

(Potter and Mulkey, 1985, p. 268,269)

The suggestion is that repertoires are not construed as entities intrinsically linked to social groups. Rather, they are seen as available to people with different group memberships. The way groups

and their membership are constructed is an important topic in itself within the approach to interviews as discourse. (And here, there is a close connection with the concept of membership categorisation within ethnomethodology.) Similarly, repertoires are not construed as linked to specific people: 'interpretive repertoires are used to perform different sorts of accounting tasks...People...will draw upon very different repertoires to suit the needs at hand' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 157). The concern is very much with language use in the way accounts are constructed and their different rhetorics and purposes.

An aspect of the functions served by accounting practices conceived in this way is that, in order to serve the purpose in a particular interactional context, their rhetoric will need to 'work' in that context. Part of the study of discourse in this respect concerns the construction of texts through rhetorical devices. This leads the approach to interviews in two (complementary) directions. Firstly, interviews can be examined in terms of their structures as texts. Such a form of textual analysis draws upon the disciplines of literary criticism, narrative analysis and the study of 'reading'.¹¹ Secondly, the convincing-ness of rhetoric can be examined in terms of 'members' artful methods in appealing to culturally-based knowledge of reality'¹². The latter will now be considered.

Interviews As Convincing Stories: Displays Of Moral Adequacy

Using a structuralist method, the analyst should seek to establish the cognitive universe or cosmology being displayed; no additional pieces of information are needed, only the elements present and the way they combine...The researcher can then seek to relate such cosmologies to the body of practices in which they are embedded...In terms of interview data, ...the way

forward is to concentrate upon the moral and cultural forms that they display. This requires a focus on how they function as displays of moral adequacy...Interviews share with any account [an] involvement in moral realities. They offer a rich source of data which provide access to how people account for both their troubles and good fortune.

(Silverman, 1985, pp. 173,176)

A focal issue identified by Silverman (1985) in his discussion of interview data concerns the split that occurs between externalist arguments (which would seek a correspondence between reports in interviews and external realities) and internalist arguments (which would seek accounting practices and interpretive procedures that accomplish an interview). The 'positivist' methods are unsatisfactory since they seek an external perspective at the expense of what is internal to accounts; whilst, the ethnomethodological ones are unsatisfactory because their target is the internal features of constructing an account.

The 'realist' method proposed by Silverman (1985) understands interview accounts as organised by the artful practices of the interviewee in that specific context, but simultaneously displaying cultural particulars. He draws attention to the work by Sacks (1974) on membership categorisation devices: "members' accounts are replete with descriptions based on appeals to norms and roles. For Silverman the implications are clear.

First, in studying accounts, we are studying displays of cultural particulars as well as displays of members' artful practices in assembling these particulars. Second, there is no necessary contradiction in seeking to study both particulars and practices.

(Silverman, 1985, pp. 171-2)

In using the term 'realist', Silverman is not intending to re-introduce a world composed of objects but one composed of social relations: 'in line with Saussure's dictum that elements have no 'essential' meaning but their sense arises in their relation to

difference from other elements' (p. 173). Thus, concepts such as 'social work', 'counselling' and 'statutory work' are both linguistic devices to indicate membership categories, and appeals to cultural roles and norms, which display the structure of social relations within 'social work'. Society is seen as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform and which would not exist unless they did so: it is neither independent of current human activity, nor entirely the product of it.¹³

It is this approach to the interview data which finally was employed in the analysis of social workers' accounts of their learning, and within which other approaches (principally, those viewing interviews as discourse) were incorporated. As we shall see, it proved a means of my creating a 'convincing story' of their accounts. For, social researchers themselves, like their interviewees, are required to produce accounts which display artful practices within the cultural particulars of their community and its own ensemble of social relations.

Before proceeding to show how these approaches towards interviews, and particularly that of displaying moral adequacy, was employed in analysing the social workers' interviews, I will describe how the research itself was planned and how the sample of interviewees was generated.

The Study And The People

This study was to be an exploratory one. I started with no hypotheses to test and no model to compare. I wanted to find out how social

workers framed their learning, without imposing my academic, professional or commonsense assumptions on interviewees' accounts. As far as I could ascertain, there had been no other empirical studies of how social workers themselves accounted for their learning, somewhat ironically given the intense period of discussions and re-evaluations of training and education in social work occurring at the time (CCETSW, 1987). This field of study was chosen because of the theoretical and policy issues it raised, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Using Interviews

In the early planning of the research, it was decided that semi-structured interviews would be the most appropriate field research method. The interest was in how social workers perceived themselves to learn, given that the controversies over the place of theory in social work were conducted largely by people other than practitioners (academic, educationalist, politicians) and that these debates seemed to be rather circular and fruitless. What did the social workers themselves have to say? Perhaps by finding this out, it was hoped, the circle could begin to be broken. At the outset, the assumptions behind this were located within the 'interactionist' tradition outlined above: by talking in depth with social workers, their own worlds of practice and learning could be uncovered, and thereby would be available to be taken into consideration by those who determined the shape of learning opportunities within the occupation.

The interest, then, was in the way social workers constructed their worlds, and in their views, experiences and beliefs concerning their learning. The place to start seemed, almost self-evidently, to be to

talk with them. The sensitive, complicated, unmeasurable features of the research topic suggested that a qualitative approach was appropriate (Walker, 1985a). Of course, interviews, per se, are seen to be employed either side of the 'divide' between positivistic and naturalistic research, with the terms 'structured' (or 'survey') attached to the former and 'unstructured' (or 'depth') attached to the latter (Walker, ed., 1985a; Burgess, 1984). Mischler (1986), in his discussion of research interviewing, argues that for too long there was a presumption within the research community that 'we all "know" what an interview is' (p. 10); and, in his history, this is the interview that Oakley (1981) characterises in terms of objectivity, detachment and a hierarchical relationship (p. 41).

The interviews that I planned were intended to be more of the kind characterised by Burgess (1982), providing

the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply, to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts from informants that are based on personal experience.

(Burgess, 1982, p. 107)

As already made clear, my understanding of interview talk was to change from these earlier ideas. Yet, they did give me a way of locating myself, for the time being, within a particular research tradition, and offered the basis upon which to legitimate the choice of interviewing as the preferred method for my topic.

It is now clear to me why it would have been inappropriate to complement the interviews with a second (or third) method, the most likely candidate being the conducting of some form of participant observation. This certainly would have afforded me the opportunity to consider adopting multiple sources of data as a means of validating findings by method triangulation (Denzin, 1970). At the time, I was

unconvinced about using any participant observation techniques because of their inappropriateness to the research topic: you cannot observe 'learning'. In retrospect, there was clearly an argument that, by, for example, tracking interviewees within the 'natural' contexts of their practice, I could have 'checked, verified, compared' and triangulated observations and interview data. Had I taken that road, the research would have led in a very different direction.

From my subsequent study of the use of interviews, based upon recent literature, I would now mount a different argument for the advantages that can accrue from research based solely upon interviewing the social workers. This argument derives from the descriptions of interview talk rendered above. Firstly, the 'triangulation method' assumes a single (undefined) reality and treats accounts as multiple mappings of this reality; by enabling comparison, it serves to eliminate 'bias' and 'error'. Within this positivist frame of reference, there is assumed to be a correspondence that can be sought between the 'subjective' accounts of individuals and an 'objective' reality: some accounts, by virtue of bias, distortion, bad faith, or whatever, will be more accurate than others. 'Deviant' cases are to be eliminated: the researcher becomes adjudicator. In so far as this is the rationale for additional methods being employed, it fails to approach interview talk as doing situated work within the context in which it is produced. Secondly, by approaching interviews as displays of moral adequacy, and examining them as discourse, a thorough and rigorous analysis can be made which generates knowledge of how social workers construct their practice and learning and of the social relations within which they do so. Thirdly, though I would not argue against generating data in multiple ways (the issue being how it is analysed), the opportunities for investigation and analysis provided by

these thirty-seven social workers were more than enough to keep this researcher occupied within the practical limits under which he was working: that is, part-time, largely unfunded research for a higher degree.

As will become clearer during the later discussion of the analysis of the interviews, the purposes to be served by the interviews changed during the life of the research. Having begun sure of why I wanted to talk 'in depth' with the social workers about their learning, I was to have doubts along the way as to the wisdom of this. I began sure of the value of using interviews to 'give social workers a voice' and intended to depict as faithfully as I could their subjective worlds and meanings as disclosed within a conversation with an interested researcher; later, I believed this intention to be misconceived. I myself had been a practising social worker for five years prior to commencing the research, and felt I would be in a prime position to fulfil the requirements of good communication with this occupational group, noting, for example, the comments by Burgess.

Researchers require a knowledge of technical terms and an ability to ascertain cultural meanings, if they are to obtain detail, verify statements, elucidate contradictory data and obtain information that will allow them to evaluate their informants' statements.

(Burgess, 1982, p. 108)

I was less concerned about the possible drawbacks of this noted by Platt (1981) regarding the possibility of the social workers inviting me to draw upon my background knowledge rather than 'spell out' what they were saying. (A 'difficulty' I was later to construe more in terms of the interactional nature of the interview and the effect of 'latent identities' within that.)

It must be said that I was also attracted to undertaking a piece of research using a research tool with which I felt some confidence, and

within a tradition which I already perceived to be a part of how I thought about my practice as a social worker. In depth interviewing and 'interpersonal communication' seemed to me to be one of the most central tasks that I had been involved in as a social worker. I felt that I could do it reasonably well (and subsequently, of course, would be putting myself in front of my former peers feeling I would have to demonstrate that I could do it well!). Now, I find some vindication for thinking this way from Finch (1984) who qualifies her position on women researchers interviewing women, by indicating that male social workers often get men and women successfully to talk about their lives. As regards my affinity with the tradition of 'qualitative' methodology, I (rather like Day, 1987) viewed a good deal of my activity as a social worker as entering as far as possible into the meanings that events held for clients. Such a framework I found I could translate into a piece of research concerned with 'subjectivity'.

Was my choice of research method dictated by these personal considerations? This is a question I have to take seriously now, but from a different perspective. Feminist social theorists and researchers have argued strongly that 'research methods' cannot be dissociated from the structural and institutional locations within which they have been produced (Harding, ed., 1987). Hence, there is the sense of an 'androcentric' use of different forms of inquiry.¹⁴ Related to this, there is importance attached to the social identity of the researcher being made visible (rather than hidden) within the research. I take my social identity to be salient in my choice of research topic, research design, implementation, analysis and report. It is relevant that I had formerly been a (male) social worker, am now working for a higher degree and have moved into academic training, but

I can never know in a final sense just how so (Derrida, 1982). My argument is that the use of interviews in this research can be defended on the grounds of meeting the requirements of 'good research'; but, that what constitutes 'good research' ultimately cannot be determined on 'technical' grounds alone, outside of the institutional practices within which it occurs and outside the social identities of the parties who are instrumental in its production.

The Sample

The matter of constructing an interviewee sample generated questions on a several levels. I was wanting to talk with a number of practising social workers, and wanting them to give me several hours of their time. Where were they to come from? Were they to be 'representative' in any sense? How was I to gain access to them? How would the research be presented to them? What were the ethical considerations to be born in mind?

Survey research gives rise to statistical data, and the inferences from them are required to be 'theory neutral', and to associate phenomena in terms of correlations with variables. Their claims to validity depend on the representativeness of their samples. In field research, claims to validity rest on the adequacy of their underlying theories, on the ability of the analysis to provide a logical and coherent account which explains the data in a convincing way (Silverman, 1989). Statistical representativeness, therefore, is not a principle within field research. Nevertheless, the process of sampling is a crucial part of the research activity; and, according to Denzin (1970), sampling procedures ought to be made public in any research account.

Sampling can be defined generally as 'the process of selecting participants for a research project' (Dane, 1990, p. 289). Despite the distinction between statistically and non-statistically based sampling, the major categories within which sampling procedures are discussed - probability and non-probability sampling (Burgess, 1984) - are themselves statistically derived. Non-probability sampling is defined by Chein (1976) in the following terms: 'in non-probability sampling, there is no way of estimating the probability that each element has of being included in the sample and no assurance that every element has some chance of being included' (p. 516, emphasis in original). Burgess (1984, 1982b) makes two observations. Firstly, 'it is non-probability sampling that is more often used by field researchers' (1984, p. 55); and secondly, 'non-probability sampling includes: accidental samples, quota samples, judgment samples, and snowball samples, all of which are discussed in less detail in the basic methodology texts' (1982b, p. 75). It was the 'non-probability' sampling procedure of snowballing that was used in this research.

The first principle that Denzin (1970) identifies in relation to sampling and field research is that the sampling must be theoretically directed. The research question derived from the consideration of theoretical issues discussed in the previous chapters was: how do social workers learn to do the job well? It was the perceptions of social workers themselves that was wanted with regard to the evaluation of what it means to do the job well. It would have been contrary to the theoretical direction of the research to have included members of other groupings (managers, educationalists, members of the public) in the selecting process. This is not to assume there is homogeneity within the occupational group 'social work' on such a

contested issue. Nevertheless, containing the selecting process within that group facilitated the production of data upon the members' construal of their differences. Indeed, the awareness on the part of the interviewees that they had been nominated on that basis by one of their peers, that the other interviewees had also, and that their ideas on 'good social work' differed, generated particular accounting practices which were crucial within the analysis in terms of legitimation.

Snowball sampling is described in these terms: 'this approach involves using a small group of informants who are asked to put the researcher in touch with their friends who are subsequently interviewed, then asking them about their friends and interviewing them until a chain of informants has been selected' (Burgess, 1984, p. 55). It is the feature of normative definition, perhaps, that connects the use of snowballing in this study with that area in which it has been most commonly reported - deviance.¹⁵ Becker (1970) indicates how a role in private life may open up opportunities for snowball sampling, and cites his own work with marijuana users. Polsky (1969), in his study of hustlers, used his abilities as a billiards player to start to collect data on fellow players.¹⁶ There is clearly a normative element in defining membership within a 'deviant' group, and the selection of 'good' social workers poses a parallel problem. The use of snowball samples is seen by Burgess (1982b) as one means employed by researchers to resolve the difficulty of whom they should study when membership cannot be clearly (formally?) defined (p. 77).

Snowballing is associated with the concept of social networks. There are two themes here. One concerns a focus upon ascertaining the full

(if possible) membership of a given social network with a view to studying processes within that network. Social network analysis utilises snowballing techniques to draw up, and possibly draw together, the network.¹⁷ The study of decision making units is one particular application of this form of sociometry.¹⁸ Alternatively, the focus may remain primarily upon the individual whilst recognising that they have been 'sponsored' by a fellow interviewee: 'such a sampling procedure follows the pattern of social relations in a particular setting and therefore the population in the sample involves individuals and relations between individuals' (Burgess, 1984, p. 55, emphasis in original). It is the second of these considerations which is relevant to this study.

The concept of gatekeeping can be applied to selecting by snowballing: 'key informants' can act as gatekeepers in any study and facilitate access for the researcher' (Burgess, 1982b, p. 77). The snowball chain depends each interviewee being willing and able to 'open the gate' for the researcher to the next interviewee. Thus, there is the issue of 'knowing who has the power to open up or block off access, or who consider themselves and are considered by others to have the authority to grant or refuse access' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, pp. 63,64). These matters of access and gatekeeping, and the ethical issues they raise, will be considered shortly.

In sum, the snowballing procedure was in line with the theoretical basis of the research in allowing the normative definition of the interviewee sample group to be internal to that group; and, it capitalised upon the researcher's existing knowledge of and role (past and present) within the social setting. It raises questions concerning the relations between individuals within the sample group;

and, questions about the means of access, and role of gatekeepers. Having considered these features of the use of snowballing as a way of selecting interviewees, I will now describe how the snowball was administered within this research and address matters of access and gatekeeping. The matter of any network effect will be discussed within the overall consideration of the analysis.

I was working and living in a small city within a shire county of England. Prior to beginning the research, I had worked for two years within the social services office of the city and had also worked as a trainer on local courses. I had many personal acquaintances and friends who were social workers, and knew many others on a work basis. The snowball was started with ten social workers well known to me but people whom I regarded as acquaintances and work colleagues rather than friends. The selection of these first ten interviewees was based upon: their local reputation as practitioners, and my personal knowledge of them and their work; my judgement that they would be interested in participating, and would be likely to get the snowball off to a good start; obtaining a spread across working groups; and, a balance of women and men. At this time, there were, to my knowledge, no black or Asian social workers in the county.

These ten social workers were all working within fifty miles of one another in the same county. Five of them were working in district offices of the local social services department; two worked in mental health centres; one in a hospital; one in a family and child guidance centre; and, one as an independent counsellor. There were six men and four women. They all had social work qualifications, and were all working from 'offices', rather than day centres or residential units. Five of them (part of the initial pilot study) were not to be included

in the final sample group. However, following the interview, they were all asked whether they would be willing to co-operate in sustaining the research by nominating two other people to be interviewed, and they all agreed to do so.

The procedure for 'rolling' the snowball was to ask each interviewee whether they would be willing to think about two other possible interviewees, who should be doing social work, and whom they considered to be good at the work. If they agreed, then they were given a 'snowball package' with a covering letter to them (see Appendix A) and two envelopes, each containing an explanatory letter (see Appendix B) and a copy of the interview schedule (see Appendix C) and background information sheet (see Appendix D). Their responsibility stopped at delivering this package to their selected interviewee. All letters had a tear off reply slip and stamped addressed envelope so that I could try to keep track of where the snowballs were heading.

The routes taken by the snowballs are depicted in Appendix E. The first ten interviewees generated a further fourteen; those fourteen generated a further eleven; and those eleven generated a further seven. The snowballs were halted at this point, there having been forty-two interviews conducted in all. There was no follow-up at the places where the snowballs halted. By the end of the snowballing, a final sample group of thirty-seven social workers was generated. They came from a total of nine different social services district teams, and thirteen teams from other settings. Four district office teams were well represented: providing eighteen of the interviewees. Three of these teams (providing fifteen respondents in all) were located in the same building, serving different districts of the city. One

snowballs did travel out of county into a neighbouring shire county. No one snowball chain had more than three links; and, no one chain remained within the same team. A profile of the interviewee group will be given a little later.

The sampling procedure achieved its primary purpose: producing a large number of social workers who participated in the research. In that sense, the difficulties of access were overcome. Since there was no follow up at those points where the snowball halted, the matter of gatekeeping rather becomes one of speculation. The research engaged the co-operation sufficiently of those with power to open up or block off access. Where there was a block, it is not known whether this was due to interviewees being unwilling to sponsor others, or those others being unwilling to be interviewed. From the tear off slips, it is known that there were seventeen nominated interviewees who did not take up the interview. But, where nominations were not made, it was not determined whether, for example, this was because the interviewee did not have an eligible candidate to put forward, or whether the packages were put to one side and forgotten, or whether she decided actively to withdraw co-operation.

There was one written communication with the researcher which helps to link the issue of power to block off access with authority to grant or refuse access. One potential interviewee wrote a note: 'haven't time to do this, suggest you contact the team senior'. In carrying out the research, I did not seek the permission of managers. I decided to leave it to the professional discretion of any interviewee approached by the snowball as to how they would negotiate (or not) their participation in the interview. The reasons were several. Firstly, there was the logistical one: I was not to know where the snowballs

would travel. Getting overall permission from senior managers in the local social services department might have obviated some of this difficulty, yet the immediate line managers would have needed to be consulted also. This leads on to the second reason, the purely practical one of the time consuming nature of obtaining formal agreements and dealing with possible obstructions throughout the life of the snowball. Thirdly, I was concerned that, if I sought permission from senior managers, this would only be granted if I altered the research topic or design in some way to suit a purpose of theirs (which I assumed would not be one of mine). I did not think that they might refuse to grant permission altogether. Lastly, and what was of most concern, was that I suspected (rightly or wrongly) that if I was seen to be aligned with 'management' by the social workers that this would inhibit what they might say to me, particularly if they understood that I would be reporting to their senior managers.

In retrospect, I am less convinced that the last, and at the time most telling reason, is valid. On theoretical grounds it suggests that there is a single, subjective reality held by the interviewee which can either be disclosed or hidden (depending largely upon the limits to confidentiality); and this is contrary to the concept of interviews being situated accounts. In relation to the data produced within the interview, there could well have been a useful as well as an inhibitive effect in my being accountable to the management of the department. The fact that I did not consult with employers could be seen as my acting in a covert fashion vis-a-vis the managers of the agencies involved. I have to emphasise that my statement to the interviewees was that I was leaving it to their discretion as to whether or not they talked with their line manager about the research,

or sought permission to take time to participate. Some of the interviewees did; some didn't; for the most part, I do not know what position they adopted, and I did not seek to find out.

The greater part of the ethical dilemmas in social research concerns the rights and protection of research subjects. The issues of acting covertly with subjects are widely debated (Bulmer, ed., 1982); and, the complex matter of 'informed consent' is clearly one for this study. Nevertheless, as the British Sociological Association (1982) statement on ethical principles makes clear, employers and managers within formal organisations can be affected by the conducting and publishing of research involving their employees; and, as such, there is a responsibility on researchers to safeguard the proper interests of this group.

The Interviewees

Forty-two interviews were conducted in total, and thirty-seven of these were included in the final sample group. Interviewees were asked to complete a brief sheet of basic details (see Appendix D) and from this a profile of the interviewee group can be given. The interviews were conducted with a sample of social workers who were: sixty per cent women; sixty per cent in their thirties (the youngest being twenty-five and the oldest fifty-seven); and, sixty per cent of between five and fourteen years experience in social work (excluding casual, voluntary work experience). (See Appendix F.) As a total group, these practitioners had clocked up over three hundred and eighty years as social workers. These years were spent in a diverse range of settings and agencies.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT All interviewees were currently working in shire counties in England. Sixty per cent (twenty-three interviewees) worked in local authority, district social services offices. Three of these had specialist posts; one in adoption and fostering; and, two in child protection. The rest were in 'generic' posts, which for all but one meant a strong bias towards statutory child care work. A further eight worked within local authority social services but outside the district offices and in more specialist settings (hospital-based teams, mental health centres, a family and child guidance centre, and one in a training section). The remaining six worked across a spread of health and welfare agencies (public, private and voluntary), involving adoption work; care of terminally ill people and their families; the probation service (one interviewee only); and independent counselling and therapy. None of the respondents were based in residential or day care services.

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Location Sixty per cent (twenty-two interviewees) had had experience of working in social work outside these shire counties. Twelve of them (almost one third of the sample) had worked in "inner city areas". A quarter of the respondents (nine) had worked only within the one county. Five people had at some point undertaken social work abroad (United States, India, Africa, for instance).

Setting Forty per cent (fifteen interviewees) had worked in the residential and day care services sometime during their social work career. Of the thirty-one currently employed by local authority social services, twelve had previously worked outside of local authority for one or more periods of time. Overall, then, nineteen respondents had only ever been employed as social workers by local

authorities, and four of these had only ever been employed by one local authority.

At first glance, the sample of social workers interviewed may appear a rather parochial one, and it is the case that local authority, field social work in the shire counties of England is heavily represented in the work experience of these practitioners. However, the basic information does indicate that the total experience from which they could draw is much broader and varied than might first be appreciated. Although many social workers may indeed come to settle in the region, where there are fewer employment opportunities outside local authorities than in some other parts of the country, their arrival is by diverse routes. When previous employment is taken into account, it is clear that social work in different parts of the country, in different settings and sectors is important in their overall work experience

In considering the qualitative material produced in interviewing this collection of practitioners, it is acknowledged, nevertheless, that certain features do characterise them. Firstly, their work in residential and day care facilities occurred mainly prior to their obtaining a basic qualification, and any conceptions regarding their learning in such circumstances relate to earlier stages of their social work careers. Secondly, work in the probation service, the second major employer of people with a social work qualification, is all but unrepresented within the sample. Thirdly, although this was not an item on the background information sheet, none of the interviewees were black or Asian people.

The virtual absence of probation officers within the snowball is noteworthy in the light of the earlier discussion of access and

gatekeeping. As the instigator of the snowball, I utilised my own local knowledge and contacts, and my work experience had not brought me into close contact with the probation service or its officers. Hence, there was no probation officer in the original ten interviewees. It is possible that my work experience is not uncommon, and that there were few connections between the networks of social workers and probation officers. On the other hand, I became aware during the course of my research that the local probation service had a formal agreement with another researcher that their staff would co-operate with that research. My 'informant' here was a probation officer who had heard of my research and was expressing her opinion that, should no probation officers come forward, it was not lack of interest but formal agency priority and permission resting with the other study. Hence, I recognised more than ever the implications of my decision not to involve higher management, and also the differences between the two organisations. In this sense, the process of accessing itself generates data relevant to the research question (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

The Interviews: The Schedule

The interviews were to be semi-structured, or focussed, interviews. Thus, strictly they fall between the textbook discussions of 'survey' interviews and 'depth' interviews, though this research were very much closer to the latter than the former. Dane (1990) defines a focussed interview as a 'technique in which an interviewer poses a few predetermined questions but has considerable flexibility concerning follow-up questions' (p. 134). He comments:

Focussed interviews are typically used when respondents consist of a specific group chosen for their familiarity with the

research topic...It is important that the interviewer be somewhat familiar with the topic; otherwise, the interviewer will be at a loss when the time comes to generate follow-up questions. The primary emphasis of a focussed interview is gaining information about the subjective perceptions of respondents.

(Dane, 1990, p. 129)

Dane writes largely from a commentary on research methods biased towards survey methods. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), on the other hand, write from ethnographic principles. They comment:

All interviews, like any other kind of social interaction, are structured by both researcher and informant. The important distinction to be made is between standardized and reflexive interviewing. Ethnographers do not decide beforehand the questions they want to ask, though they may enter the interview with a list of issues to be covered. Nor do ethnographers restrict themselves to a single mode of questioning. On different occasions, or at different points in the same interview, the approach may be non-directive or directive, depending on the function that the questioning is intended to serve.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 112-3)

The interviews in this research incorporated techniques from both of these approaches. A schedule of pre-determined questions was used, yet, within the interview, there was much 'reflexive' interviewing, sometimes to the extent of parts of the schedule not being covered. In that sense, the schedule set out for the interviewee the 'territory' he was arranging the interview to cover, but the interviewee was given leave to cover it in her own way. The interview was 'interactional' in the sense of the interviewer attempting to respond to the meanings communicated by the interviewee; and, the interviewee attempting to respond to the areas she perceived the interviewer to be interested in. A fuller description of the interviewing process will be given shortly.

The interview schedule used in the study consisted of four sections, each of which had a distinctive line of inquiry (see Appendix C). These four sections were seen to be four different ways into a

consideration of learning. The first focussed upon processes, the second upon situations, the third upon sources and the fourth upon history. The intention was to alter the aspect of learning put into the foreground of the interview, and also to allow for different forms of expression; analytic, narrative and projective. The first section considers two identified areas of practice and enquires directly about these and the social worker's understanding as to how they were learned. The second section invites accounts to be given of specific (critical) incidents that the social worker associates with an occasion of learning. The third section comprises a list of trigger words based on as comprehensive a list as seemed possible of sources of learning. The final section turns to conceptions of development. Firstly, it seeks a discursive, auto-biographical account of perceived stages; and secondly, it invites a pictorial representation of the perceived relation between personal and occupational development (a 'life path').

Sections two and four of the schedule, utilising critical incidents and a visual life path, are instances of the meeting ground between research interviewing and interviewing in social work. They are both approaches which can be employed by social workers when undertaking 'assessment' work with clients (Priestley and Maguire, 1978). The use of critical incidents facilitates narrative accounting on the part of interviewees in which vivid accounts are given of memorable experiences. Hence, there is less generalised, abstract talk and more specific, detailed talk. A major purpose of using this kind of interviewing is to elucidate contextually based 'stories' associated with more general phenomenon. The use of a diagram enables an artful expression of information which would take much longer to convey verbally. Moreover, it is the form as much of the content of the

chart which conveys a significant message to the interviewer. As Whyte (1982) suggests:

There is no need for the interviewer to limit himself to verbal and gestural stimuli. In fact, there are situations in which verbal stimuli are entirely inadequate to bring out the data the researcher is trying to elicit. In such cases, the interviewer may wish to develop his own projective devices.

(Whyte, 1982, p. 119)

As will be seen in the later discussion of the analysis, this particular device proved to be a useful but supplementary one to the interview talk which emerged from the other sections of the schedule.

The schedule used with the main sample group had undergone some revision as a result of a pilot study carried out using an earlier version. In the original, section one had invited consideration of two areas of practice: one skills-focussed; the other, knowledge-focussed. Subsequently, it was felt that this unnecessarily presupposed such a distinction made sense to practitioners in terms of their activities. In the amended version, the identification of two areas of practice was left undifferentiated but with a supplementary question being introduced inviting perceptions of the respective ingredients. Alterations were also made to the original version of section two. Some incidents had prompted little comment and were replaced with others which had emerged as more evocative during the pilot interviews. The list grew by almost half again. Section three remained unaltered. Section four was devised as a response to the extent to which social workers made reference to events in their personal lives. The first question of section four, concerning an overview of their development, was relocated from section one in the original to this new section.

The Interviews: The Process

In effect, the interviews began prior to the face-to-face meeting. The interviewees were in possession of the interview schedule and were asked to find time to prepare beforehand, and also to complete the life path. It was felt that the interviewees might appreciate the opportunity to think about the questions before the meeting. Furthermore, such openness with the schedule was intended to increase the opportunity for the interviewees to decide whether or not they wished to participate, in accord with the principle of 'informed consent'. Of course, not all of the social workers found the time (or inclination) to look at the schedule.

Ms. Tanner: Oh, the bit I was supposed to do. I haven't done.

M.J.: We can talk about that rather than you writing it down, but that could come at the end or we could start with that?

Ms. Tanner: I don't mind, really.

M.J.: Well, let's start at the beginning.

Ms. Tanner: This must be awful. You plan it all so carefully and people haven't done their stuff.

M.J.: I'm just grateful for people who find the time...

[*Ms. Tanner, 1,2*]

All the interviews were conducted by the same interviewer (the researcher/author). The interviews lasted between two and four hours, from introductions to departures, with the usual length being around three hours. The first twenty minutes or so was spent on social introductions, outlining the background to the research and providing tea or coffee. All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, but generally the recording did not start until this point, signalling the start of the 'business', though interviewer/interviewee interaction before and after the 'business' (the 'off tape' remarks) would provide fruitful data for analysis in its own right (Redley, 1991). The

transcriptions were made by an experienced audio-typist, though not someone with much previous experience in transcribing interviews. They were produced on A4 size paper, single space typing, with only longer pauses and silences being noted. In the transcript extracts which appear in this document, the social worker's pseudonym is followed by the transcript page number. As a rough working guide, there are ten pages of transcript for every hour of recorded interview. I also took notes during the interview, in part as a supplementary record and in part to focus concentration. The interviewees were given the choice as to where they wished to be interviewed, and mostly they appear to have decided upon the basis of travel time (that is, I travelled out to them where the distances were greater) and opportunity for privacy (that is, whether or not they could obtain a quiet meeting room and remain undisturbed at their place of work). The majority of interviews were conducted in my office, situated in the social work department of a University.

The interviews began with a brief explanation of the background to the research and the design of the schedule, and discussion of what assurances of confidentiality could and could not be afforded. I explicitly acknowledged responsibility for guiding the conversation to accord with the purposes of the interview, encouraging interviewees to 'keep talking' until I brought them back to the schedule. The interview time was not apportioned between the four sections of the schedule, and interviews differed on how much time was spent on each. In some instances, the schedule was not completed. This extract contains the elements of a typical scene-setting opening for the interviews.

M.J.: This project is towards a PhD and the research is for that, but it's hopefully an area that's useful and relevant. It happens that it's quite timely. I've had an interest in theory and practice in social work, and all the different ways social

workers learn, outside courses as well as on them, and that's, of course, very much to the fore now. So, it happens that it's fitting in with lots of other developments as well. It also fits in, coincidentally, with the part-time job that I've got at the University, which is about training, though that's an accident because this isn't for the university's use and this project pre-dates any connection I've got with the university...What it means is that I talk with about fifty people by the end of it, to find out their views on how they've learned to do the work. The interview schedule comes in four sections and each section is about that in one way or another, but really it tries to take a different angle on teaching and learning. The material is confidential. So, we talk. It gets into a transcript, and then anything that would appear in the final publication would be rendered as anonymous as possible. The person who does the transcripts is experienced at research, and does not live in this part of the country anyway. But, obviously, if anybody wanted to track things down and were serious about doing that, then I guess it wouldn't be impossible because they could soon find out that it took place here...So, it's not impossible. I can't guarantee absolutely its anonymity, although I will do the obvious deletions, but it's only right you should know that...

[Ms. Tanner, 1]

Forty-two interviews were conducted in total. The first twelve were initially devised as pilot interviews: to test the appropriateness and usefulness of the interview schedule; to experiment with the snowball sampling; and, to provide opportunity for the researcher to gain coached experience in conducting the interviews. In the event, revisions to the schedule were complete after five interviews, and the remainder were incorporated into the final interviewee sample group. The interviews took place over a four year period between 1985 and 1989.

All the interviewees participated in the interviews enthusiastically and seriously. I was aware that I was known to the majority of them in other contexts; as a former work colleague and fellow professional; and as a lecturer and tutor on a social work training course (though not directly to any of them). I felt that I was sitting in front of them with a particular 'research hat' on, but that I might have to make this clear should the interview lead in directions that spoke to

me as some one with a different 'hat'. This did occur in an explicit fashion at one point. Ms. Yew had been talking at some length about a family she was currently working with, and was describing how she was feeling that she did not know which way to turn. I interpreted what she was saying as being in response to the interview question, but felt also that perhaps she was inviting me to 'supervise' her.

This interpretation may say more about my own ambiguity than hers, of course, but I tried to address it directly.

M.J.: You're feeling at a loss about the whole situation. Also, you're at a loss in relation particularly to the father. What happens now, for me doing this, is, I am tempted to jump out of a research hat. But, trying to keep my research hat on, this is your case. Tina is your client and she's at the community home at her parents' request, and you really don't know where to go from here. You've got to do something. What do you do? How do you as a practitioner proceed, carrying this feeling?

Ms. Yew: What I've done is call on my supervisor for five minutes to offload what I'm feeling, and get some instant supervision or feedback as to what I should suggest to them...

[Ms. Yew, 15]

I remember feeling satisfied at the time that I did not shift into a 'supervisor' mode at this moment in the interview, since it would have been very easy for me to do so. It would have (hopefully) have 'proven' my credentials as someone not detached from practice, and as a social work tutor who could enter into the 'nitty gritty' of casework. On reflection, I suspect that this may say more about me as the interviewer than about the interviewee. Yet, if I was so aware of these different aspects of myself in the interview, then I think it reasonable to assume the interviewees were also.

In one sense, my approach to the interviews exacerbated this difficulty for me. I had resolved that the kind of interviews I was conducting were not of a totally different type to the interviewing I had undertaken as a social worker. This link was verified for me as I

read the literature which spoke of the research interviewer being 'reflexive' and 'non-directive' in approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Jones, 1985). I considered myself to be reasonably adept at this, and resolved that I would make use of it in my research interviews rather than divorce myself from these abilities by trying to approach the interviews with a different set of interviewing 'techniques'. The fact that these were the kinds of deliberations I was having, my 'mental frame' towards the interviewing, is more important than using the labels to try to capture what I was 'really' like as an interviewer.

Hence, 'reflecting back' to the interviewee as a means of building understanding and inviting further 'exploration' occurred throughout the interviews. The above extract begins with one instance. A consequence of this 'mental frame' is that I tended to interpret more personal, intimate 'disclosures' on the part of the interviewees as evidence of a certain quality of relationship at that moment between the interviewee and myself. Again, in retrospect, I suspect other interviewers achieve the same outcome but would tell themselves a different story about it. Furthermore, during the analysis of the interviews, I have been concerned with the research context of the interviews, and the accountability frames construed by the interviewees, rather than making any analytic use of the notion of 'quality of relationship'. (Interestingly, partly as a consequence of this I suspect, my understandings of 'what is going on' in social work interviews has changed.)

Employing the frame of 'reflexive' interviewing, then, I felt an interview had gone particularly well if someone had felt able to tell me something very personal to them. One of the more vivid examples of

this came towards the conclusion of an interview. The interviewee says -

something else I haven't said which is relevant is that - because I am cautious about it - is that during the time I was at college I was looking at myself quite a lot anyway, because the course made you do that. And, I was also looking at my sexuality. And, I'm a lesbian now, and I think that has had a very significant effect on my attitude towards other people and, obviously, my family.

I felt 'privileged' to be trusted with this information. Yet, I was aware of the way in which it had been introduced into the interview, with the interviewee acknowledging that she was 'cautious' about it. Although privileged with the information, I was not sure what I ought to do with it. Within the interview, I commented, 'that's very helpful, that does help to make sense of a lot of things you've been talking about'. I wished to let the interviewee know that her 'risk' in saying this would be repaid in terms of the benefit to the research. Yet, she was 'cautious' about it. Had this 'declaration' been made earlier on, with explicit connections being drawn between her sexual orientation and her social work, had it been more 'public', then I would have felt able to refer to it within the analysis. But, this wasn't the case and so I have chosen to keep it more private. The whole exchange, however, raises the issue of 'informed consent' to which I shall return shortly.

As regards my deliberations concerning the social work aspect of my interviewing, I see the process somewhat differently now. Here were social workers talking to a researcher who was also social work trainer. They were giving their time and thought, and they would wish the interview to be a 'good' one not only on their part but on the part of the interviewer. The accountability frame (Cuff, 1980) which I construed for myself in that respect was that I would want to pull off a 'good' (morally adequate) interview in their eyes, both in terms

of the frame of social work interviewing and research interviewing. Not to have shown myself to be a good interviewer as a social work trainer would have breached its accomplishment.

I was aware of the penetrative nature of the questions. From the first interview, it was clear that talking with social workers about their learning involved talking with them about their personal histories, their hopes, disappointments, perplexities, self-doubts, and so on. Deep feelings were provoked by the interviews. Ms. Yale here recalls a significant episode in her work life at a psychiatric hospital.

Ms. Yale: What happened was that I found myself getting more and more stressed and one day I was supposed to be doing a drug round and it was breakfast time and we had a seclusion room upstairs which I rarely used, and one of the women was playing up and instead of staying, I decided to take her and sit somewhere else, just let's get this over with and then let's sit down and talk about it. Always rush, rush, rush, got to get it done. Laundry comes at ten, and all the rest of it, dinner at twelve. And what I did was, I slammed the drug trolley shut, grabbed this woman by the scruff of her collar and dragged her upstairs, opened the seclusion room door and just stood there shaking, holding this woman, and she's twice as big as me, and I'd got all the way upstairs. I even think about it now. It's horrible. And, I just stood there, and I realised that there was this woman absolutely frightened out of her life because all she's done was be cheeky. I'm standing behind her like this, and I just couldn't handle it, and I just apologised to this woman and said, look I'm really sorry. I apologised to her and went into the office and burst into tears, and I couldn't move for about an hour because I was so shocked at what I'd done.

[Ms. Yale, 30]

There was no way to prepare the interviewees for these aspects of the interview experience, how emotionally involved they would become in their accounts and the way in which the interview process could highlight or even heighten personal conflicts and distress. In the case of two social workers especially (Mr. Allsop and Mr. Porter), the interview came at a time when they were doubting seriously their capacity to do good social work. Aspects of the interview served to prompt further self-questioning.

Mr. Allsop: This has been a bad time for me personally in as much that I'm subject to one inquiry on a child abuse case, and feeling weary that one's going on for the next two or three years, what does the future hold under new organisation. I've peaked out. I've perhaps done my best work, just after I came back from college, done little bits of reasonable work that I've been well satisfied with down here occasionally. The odd crisis has given me satisfaction and has been accepted as good work, but I think I've got to ask the question now, have I burnt out?
[Mr. Allsop, 9]

It could be argued that the interview offered Mr. Allsop a chance to reflect upon his experience, perhaps clarify his thoughts, and generally have a therapeutic spin-off. However, the interview is being conducted for research purposes and, although the interviewer has a responsibility to safeguard the emotional well-being of the interviewees, this cannot be assured. Such an argument does not address the issue that interviewees cannot be prepared for the disturbing effects that may ensue. In that sense, the consent they give to be interviewed can never be fully 'informed'.¹⁹

Analysing The Interviews

The central issue of the analysis can be stated very simply. Given that the interviewees were thirty-seven, non-statistically derived social workers, what can lengthy, tape-recorded interviews tell us about learning to do social work well that has relevance to the empirical knowledge and theoretical explanations of the phenomena outlined in the preceding two chapters? Given that what I did was to listen to these social workers' stories about social work and learning, and ask a few questions about issues of interest to the study, without checking the accuracy or veracity of their accounts, and sometimes leaving details of events and people vague, what weight should these stories carry, and how can the analysis of them

contribute to the professional and social science literature on this subject? The opening section of this chapter has discussed the approach towards the interviews that was adopted in the analysis, and the use of interviews as an appropriate method for the study has also been argued above. In what follows I will make clear the method of analysis which resulted in the detailed explication of the accounts to be found in the next three chapters.

As already indicated, the way the interviews were approached altered over the life of this research. I struggled with the interview transcripts over a long period, trying to find a way of making sense of them in a convincing fashion. Eventually, I read the transcribed interviews as situated accounts of learning in social work, produced in the context of a research interview, and displaying aspects of the moral and cultural framework of social relations in social work. Before arriving at this method, however, there were countless hours spent wrestling with the files of transcripts on the one hand and textbooks of analysis on the other.

My attempts at analysis can be discussed in three stages. I was aware, nevertheless, that there were certain general principles that governed the interpretation of all such data, and should guide my method of analysing and communicating these accounts to the wider academic community. To be convincing, the analysis would need to be a coherent, preferably an elegant, theoretical treatment of learning, refined by (rather than blunted by) the anomalous or 'deviant' examples in the sample. Second, it would need to draw on and preferably develop theory from this and other fields. Third, it would need to move beyond the micro-level of individual learning accounts to explain wider social relations, and to contribute to practice and

policy debates. Fourth, it should aim to be imaginative in its ability to make connection with other studies from different fields. Fifth, it would need to subject itself to attempted falsification, by considering 'deviant' cases and by investigating rival explanations of the same data.²⁰

In my first stage of attempting an analysis, I was conscious of two influences upon my thinking. One had to do with the vivid and detailed accounts that the interviewees had given. I felt that I had indeed succeeded in obtaining their view of the world of social work. I was struck by some of the refreshing comments and 'revelations' within the accounts. Witness Ms. Yale above, and Mr. Walker: 'I don't think you ever do [know which is the best plan] in actual fact. I think you tend to suck it and see.' [Mr. Walker, 9] My inclination in the face of all the interesting material I had gathered was to use it to 'tell social work like it really is', to portray to a wider audience the complex and little understood world of social work 'from the inside'. Such a naturalistic approach, in addition to being subject to the criticisms levelled above, more often than not resorts to an anecdotal 'method' of reporting which may have interest but which is not theoretically based (Silverman, 1989).

Alongside this approach, I was sufficiently aware of the texts of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987) to realise that I would need to undertake a comprehensive coding and content analysis of the interviews in the search for relevant categories. This I did, reading and re-reading to note significant concepts in the interviews, and finding ever more. A large set of indexed cards was produced, coding the interviews along such lines as: 'what social work is'; 'personal qualities'; 'commitments'; 'conditions of work'; and so on. This form

of content analysis produced some interesting deliberations concerning possible connections between categories, and drew attention to some important areas. But ultimately, the data seemed to be too complex to be susceptible to such an approach; though, the indexed cards proved an essential ready reference during the final and successful stage of analysis.

The second stage of attempting to find an analysis was signalled by an interest in construing the interviews as texts, and therefore in literary criticism as a possible method of analysis (Jones, 1990). The works on interpretation seemed particularly relevant (Ricoeur, 1981); along with those in the hermeneutic tradition (Gadamer, 1975; Bleicher, 1980); and, those which were concerned with reading (Hillis Miller, 1987). However, it was the deconstructivist writings which were to occupy me the most (Culler, 1983; Derrida, 1981, 1982). These provided me with a philosophical and theoretical background which has been influential in my overall understanding of the topic of the study. However, as a means of approaching interview transcripts, I was left with some puzzling questions. In what sense are interview transcript 'texts' of the same genre as the texts which have been the focus for literary criticism? Deconstructive criticism 'selects' small portions of texts for close reading. How would I decide which portion to analyse by close reading out of the hundreds of pages of transcript? Moreover, in what terms could I justify my selection to the (social science) academic community? The value of approaching the interviews as texts has been argued above. For the purposes of my study, however, this could not provide a convincing overall method but would need to be one within an approach which could assist me in dealing with the transcripts as a collection. Furthermore, as accounts of people with social identities, situated in social

relations, the concept of 'text' needed to be complemented by one of 'textuality' (Corrigan, 1990a).

With these three strands standing in somewhat of an uneasy relation, I attempted to produce an analysis of the interviews and produced an early and unconvincing treatment of the accounts. This analysis did contain some interesting and illuminating discussions of social work and learning but it did not do justice to the empirical data that the interviews had generated. It has been the approach advocated by Silverman (1985) which has enabled me finally to render a coherent and intelligible analysis of the interviews.

Re-reading the accounts as 'displays of moral adequacy' as outlined at the start, I was now reading them looking for the ways in which social workers explained and justified what they did in the context of the research interview. A key question became: 'what work is this talk doing?' The primary question of the research, 'how do social workers learn to do the job well?', is an alarmingly simple one. Yet, the social workers took it seriously and proceeded to show that the simplicity is misleading.

My focus in analysing the interviews was concerned with the terms in which they set about accounting for their learning, given the 'accountability frame' represented by the research interview. The interviewees were seen to be constructing themselves as people who reveal their identities as moral beings, producing and managing their descriptions to make them as morally adequate as possible (Cuff, 1980). The accounts were intelligible within, and framed in terms of, cultural particulars (roles and norms) which show the social relations within the ensemble 'social work'.

The analysis showed that there were structural similarities within the accounts arising from the way social workers managed the accounting task that the research interview represented. It was first necessary for them to establish their credibility, and as they did so they were attesting to the contested nature of social work and the differences within, and criticisms of, this occupation. The cultural particulars of social work that they assembled at this point had to do with legitimation for members of a professional group that is subject to much scrutiny from the media, politicians, public inquiries, and so on. There were common themes, utilised throughout the interview, in the way the social workers managed this, employing concepts of identity, membership, role and setting. From the outset, then, they established that their identities as social workers were not necessarily to be equated with the role in which they worked. They also established that their identities as social workers were related to their personal identities.

Once it was clear that establishing credibility was necessary for these social workers to manage the beginning stage of the interview, further reading of the transcripts was undertaken to examine how the common themes were mobilised to achieve this. It was found that the social workers could be categorised, in the form of accounting they adopted, by the ways in which they mobilised the common themes. Hence, there were those who referred primarily to their social work identities; those who referred to themselves in relation to their current role; and, those who did both. There were three accounts which on first reading appeared not to show the same way of managing the opening of the interview, three 'deviant cases'. These accounts were bewildering to begin with until it became that they were

intelligible as variants of the task of establishing credibility. These three social workers did not achieve credibility but rather demonstrated non-credibility in relation to either themselves or their role.

The research question concerned learning to do social work well. Utilising the approach suggested by Silverman (1985), the issue would be the artful practices employed by social workers to demonstrate their competence at accounting about themselves in this area. What one might expect the accounts to demonstrate, then, is management of the aspect of 'good' practice. Although the research question had learning as its prime focus, it had been evident from the initial readings of the accounts that there was little in them that was (apparently) directly about learning. Again, this was mystifying. It would have been plausible to find references to courses, supervisors, books, and the like, but these were few and far between. At the same time, there was a lot of talk about something! Invoking the notion of displaying moral adequacy, attention was brought to the task facing the practitioners of confirming that they were indeed 'good' social workers.

In their 'accounting work' to establish credibility, the social workers had talked of their practice with clients and the world of law, policy and procedure that shaped and characterised their occupation. Recognising the cultural particulars at play here, two dimensions to their constructions became evident: work in the formal, institutional world; and, work in the everyday world of their clients' lives. This clearly linked with the research literature about social workers as members of large bureaucracies; and, suggested the ways in which their accounts might display cultural particulars at work in

members' categorisations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Contrast, for example, Ms. Yale and Ms. Tanner.

Ms. Yale: I can't do ordinary social work. I don't want to do ordinary social work. It's too shallow, I think. It is caring done on a very superficial level.

[Ms. Yale, 36]

Ms. Tanner: I don't want to work in any other setting than local authority because that's real social work. It's not piddling about on the fringes.

[Ms. Tanner, 22]

Thus, the interviews were examined to identify the ways in which the social workers defined and constructed 'good' social work, and to understand the ways in which they mobilised the common themes of identity, membership, role and setting. The distinction between formal and informal dimensions of practice proved to be crucial in determining how social workers differed in these constructions. The social workers were demonstrating how they could be seen to be adequately handling the tensions between these two dimensions. It was possible to identify the versions of reconciling, making compromises, or dissociating. The versions adopted again drew upon the common themes as the social workers located themselves and legitimated their positions regarding good social work.

As these categories were formulated, and the different kinds of accounting were identified, there was clearly a question as to whether they were evident within the networks of association suggested by the sampling technique of snowballing. There appeared to be no identifiable pattern between the snowball networks and the categories derived from constructions of good social work within the accounts. The 'work' being done in the interview to construct good practice is not the same as the 'work' being done in selecting a suitable colleague for a research interview, both the context and purpose

differ. The most striking incidence of a visible effect of the snowball network within the sample group concerned a small network of four women who defined their personal identities in similar ways, two of whom had the same role (Ms. Wright and Ms. Yale), the other two working in different settings (Ms. Smith and Ms. Drake). These four espoused a broadly feminist stance towards their own lives and their work with clients.

In addition to the transcripts, interviewees completed a section of the schedule by pen and paper: a life path. These were examined during the analysis but as supplementary to the understandings being derived from the transcripts. As such they served a useful purpose in depicting a relation between personal and social work identity. For instance, Mr. Tate wrote 'everything' to convey that he could not make discrete connections but that for him oneself is central to one's social work self. Similarly Ms. Drake comments upon the difficulty she experienced in completing the chart, suggesting she has come to realise now (in the latter part of the interview) why that may have been so.

Ms. Drake: I quite like the fact that it feels more that I couldn't...Last night, when I was struggling with it, it felt really bad that I couldn't do it, but actually, putting it like that, I feel quite good about it, because it feel wholer somehow.

[Ms. Drake, 16]

Through commentaries upon the process of tackling the chart, or from an examination of the form the chart took, further material was generated on this vital aspect within the accounts regarding the presentation of the relation between self and social work.

Having ascertained the ways in which social workers managed the accounting task of constructing good social work attention turned to the matter of their accounts of learning. As stated, it was

immediately clear that social workers referred little to the more formal processes associated with learning but that their accounts were full of narratives concerning 'learning experiences' or statements about the importance of experience generally. Following Gilbert and Mulkey (1984), the concept of interpretive repertoire was utilised to examine these instances further. The repertoires needed to be appropriate to these accounts rather than scientists' talk; nevertheless, the approach of mobilising two contrasting repertoires was in accord with the tensions I could detect at work in the texts. Analysing how these repertoires were being used within the accounts required firstly linking them with the constructions of 'learning task' and 'learning environment'. These derived from work that the interviewees were doing in respect of defining good social work. In their accounts, the social workers had been constructing their learning task and learning environment as they constructed good social work. By examining the deployment of the repertoires so as to be consistent with these constructions, I felt that I could begin to make sense of their accounts of learning. Yet, there was something I was missing, since the analysis was not entirely convincing. The talk did not fit within these frameworks.

This was a further point at which the analysis did not come easily. I could not seem to grasp satisfactorily what the social workers were doing with the accounts. The answer was to be found in my search for the demonstration of adequacy in their accounts of learning. When I re-examined the accounts recognising that the social workers might not 'pull off' a convincing account of learning, then it became clear that this was indeed what was being displayed. One of the keys to this which I had been overlooking was my 'latent identity' as an academic trainer. The accountability frame within which the social workers

were producing their constructions was represented within my role as a professional educator. The analysis that could then follow, and its theorising, results in one of the major themes of this thesis: the lack of a repertoire of learning that endorses the accomplishments of practising social workers.

The overall process of analysing these accounts I found to be both immensely frustrating and greatly rewarding. The approach advocated by Silverman (1985) had eventually proved to be a powerful tool in working with the hundreds of pages of transcripts. It led to an understanding of the accounts which reached inwards to the social identities of the interviewees and outwards to the wider social relations of their cultural group. It is interesting to note that one of the 'blockages' in making sense of the social workers' accounts related to my failure to recognise the interactional effect my 'latent identity' as professional educator/academic was having on the accounts. In many ways that provides an apt metaphor for one of the central arguments of the thesis.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have discussed the contribution of qualitative methodology with particular reference to recent developments which move this tradition beyond the 'naturalistic' approaches with which it has been associated. These developments can be utilised to establish a distinctive and valuable place for the research interview. I have examined the research design, including the different understandings I have held concerning the use of interviews, and discussed how the

sample of social workers was gathered. The characteristics of this sample have been described. The interviews have been considered in relation to the schedule used and the processes that occurred. Finally, I have shown the route I have travelled to arrive at a convincing analysis of the accounts of the interview sample. My analysis of the accounts is discussed in relation to a method which takes interviews to be situated accounts and 'convincing stories'.

Having examined the professional and research literature on learning, the practice of social work and its setting within organisational contexts, I am now in a position to report in full on the analysis of the accounts. Chapter four will present how the social workers managed the opening stage of the interview by constructing credibility; chapter five is an extensive report on the constructing of good social work; and, chapter six examines accounts of learning.

Notes

1 See Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), p. 2.

2 See the remarks by Corrigan (1990b) on, amongst others, Dawe (1970).

3 See Walker (1985a) pp. 4,5.

4 See Blumer (1969), Matza (1969), Denzin (1971).

5 See Silverman (1985), p. 163.

6 See Denzin (1970).

7 See Silverman (1985), p. 163.

8 A parallel debate is had in hermeneutics in respect of the relation between the 'interpreter' and the 'text'. See, for example, the discussion in Bleicher (1980).

9 Livingston (1987), p. 11.

10 See Potter and Wetherell (1987), p. 146.

11 See, for example, Culler (1983), Hernstein Smith (1980), Hillis Miller (1987) and Mishler (1986).

12 See Silverman (1989), p. 67.

13 This rendering of Silverman's method draws from Jordan (1991), personal communication.

14 See Harding, ed., (1987), p. 2.

15 In addition to the more well known examples within studies of deviance of Becker (1963) and Polsky (1969), see also Plant (1973) and Morrison (1989). Snowball sampling is sometimes equated with key informant sampling (Dane, 1990, p. 161) and here again it is within deviancy studies that it is most commonly reported; for instance, Whyte (1955) and Parker (1974).

16 See Burgess (1984), p. 57.

17 See, for example, Moum (1984) for a discussion of snowballing and network analysis within studies of mental health.

18 See, for example, Rowland and Bateson (1982) who distinguish between single stage, multiple stage and exhaustive snowballing of decision making units.

19 See, for example, Kay (1989) and Finch (1984).

20 See Jordan (1991) and Silverman (1989).

4 ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

The Interview Situation

The empirical data of the research was generated through semi-structured interviews with social workers. How is such data to be understood? As discussed in the previous chapter, approaching the interview data as 'interview talk' keeps one's eyes firmly on the situation within which the talking took place. What might this mean for the present study? Social workers were contacted through a snowball technique. This invited respondents to identify further potential interviewees; specifically, 'somebody who is (or has been until very recently) doing social work in one form or another and whom you have reason to consider is relatively good at the work they do'¹. The subject of the research was described to respondents as being 'about the way people learn to do social work and all the various influences that bear on what they learn and how they learn it'². The interview schedule itself was made available in advance of the interview, indicating the main areas about which comment was to be sought.

The research was about how people become good social workers. The interview was a request to practitioners to talk about their learning. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured³; the purpose was framed in terms of furthering understanding of the subject; and, the arrangements for each interview were as described above. The question can be put: how do social workers respond to such a situation?

The ensuing interviews are understood in this study by considering them, in the first instance, in the light of this question - as accounts that are produced within a particular situation. The starting point in understanding them becomes: how do social workers set about giving accounts of themselves and their learning? What is found is that the interview data can be read as accounts whose content concerns practitioners making sense of "self", of "social work", of "good" and of "learning". Integral to making sense in these areas is the question of membership, that is, social workers making sense of themselves as members of teams, agencies, movements, and so on. In this way, the interviews can also be read as a collection, showing relations between social workers and between them and their clients - relations which pertain to social workers as a community.

Viewing the accounts as situationally produced does not restrict the focus narrowly to the interview situation alone. This would be to suggest that the accounting procedures employed therein had their source in that somewhat unique encounter. Rather, the kinds of accounts that are generated and the accounting procedures that occur in the interview situation can be examined as specific incidences of a whole range of beliefs and practices that have to do with 'making sense of'. Social workers do not leave these beliefs and practices behind on entering the interview situation but are seen as drawing upon them in ways which can be examined.

Getting to grips with the bulk of transcript material that interviewing produces is a daunting task. The research question which underlies the interviews can, as in this case, provide strong clues as to how to approach the task. In this study, the research question resulted in an interview situation which required a great deal of

formidable and complex accounting on the behalf of social workers. 'Learning to do social work well' proved to connect into an array of issues, many of which came with not inconsiderable emotion and passion attached.

Beginning An Account Of Learning

The interview data can be read as accounts which are produced within a situation that is the outcome of a particular research question. From this standpoint, what the interviewees talk about in varied and many ways is learning, but it is also themselves, social work, and good social work. The point is that giving accounts of learning involved these social workers in talking much more widely about themselves and the work. It might be assumed that when they did this they were straying away from the theme of the interview.⁴ That is not the assumption here. On the contrary, talk about themselves, and the work, is taken as central to producing accounts about learning in social work. In proceeding from this assumption, the complexity of the accounting which was occurring in the interviews becomes clearer and more accessible.

When these social workers were requested to talk about their learning, how did they begin? Since there was a schedule accompanying the interviews, "with an answer to the first question" may seem the obvious reply! Setting about giving an account, however, is of a different order than answering an interviewer's questions. As it happened, all but two did begin the interview by answering the first question. What they all⁵ used the beginning of the interview to do, however, was very much the same. All the interviews started with a

shorter or longer passage in which the respondents set about constructing their credibility as social workers.

CONSTRUCTING CREDIBILITY: SELF IN RELATION TO SOCIAL WORK

The social workers begin their accounts by making distinctions between and across 'selves' and 'social work'. The interviewees are involved in at least two concurrent processes. On one hand, they are presenting how they make sense of social work; or, in other words, they are talking about what kind of activity social work is. They are not going about this as detached observers, however: they are talking about what kind of activity *they* take social work to be. This is important in the sense that the account giving does not begin with a defining of social work so much as a defining of *self* in relation to social work. The emphasis slides from the 'kind of activity social work is' to the 'kind of social worker I am'.

The effect of reading the passages that way is to find that what the social workers are doing is making talk about identity and membership the beginning point in producing accounts of learning. Identity concerns social workers establishing for the interview how they perceive themselves and how they wish to be perceived by others. Membership arises here through allying with a certain kind of social work and a certain kind of social worker.

Talk about identity and membership does not occur only at the outset of the interviews. These crucial themes arise throughout as the

social workers elaborate, refine and re-work their accounts. The purpose of this talk in the opening passages of the interviews concerns constructing a basic credibility whereby what they will have to say about social work and learning can be taken seriously and, to some extent, as authoritative.

Again, it is useful to remember the interview situation. The respondents are not only aware of the research question. They are aware also that they are but one of the people being interviewed on the same question. What value is to be placed upon their experiences, thoughts and opinions? What judgements might be formed about themselves as social workers and their practice? What credibility will they have in the eyes of this researcher?

Identifiable types of constructing occur as the social workers manage the opening stage. To understand these types of constructing it is necessary to link the idea of credibility with both the social work role currently being occupied and the social work self who is in that role (that is, identity as a social worker). There are two related aspects to this. Firstly, in constructing credibility, social workers tend to draw upon experiences relating either to their current role, or to prior experiences, or both. For those who construct credibility within the current role, talk concerns how that role is enacted, and identity is defined in terms of being 'the kind of social worker who does this job in this way'. For those who construct credibility outside of the current role, talk focusses on the person of the social worker rather than the role occupied, and identity is defined in terms of 'the kind of social worker I am'. Those who refer to both current and past experiences achieve a combination in which identity is defined in terms of 'this is the kind of social worker I am, and this kind of social worker does this job in this way'.

The second aspect concerns the consequent variation in social workers' accounts according to whether or not credibility is constructed for the role as well as for the self. Where credibility is constructed in relation to the current role, the task is to define the role as credible and to define oneself as credible within it. Where credibility is constructed outside of the current role, the task is to define oneself as a credible social worker whilst the credibility of one's current role remains undetermined. The constructing of credibility and identity that occurs in the accounts reflects the contested nature of social work: there is a task to be done in constructing credibility for social work roles and social work selves. (See Appendix G, Figure 1.)

Hence, these social workers were describing and legitimating themselves to the interviewer, accounting for themselves in the context of their work. Each knew that other social workers were being interviewed, and so that their accounts would be heard and read as those of members of their occupational group. Thus, the 'work' of the interview was to provide an account for that particular context: their answers constitute a social practice, constructing their working lives for this interactive purpose. Microsociologists have analysed survey responses (Cicourel, 1964), scientific papers (Potter and Mulkay, 1982) and family support groups (Gubrium and Lynott, 1985) in these terms.

However, unlike such prestigious professionals as doctors and scientists, or such lay people as patients (Baruch, 1981) or the parents of handicapped children (Voysey, 1975), social workers have to manage the contested nature of the 'expertise'. To be a social worker

is not to possess an exclusive form of professional knowledge, but rather to borrow various kinds of knowledge and skill from other, higher status, professional groups, yet to be subject to the critical scrutiny of lay people (Jordan, 1990). At the time the interviews took place, social workers had experienced over a decade of continual disparagement by the popular press, many politicians, and a number of public enquiries: they had been branded as possessing neither adequate 'professionalism' nor adequate 'common sense'.

Yet, the reason for this critical attention was precisely their powers and duties to intervene (compulsorily if necessary) in the intimacies of family life, in the relationships between spouses, between parents and children; in issues of family obligation (such as responsibility for elderly or handicapped relatives); and, in contested areas of public policy (such as poverty, crime and mental illness). Above all, the power and duties to protect children, and to separate them from parents seen to be abusing them, evoke the strongest opinions: yet, social workers have little professional legitimacy to match these formidable legal powers.

Hence, social workers, in trying to establish their credibility in an interview situation, are required to acknowledge both sides of the essential dilemma of their occupation. They must recognise (if only to construct their reasons for escaping from) the legal, procedural and service-delivery side of the work, which predominates in local authority social services offices. But, they cannot claim that expertise in this is adequate for doing the job well. Instead, they must show how they make meaningful relationships with their clients, in which these issues are addressed in the informal language of everyday interaction, and where possible negotiated without recourse

to compulsory legal powers. Thus, they must show themselves to be competent in both the formal world of law and procedures, and the informal world of their clients' lives, and also competent in providing a bridge between them.

Because of the contested character of social work, the interviewees' accounts are constructed as public and moral: as open to criticism and judgement, yet attempting to provide a 'morally adequate' account of themselves in their work roles (Cuff, 1980). They display skills in making the situations they handle manageable and intelligible, but they also construct an orderly experience of their work in terms of the taken-for-granted knowledge of their occupation (Silverman, 1973). Through their rhetorical accounts of social work, the interviews show the cultural practices of the membership group (Silverman, 1985), its organised and informal relationships.

But social workers, in using examples from their work, are also displaying the moral regulation of the everyday life of their clients. The contested issues of their occupation are contentious because they concern the fundamental moral and social issues of our society, and the individuals, families and communities that compose it. The activity of social work is directly concerned with the moral order (Jordan, 1990), and with the formal and informal processes of creating and sustaining this order.

Therefore, even as they are constructing their own credibility in terms of the standards and practices of social work, they are showing how, as public officials directly concerned with the everyday lives of troubled citizens, they make sense of such troubles, and assist clients in rendering, and gaining some control over, potentially

chaotic, destructive and 'meaningless' situations (Hilbert, 1986). In other words, their credibility rests partly on their ability to help others, facing emotional or material crises, or long term deprivation, to construct morally adequate, meaningful versions of their lives and relationships, in discursive interactions. Interviewees are usually themselves interviewers: their accounts are laced with examples of how they have contributed to their clients' accomplishment of 'convincing stories', or how they have judged destructive or deviant individuals' stories to be 'unconvincing' (Silverman, 1989). Although social work is not susceptible to the kind of exclusive, expert, scientific description that characterises medicine or psychology, only certain kinds of accounts (by workers and by clients) are acceptable.

CONSTRUCTING CREDIBILITY WITHIN CURRENT ROLE

Within this type of constructing, there are four possible variants arising from construing or not construing credibility for role and for self. (See Appendix G, Figure 2.) Of the eighteen interviewees who adopt this type of constructing, fifteen construct credibility for both their role and themselves in it. Considering these fifteen first, ten work within district social services offices. (Twenty-three of the total sample work in such a setting.)

District Social Services Settings

Ms. Orton has been talking at some length about her work over several years with a lone parent family where there are young children (now

nearing their teens) whose mother has learning difficulties and mental health problems.

Ms. Orton: You can't alter her, because I don't think you can change people much. You can make changes, but you can't actually change people. I can't change her, but I've done quite a lot of practical things for her in making life easier. But, the basic thing, I give her constant uninterrupted supervision and care and all through the week. She always knows that she's got that person to come to. Having gone through periods of not trusting me because of having had to take the children away, I think we've got to where she has to trust me, know that I will help her, that I will stand by her. And I think, though the rest of the community banish her and hate her, she's got to have somebody that she can rely on, and I think she does rely on me for lots of things.

[Ms. Orton, 4]

In talk such as this at the outset of the interview, credibility is being ascribed to both the role of long term, statutory child care and to the social worker in that role. Ms. Orton is construing her role as one in which something worthwhile can be done, and construing herself as a social worker who enacts the role in a way which earns her credibility. Her identity is as a social worker who is constant, who stands by people, is trustworthy and reliable. There is no explicit statement to the effect, but it is left implied that there may be other social workers who do not enact the same role to the same ends or with the same steadfastness of supervision and care. The contested nature of this kind of work is also left implicit (that is, the value and place of long term support to families) but it is clear that Ms. Orton is presenting herself as allying with social work of this nature.

The relationship between the legal and compulsory side of the work (Ms. Orton has taken her client's children away) and the informal creation of a meaningful, helpful relationship is constructed in terms of trust, reliability and acceptance, as well as practical assistance. Ms. Orton has become part of her client's everyday world 'all through

the week', and her 'uninterrupted supervision' part of the moral regulation of her client's life.

Mr. Hare's role is one of statutory social work, though with situations of shorter or longer duration. In making sense of what he does by way of establishing credibility, he says

Mr. Hare: I suppose a lot of work you do would come under the heading of counselling, which is obviously very important, giving advice and allowing the client to decide things for themselves, or to help them see a problem in a different way.

[Mr. Hare, 1]

The relationship between counselling and statutory work is very much a contested area. However, Mr. Hare talks of enacting his role as a statutory social worker in the terms he has defined as counselling, which, he claims, is 'obviously very important'. He talks of a woman he has been working with who was 'very frightened that her baby's father was going to take her baby away...She was very much under the influence of this man' [Mr. Hare, 1]. Reflecting upon the counselling that he entered into successfully with the woman, Mr Hare concludes

Mr. Hare: It hasn't changed her life. Her life is not now pure bliss. But, I feel her life is much more...she has more control of it. She has exercised that control in terms of facing up to his demands. And, she's better able to make her life choices in the way she wants - to stick around this man whom she's known for a long time, or whether she wants to cut him out completely. It allows her to make that choice from a position of knowledge.

[Mr. Hare, 2]

In her work in the role of statutory social worker, Ms. Bryant talks of how she receives children into care [Ms. Bryant, 1,2]. She talks of 'concentrating on what it means rather than concentrating on getting the paperwork done', of 'listening to what the client has to say', of 'causing the least disruption' and 'reducing the sense of separation and loss', and so on. Her sensitivity and professionalism is contrasted with the heavy-handed, procedural approach that she sees can be taken in these circumstances. Her way of enacting the role,

she claims, is one of 'partnership'. Receiving children into care can be a credible activity, the message is, when approached in this fashion, and this is how she describes herself as going about the work.

In all three of these accounts, the social workers are describing a process of entering their clients' social worlds, respecting their ways of understanding their social relations, and communicating about their troubles. Despite their duties to carry out painful separations (admitting children to care), sometimes against the client's will, they construct their credibility in terms of a capacity to reason with them about these actions, and to reach agreements within their 'commonsense thinking', in terms of shared meanings (Schutz, 1954). Hence, they describe the creation of an 'interactional order' (Rawls, 1989) of informal reasoning, concerned with the moral regulation of their clients' lives.

Statutory social work can involve providing a duty service and responding immediately to certain referrals made to the office. Ms. Yew, who works in the same team as Mr Hare, describes one such incident and constructs credibility for the role of monitoring the safety of children and for herself in the conduct of such work. She outlines the situation.

Ms. Yew: The sister of a fairly well known child abuser had a young son of eight, and the police had received information that this woman was allowing her brother to stay at weekends.

Then, she outlines her task.

Ms. Yew: What was left to me was a joint visit with one of the police to confront this woman with this information and to ask her whether it was true, and whether she knew that her brother was a sex offender, and that she might be putting her son at risk.

Next, she tells what happened on meeting the woman.

Ms. Yew: She immediately admitted to us that her brother was staying at weekends and she told us quite readily that she was

trying to support him, that she was concerned that, if he was left to his own devices at weekends, that he could possibly get into further trouble. And, she said she's not naive enough to think he won't do it again. So, I felt she had all the information that we would have had to impart to her had she not known it, and what we had to do was talk to her about the risks that she could be putting her son at. She struck me as being a very sensible woman, a very caring mum. And, the upshot of it was that she said...I had to say to her, if your brother stays here on a regular basis, her son's name will go on the at-risk register, and had to explain to her what that meant. And, she immediately said, I don't want my son involved in any of this, I won't have my brother to stay any more, although I want to support my brother.

Finally, she gives the outcome.

Ms. Yew: We had the co-ordinating meeting, and my assessment was accepted, with one or two questions, and it was felt that it was likely that she realised the risks and she would protect her son, so there was no further action taken.

[Ms. Yew, 2,3]

The necessity for the task is constructed in terms of the risks surrounding 'a well known child abuser', risks which ostensibly the man's sister herself acknowledged but which she was having to weigh against her wish to 'support' him. The social worker frames her subsequent action in terms of explaining the consequences of the decision the woman had to take. Constructing credibility for the social worker enacting this role involves talk about the degree of respect afforded the woman, and about the assessment to be made regarding the future protection of the eight year old child. Recognising the difficulties in making such a judgement is also part of the credibility Ms. Yew constructs: 'Not that I really doubted my assessment, but there was a little element of doubt there. What if I have got it wrong, and this boy was later abused?' [Ms. Yew, 3].

Because the effectiveness of these informal methods depends on trust, reliability and the creation of shared meanings in largely unstructured conversations, Ms. Yew is aware of the problems of relating the 'substantive rationality' of her understandings of her

client (Durkheim, 1933) with the 'formal rationality' of her agency's managerial systems. 'Getting it wrong' in the interactional moral ordering of family relationships is not easily explicable within the formal/bureaucratic ordering of law and procedures.

Ms. Moore, who works in the same district office and team as Mr. Hare and Ms. Yew, is aware that the credibility of statutory child care may be in some doubt when it comes to the social worker's role in the quality of substitute care. She is relating some 'direct work' that she undertook with a young woman who had been in care from the age of two to eighteen. This entailed reading through her file with her for two afternoons a week over ten weeks.

Ms. Moore: It was so important to her. The questions it resolved for her were tremendous. The things she was... There were very difficult issues that she'd hidden and buried which we were able to bring out into the open and I was able to explain.

[Ms. Moore, 2]

She provides an example of this.

Ms. Moore: When she was about five or six, she developed vaginal thrush, which is quite common amongst girls as well as women, but her foster mother didn't know that and she was still having access to father at the time and the foster parent and the social services were very wary of father, and the foster mother concluded that this discharge indicated sexual activity with dad whilst on access visits...She could remember the foster mother waving her knickers in front of her face, making her sit on the settee and saying to her, you dirty girl, you must sit there and wait until the social worker comes and I'm going to show him your knickers to show what a dirty, horrible, nasty girl you are. And she didn't know why, what she'd done wrong. But she remembered being absolutely terrified, waiting for a male social worker to come. The male social worker arrived, was duly shown the knickers, in front of her. He duly ushered the foster mother into the kitchen, away from the girl to discuss it...The foster placement later broke down. But, this girl, at eighteen had still got this huge memory of being a dirty, nasty girl and she never knew why. And we were able to answer it, and show she wasn't a dirty, horrible girl.

[Ms. Moore, 3]

This detailed example given by Ms. Moore relates both the task of achieving credibility for a role complicit in creating damage, and constructs a credibility for herself by describing how, occupying the

same role, she was able to rectify some of the damage. Achieving credibility for the role includes recognising that the social workers had a difficult job to do ('how were they to know what was happening?', Ms. Moore, 4) as well as suggesting practice has changed: 'the emphasis is on talking to the child, whereas in those days nobody ever actually talked to her during that time' [Ms. Moore, 5]. The identity Ms. Moore defines for herself is as someone who understands the deficiencies of the care system and who works to meet the needs of young people, especially young people in care. She does this by recreating hurtful past situations, and helping children make a new kind of shared sense of them.

But the other part of the role of statutory social work with children is formal work with the courts and other agencies. Ms. Wood discusses this aspect in the opening passage of her interview [Ms. Wood, 2]. She talks of a case that has gone through to the appeal court in London, and so illustrates her credibility by reference to a particularly complex legal situation. She comments that 'the judge would refer to what I said' and that she had 'reasonably well fended off what the barrister or solicitor on the other side was trying to do'. In situations when the judgement turns out not to be that which had been sought, credibility is still not necessarily in doubt:

Ms. Wood: It's more the sense of preparation, of work that you've done prior to coming to court, that you know you have done to the best both of your ability and the best that can be expected.

[Ms. Wood, 2]

Ms. Wood defines an identity for herself within this aspect of her role, an identity constructed to be credible. She presents herself as a competent figure within the court situation, as a social worker who does her best prior to court, who then prepares and performs well.

The focus is upon the way in which the role is enacted, perhaps not surprisingly given that one's credibility may be under test within a court hearing. The credibility of the role itself is here assumed to be largely uncontested.

Credibility in these formal aspects of the social work role is constructed by this sub-group of interviewees in terms of public accountability to official tribunals and other professionals. It is being able to give a competent account to these authorised persons of their work with the informal, interactive order of the clients' lives. The courts and the agency provide the 'accountability frame' of formal rationality for the 'commonsense reasoning' which is their everyday work (Rawls, 1989).

Ms. Atkins works in the district office with Ms. Bryant as a statutory social worker. Constructing credibility in this instance involves discussing possibilities for managing the work. Ms. Atkins describes her daily round as busy and as entailing her focussing her attention on diverse tasks which come upon one another in rapid succession. She presents herself as someone who 'keeps on top of' her cases [Ms. Atkins, 1].

Ms. Atkins: I don't necessarily worry if I can't do things in a day I've set my mind to do them, but what I do need to do is to satisfy myself that I've got them planned in a programme to achieve. So, if someone were to ask me about any of my cases now, I could tell them exactly where we were. I couldn't necessarily quote the last day of the visit, but I could tell you what happened on the last one, and I expect to be able to do that.

[Ms. Atkins, 1]

Keeping on top of cases is described as being demonstrated in several ways. Planning when things are going to be done and having a clear grasp of the up-to-date situation are involved; also, 'keeping up with

recording' and 'not chasing events, but anticipating them' (Ms. Atkins, 2). In talking about working in this manner, Ms. Atkins describes how it matters to her, and it is when she talks of falling short of her standards that this is made especially evident.

Ms. Atkins: If it goes wrong, but you've satisfied yourself that you've done the best you can...and, so much of this is out of your hands anyway...what I do find unsettling is, if I've not prepared and it goes wrong because I've not prepared. I can accept it going wrong when it's something outside my control. I can accept that quite happily. But, what I do find difficult is to accept it when it's been my fault, I've not prepared.

[Ms. Atkins, 2]

Ms. Atkins likes to see herself as someone who is as prepared as possible, and what she finds difficult accepting about herself is when she fails to live up to this and her credibility is called into question. She is presenting herself as the kind of social worker who judges her work according to these standards. She conveys how important this is to her also by talking of how she feels when she lets herself down in the eyes of others.

Ms. Atkins: A court welfare officer had been appointed in this case, and I expected him to contact me. I'd just come through the door at about ten to nine and the phone rang. He was asking about the dates of access for one of these kiddies in Wales. I knew I'd got the letter with the dates in it in the file, but, what I'd done, there's two children and the family had been split. I picked up the file it should have been entered into, and I'd filed the letters in the wrong one, and it took me a few minutes to find it. I was so cross with myself because that was my first contact with him, and it looked as if I didn't know what I was doing. I just really was very cross with myself. It wasn't a good beginning for an important thing like that.

[Ms. Atkins, 3]

The strong reaction of being very cross with herself may on first reading seem rather extreme. With all the responsibilities social workers have, isn't this concern with administrative efficiency somewhat out of proportion? What the extract illustrates again, however, is that the social worker is constructing a certain identity and credibility for herself in relation to her current role. This is

a point at which she lets not only herself down but also her standards for social work: 'it wasn't just because of me, something like that reflects on the service' (Ms. Atkins, 4). Furthermore, the approach with which she aligns herself is being drawn within a work setting where much is construed as 'out of your hands' and 'outside your control'. Consequently, the approach with which she wishes to be identified is about doing 'the best you can' with as much as you can render within your control.

Of the ten social workers based in district social services settings who come into the present category, three have 'specialist' roles. Mr. Grant and Ms. Smart are both senior practitioners in child protection work. They each have their own way of setting about establishing credibility for themselves and their role in this hotly contested field of social work. Mr. Grant focusses upon his practice with clients.

Mr. Grant: It is important that the procedures are followed but there's an art to social work, an art in applying the procedures. It is about being firm but in a sympathetic way, taking the best of both...You have to act with discipline and authority, but you want to let people keep their dignity.

[Mr. Grant, 2]

Ms. Smart focusses firstly upon the fact that she is a senior and so presumably is 'experienced'. For her, it is important to establish that she does not assume that experience straightforwardly equals credibility. She talks of her attitude toward experience.

Ms. Smart: If you begin to think that you're getting better at the job you do, for whatever reason...what's so scary about social work, and learning, and the experience is that it only takes one small thing to knock you over again. And, the more experience and the better you feel you're doing at the job, do you then take more risks, push people a little further than you might have...If you're going to survive, your defence mechanisms, do they then get in the way of you helping people?

[Ms. Smart, 2]

By posing her series of questions concerning the dilemmas of being experienced, Ms. Smart is showing that it is not experience per se to which she refers in order to establish credibility. Rather, it is the fact that she poses these questions about being experienced which is used to establish herself as a credible, experienced social worker.

Ms. Smart refers to another aspect of credibility that rests ultimately on the ability to sustain informal moral regulation through an interactional order. Because success or failure does not depend on the application of formal procedures, the process of how order and predictability are achieved and sustained cannot be specified in advance: they have to be negotiated. Ethnomethodological studies have emphasised these aspects of the ordering of interpersonal relations: it does not depend on rules, so participants have to get by without procedural ways of interpreting principles (Goffman, 1959; Garfinkel, 1967). The accomplishment of credibility depends on being able to improvise, to reason on one's feet in informal or even chaotic situations (Bittner, 1967; Hilbert, 1986). This requires an almost intuitive grasp of aspects of a situation which are not accessible to formal rationality.

Turning to her role as a senior practitioner in child protection work, Ms. Smart talks of her activities in advising other members of staff. She describes the 'management' role she enacts in this respect, and the importance of addressing the different needs a member of staff may have when asking for advice.

Ms. Smart: People will tell you things, and it's like your voice is out of your body or something, where you can look at yourself. You think, what are you saying! You are saying something like, well, thank you very much, that's very interesting, well, I think perhaps this man ought to so and so. And, I'm saying, god this is awful...And, you relate to them in giving them some information or advice about a client and a client's needs, and sometimes I think, you poor old thing, sit

down, have a cup of coffee - on a gut level. And that is what you want to hear.

[Ms. Smart, 3]

In the hotly contested arena of child protection work, both Mr. Grant and Ms. Smart begin constructing credibility within that role. Mr. Grant defines an identity for himself as a social worker enacting the role in relation to clients, and through the approach he claims to adopt he distances himself from others who might work 'to the book', in a mechanistic manner, unaffording of dignity. Ms. Smart presents herself as an experienced practitioner who adopts a critical attitude toward experience and who, in managing others doing child protection work, seeks to respond to the emotional needs of her staff as well as their need for information and guidance.

The specialist role Ms. Tanner has is fostering and adoptions officer. She is based in the same district office and team as Ms. Orton. Ms. Tanner talks about the way she approaches 'approving' prospective foster and adoptive parents.

Ms. Tanner: I think at the beginning I used to think that I had to make my mind up about these people and go one way or the other pretty quickly, otherwise I couldn't deal with them. Then I go better at being able to say to them, well we'll find out as we go along, you know, we're deciding this together.

She continues

Ms. Tanner: I think part of it comes from being more honest with people. I used to think that I had to kind of know things and...but I'm much happier to say to people now, I don't know about this, I don't know what the answer is. Whereas when you start you kind of feel you ought to know, you ought to be professional or something, and you realise that's not really what it's all about...It's a much more relaxed approach.

[Ms. Tanner, 4]

In managing the opening of her interview, Ms. Tanner is not constructing credibility for her role (which is left assumed) so much as credibility for the way she carries it out. Her emphasis is upon

the more open, honest and relaxed manner in which she works in the 'approval' stage. She contrasts this with how she used to work when starting out, and implicitly draws a distinction between those who may conduct themselves in the way she used to do. The identity she constructs for herself in this respect is of a social worker who has moved beyond the stage of detached (defensive) 'professional' to someone with the (professional) confidence to work more in partnership: 'deciding together'.

Looking at the ten interviewees based in district social service offices who construct credibility both for their roles and themselves, two, Ms. Wood and Ms. Tanner, focus less upon their role than how they enact it. The aspect of the role about which they talk (respectively, court work and approving foster and adoptive parents), and around which they define their identity, is presumed to be largely uncontested for the purpose in hand: constructing credibility. For the rest, the way in which they talk of conducting themselves in their role defines both a credibility for that (contested) role and a credible identity for themselves within it.

Five other interviewees also construct credibility for their roles and themselves: one works in a hospice; two work within a hospital setting; one works in a family and child guidance centre; and, one as an independent counsellor. The roles associated with these settings are all 'specialist' if contrasted with the 'generic' statutory social work of the district offices. They are still perceived to entail a task of credibility in terms of the contested nature of social work, and especially so where there is a basic question as to whether they constitute 'social work' at all. Those social workers within inter-

disciplinary teams in medical settings have a particular task in this respect.

Medical Settings

The first social worker to join an agency may very likely find their role is not at all clear and may indeed be a matter of active contest. This is the experience Ms. Williams describes at the hospice she entered. In such situations, there may well be a discrepancy between the identity a social worker defines for herself and the role that others would wish to define for her. Ms. Williams's resolution entails a shift both in terms of her identity and her role, reducing the discrepancy.

Ms. Williams: Medical colleagues don't see my role in the same way as another social worker would see it. They see it very much more as a practical role and they see their role as a counsellor. There's a huge overlap area with mine.

[Ms. Williams, 2]

She continues by talking about isolation and support.

Ms. Williams: I felt terribly isolated at first, and I felt very much at odds with the nurses...I think there was the feeling actually that nobody else was going through the particular problems that I was going through...And, I was still very much a social worker then and tended to feel that I ought to turn to social workers for support, and I think that now maybe I've learned a lot more about the nursing profession and got to know people in there, and in fact can get support from different areas now. I've also organised a regional Hospice social workers support group.

[Ms. Williams, 3]

In commenting that she was 'very much a social worker then', Ms. Williams is constructing clearly an identity which has moved away from 'social work' towards something for which she does not have a label but which she associates with 'hospice social work'. One means of facilitating this redefining, she offers, is in drawing together other social workers in a similar position. Social workers outside the

hospice, as well as medical colleagues, are implicated in contesting her role.

Ms. Williams: Where I wanted to get a social worker involved, it was actually quite difficult because the feeling was that if you're involved then why does there need to be a social worker involved. And, in fact it was a child care issue, which I'm not experienced in at all.

[Ms. Williams, 3]

The credibility that Ms. Williams constructs for herself within the interview at this stage concerns her attention to creating a role and defining an identity for herself upon being the first social worker at a hospice. The tasks of credibility for social workers in more established inter-disciplinary teams is described differently, though relations with colleagues is a common theme.

Working in a hospital setting on a paediatric ward, alongside medical, nursing and other health staff, Mr. Kilroy begins by describing where the social work role might intersect with and complement these surrounding roles.

Mr. Kilroy: The kind of thing that might happen, might be a child's born in a hospital, the medical staff are concerned that the child has some difficulties, they perform some tests and they reckon that the child has a handicap, such as Down's syndrome. The social work task is about supporting, advising, counselling the parents...The kind of arrangement that we had worked up was that I'd be involved pretty much straight away.

[Mr. Kilroy, 1]

A little later, he elaborates -

Mr. Kilroy: The social work task alongside the medical task - the medics had the job of telling people what they knew, and I saw the social work task as trying to help people come to terms with what they'd been told, encouraging them to try and work out what they hadn't been told and what they wanted to be told. It worked better with some doctors than others.

[Mr. Kilroy, 3]

Mr Kilroy is constructing within the interview the credible role that exists for social workers in hospital situations, describing how he has negotiated such a role for himself, and how he fulfils it to ensure its credibility. The identity he defines for himself is in

relation to that role and his performance of it, and is aligned with a social work that involves 'supporting, advising and counselling'. This involves making medical knowledge intelligible and meaningful to families, in terms of their informal knowledge of the everyday world.

Mr. Roberts is the second of the two respondents who are local authority employees working alongside hospital staff. His agency is a hospital based family support unit. Similarly, he begins by talking about his work in a 'multidisciplinary group'.

Mr. Roberts: Other professionals tend to look at what a particular child needs and to get upset if the family prevent, to whatever degree, the child getting that particular therapy. So, there are circumstances when what the child needs, from a purely objective, therapeutic point of view, is at cross purposes with what the family can accept the child needs. I suppose there have been circumstances when my intervention has created change.

[Mr. Roberts, 2]

For Mr. Roberts, the role he has as social worker also is defined in relation to 'other professionals'. However, he places less emphasis upon complementarity and more upon mediation between conflicting attitudes. This is portrayed as a very necessary contribution, a bridge between those professionals who take responsibility for treating the child and those family members who have responsibility for caring for the child. It is also a contribution which Mr. Roberts can fulfil, and one which confirms his identity as a social worker, interpreting between the scientific and therapeutic diagnoses of fellow professionals, and families' perceptions of their children's needs.

Therapeutic Settings

Mr. Parry works in a family and child guidance centre. He is talking about the kind of person who makes the role and themselves credible.

Mr. Parry: I don't like the idea of the word maturity because I think if people talk about it they, perhaps, are saying they have it. So I think it's a dubious thing, but somewhere, as a worker in this kind of field, the individual has to be able to lay aside their own needs. They have to have their own needs reasonably well met. So, if I were a very, very needy person, be it financially or emotionally, then I would wonder if I could actually engage people in a kind of positive and therapeutic process, and I don't think I could.

[Mr. Parry, 3]

He is doubtful whether it is possible to engage people in a 'positive and therapeutic process' unless one is able to 'lay aside' one's own 'needs'. The credibility of therapeutic work and the worker rests for him here on the encounter being centered upon the 'needs' of the client. The encounter also has to proceed upon the basis of 'choice': 'it's a voluntary setting this, if they don't want to come back, they don't, which I think is good' [Mr. Parry, 2]. Finally, lest he be misunderstood, Mr. Parry talks of his attitude towards experts: 'I am very dubious of experts...Experts should be treated with a big dose of caution...I try and make myself, as it were, available, and not sit on some high horse of specialist knowledge' [Mr. Parry, 4,5]. The credibility being constructed is treading a careful line within a contested area involving the value of therapy; arguments of elitism and professional control; the relations between, and relative status of, 'voluntary' versus 'statutory' settings; and so on.

Mr. Scott also talks of his work as 'therapy' but the setting is rather different. Mr. Scott is one of the two respondents who are self-employed and who describe themselves as being a therapist and counsellor. Indeed, it is as a therapist/counsellor that Mr. Scott defines his identity, has sought to create a role for himself, and now

constructs his credibility. In this sense, his is a different case to those already considered. Although Mr. Scott trained and qualified as a social worker, it has become seemingly of secondary concern to him whether or not he might still be seen to be 'a social worker'. Unlike Ms. Williams at the hospice, he is not employed to be a social worker, nor is he surrounded by expectations to behave like one. (Two further respondents, yet to be considered, could be similarly described. They both work in a mental health centre and also view themselves largely as counsellors.)

Nevertheless, Mr. Scott does begin the interview constructing credibility for himself - as a therapist/counsellor - and for that role. He talks of his approach in terms of the responsibilities of therapist and client, and makes it clear that he is aware of the case for being 'directive' as a therapist and for being 'non-directive'.

Mr. Scott: I mentioned before that I draw on Roger's client-centered stuff when I am interviewing, and also systems theory ideas, and brief therapy. There is a dichotomy, of course, between what Roger's has to say and taking control in brief therapy. So, a question for me is, what right have I to be in control in the interview? I believe the therapist has a responsibility, they ought to know what they're doing, where they want to go, and I have that confidence now. But, my direction doesn't take away the client's responsibility. I still believe that therapy is about people becoming more responsible for themselves.

[Mr. Scott, 4]

The defining of identity involves Mr. Scott locating himself in relation to various literature about therapy, and credibility arises from being seen to be knowledgeable and aware of the issues with which a credible therapist grapples. These issues are also ones which determine the credibility of the role in as far as that is seen to rest upon being a source of help rather than professional hegemony.

Of these five who construct credibility for themselves and their role in a setting other than a district social services office, it is those working in inter-disciplinary teams who talk more about the nature of their role and identity. The task of defining themselves in relation to social work concerns, fundamentally, what kind of social work role and identity (if any) they have. The question of credibility becomes more sharply double-edged: credibility for themselves as performing a social work role and continuing to define themselves as social workers; and, credibility in enacting that role. Credibility within the family and child guidance centre highlights the dilemmas of being a local authority social worker working with children and families in a 'therapeutic' setting. For the independent therapist/counsellor, identity as a social worker has become apparently something of an irrelevance, though credibility for and within the newly forged role remains a live question.

There are three other interviewees who manage the beginning of the interview by constructing credibility within their current role but who demonstrate that they cannot achieve credibility either for themselves or their role, or both. Since these three are exceptional within the respondent sample in this respect, I will present their forms of accounting at a later point.

CONSTRUCTING CREDIBILITY OUTSIDE OF CURRENT ROLE

Rather than refer to the current role, it is possible to construct credibility for oneself for the purposes of the interview by referring to experiences and identities which relate to the period prior to

being in the present role. Six of the respondents manage the opening of the interview by adopting this type of accounting. All but two of these work in district social services offices. The fifth and sixth are social workers who have only recently changed jobs. The prior experience referred to might be either personal or work-related, or both. What distinguishes this type of constructing credibility from the former is that a credible identity is sought for self in relation to social work regardless of current role, with the credibility of that role being left undetermined.

District Social Services Settings

Mr. Anstone works with Ms. Bryant and Ms. Atkins in a district team. His role is one of 'generic' statutory work, although he finds that mostly this involves statutory work with children and families. He is talking about the understanding he has of how families work.

Mr. Anstone: I have been through a lot of difficulties in my own personal family life, my own family and my family of origin, so that gives me some basis for understanding how families work...I think that was one of the reasons why I went into social work, because when I was sixteen my father died and a couple of years after that my mother had to go into mental hospital. She wasn't sectioned, but an informal patient, but she wasn't able to make the decision herself. She went into hospital for about three months and was diagnosed schizophrenic. So that was my own personal experience, and I feel it gives me some basis for understanding what people are going through.

M.J.: Difficult question, maybe, but...that was an experience that was part of your life, is there anything that you feel you've had to do about it, or do with it, in order now to be able to say that you feel you can use it to improve your way of being with people?

Mr Anstone: I feel that I've had to process it, in a way, look at it and try to interpret it. I am a Christian and I've tried to understand it in terms of christian ideas and thoughts and in terms of a philosophy of suffering and how we can learn through suffering and very difficult times in your life.

[Mr Anstone, 3]

Constructing an identity in relation to social work here employs personal experience of suffering and difficult times. Mr. Anstone refers directly and explicitly early on in the interview to personal experience and describes it as being one of the reasons he went into social work and as giving some basis for understanding what people are going through. On prompting, he also describes a bridging process between having certain experiences and rendering them useful within the work. Both of these aspects, having such personal experience and processing it, construct a credibility for himself as a social worker.

In more detail, what is being accomplished here? Firstly, social work is being presented in terms of common humanity: both social workers and their clients are part of a common humanity, equally subject to suffering and difficult times, and experiencing similar emotions and reactions. Secondly, and following from this, social work entails understanding what people are going through and this entails the social worker bringing her own personal experience to bear. Thirdly, establishing a strong link between personal experience and the job 'social work' is establishing a link between 'the kind of person I am' (who has had these experiences) and 'the kind of person who can do social work' (which requires understanding others). Fourthly, having had certain personal experiences is not sufficient in itself. There is a processing of them to be done, some sense of working on one's experiences, before they are fit for use. In Mr. Anstone's case, reference to this processing or interpreting involves reference to christian ideas and thoughts, and provides opportunity to declare his religious faith and incorporate this into the identity he is constructing for himself as a social worker.

The invoking of personal experience here sets forth a set of positions concerning social work and Mr. Anstone as a social worker. Personal

experience is invoked greatly within the accounts generally but for many different, though not always unrelated, purposes. The emphasis given by Mr. Anstone concerns personal experience and understanding, and the constructing of credibility draws upon the understanding he can achieve on the basis of his own experiences and processing of them. Mr. Anstone aligns himself with, and accomplishes credibility within, a social work which proceeds from the conception of an empathic relationship between social worker and client.

Empathy is a term which Ms. Richards uses in the opening of her interview. She works in the same district office as Ms. Bryant, Ms. Atkins and Mr. Anstone, though her workload involves mostly older people. Defining herself in relation to social work, Ms. Richards refers to the life experiences she has had and how these give her a certain understanding of others.

Ms. Richards: I have had children and been married. I have had a parent who has died, and a daughter who has been through a divorce. I think all these experiences help me to understand more how people feel. They help you get a step nearer to people...Clients seem to understand that I understand, without me even saying very much.

[Ms. Richards, 4]

Ms. Richards does not talk of any particular processing of her experiences as Mr. Anstone does, and the experiences themselves are more general 'life' experiences, but the appeal to them accomplishes very much the same purpose.

A rather different kind of prior experience is referred to by Mr. Allsop, and one that is not readily associated with social work. Mr. Allsop, incidentally, works in the same district office and team as Ms. Orton and Ms. Tanner. He undertakes a range of statutory work including that of an approved social worker and has been talking of handling crises in mental health situations.

Mr. Allsop: I have been a professional soldier and I carried with me into social work a lot of lumber which was useless, but one aspect which was a great help was my training in self control. However uncomfortable I might be in a situation, I was able to...[indistinct]. So, I brought that with me, that was something I had twelve years of before I came into social work. Nevertheless, it had to be tempered with the fact that I wasn't dealing with the type of situation that I was geared for. I had to modify it. I couldn't strike people or order people about. I had to engineer the situation by leadership, but, again, it was relevant because I'd been a commissioned officer at one time and I was expected to handle people and situations.

[Mr. Allsop, 3]

There is a continuity drawn between twelve years as a professional soldier and now social work. 'Self control', 'leadership', 'handling people and situations' are some of the characteristics, suitably modified, Mr. Allsop portrays himself as transferring from his soldiering experience into social work. He does not dissociate himself from that prior experience but defines an identity as a social worker which accommodates the 'lumber' from it which is not 'useless'. Having defined such an identity, his credibility as a social worker can reside in having been a 'professional soldier' and being able to utilise appropriately that experience.

For Ms. Hooper, it is her previous educational experience which is evoked in defining an identity and constructing credibility. Ms. Hooper, in the same district office team as Ms. Wood and Mr. James, talks of having skills in report writing which were developed during her degree course on communication studies.

Ms. Hooper: There is a skill which is something to do with categorising and creating a logical flow of an argument, making it seem logical that one thing follows from another, use of language, really...I got the basic skills in particular, I would say, when I did some linguistics and computers on that course, and part of that was systemic analysis of ground structures...I certainly think that has actually helped me think clearly...I suppose it's a bit about me anyway, because of my family, but it came out from that, as did all of the stuff. And, it was one hundred per cent of my ability to see through stereotypes, just to look at what I'm writing and how I'm writing, and the implications of the words I use. All of that came from my

communications skills course, responsibility, and the power that I have in what I say.

[Ms. Hooper, 4]

'Seeing through stereotypes' and understanding the play of 'responsibility' and 'power' are linked with the abilities that Ms. Hooper presents herself as being able to exercise as a social worker arising from her prior experiences.

Within this type of constructing credibility, it can be seen from the four instances that the opening of the interview is managed by defining an identity as a social worker separately from consideration of how this identity may or may not be reconciled with current role. Additionally, the credibility of the current role remains unaddressed. With the emphasis upon identity, the task focusses on the social worker aligning herself with a certain kind of social work, one in which she can be seen to be credible on the basis of stated experiences which fall outside of current work. From the fact that all four instances concern social workers currently within district social services offices, it is tempting to conclude that reconciling identity and role within that setting for these interviewees is not a straightforward matter.

What do these four accounts of previous experiences have in common? On first reading, they seem very diverse, from experiences of suffering and troubles, through military training, to communication studies. The common theme is understanding and gaining some control over one's own life experiences, making sense of emotions, relationships and perceptions. Social work must be sensitive to clients' needs, both to recognise the self that has such experiences and feelings, and to establish some order and meaning on them (Rawls, 1989). By showing that they have been able to do this in their own

lives, these social workers establish some credentials for doing it with clients.

'Between' Settings

There are two further instances of this type of constructing. They concern social workers who have recently changed jobs. The first, Ms. Trent has moved from being an adoption and fostering officer within a district office to working in a family and child guidance centre. It is the same centre as that in which Mr. Parry works, though these respondents do not overlap in time there. Ms. Trent does not talk of her work at the centre in the opening of the interview, rather she looks back to her previous job and talks of the way she went about 'approving' foster parents. She describes herself, for example, as 'being unafraid to use instincts and intuitions'; as 'putting aside my own constructs about parenting'; as accepting that 'a lot of the process is discovery, only you have to gain confidence before you can have meaningful conversations like that'; and, as 'being creative' and 'doing things out of the mould' [Ms. Trent, 3,4]. Ms. Trent constructs a credibility for herself in relation to her previous role. She presents herself as a practitioner who knew her job well and had the confidence to experiment, trust her instincts, risk different views, and so on. This also was her identity, but it depended on feeling secure in the role.

The second, Ms. Orchard, moved from being a senior psychiatric social worker within a social services department to becoming a training officer there. Again, Ms. Orchard does not talk about her new role within the training section but defines her social work identity through previous experience. An aspect of her previous work she discusses is work she has done with two groups of clients.

Ms. Orchard: The clients told me that the group was good and I was good and, when I left, on both occasions, there was a grieving process. I do think that happens in a lot of groups, and it's something about the charisma of the individual. I don't think that's any great personal coup of mine. I think it's part of the group work process, that people invest something in the leader and that's more than the sum total of what you are. But, the feedback was that I was good, and that what I and they together made was good.

[Ms. Orchard, 2]

The two groups took place in two different, earlier jobs, with a twelve year gap between them. Ms. Orchard traces how she perceives herself to have altered in the interim. She constructs credibility for herself in relation to this method of working and defines an identity of expertise as a facilitative group leader.

Yet, in their new roles, how far can these two social workers carry their identity with them, or have they to become novices again? How much can they transfer into their contrasting roles, how credible are the new roles anyway, and how credible will they be within them? In transition between role and identity, Ms. Trent and Ms. Orchard might be expected not to have yet found replies to such questions.

Illuminatingly, Ms. Orchard herself gives expression to feelings surrounding such dilemmas a little further into the interview.

Ms. Orchard: All those feelings about not having the expertise are rushing back. So, the set of skills that I learned that are relevant to social work are only partly relevant to teaching. And although, yes of course, some of the skills about group work and enabling people, facilitating people, are the same skills that you use, they're very different in a teaching setting. I have felt very deskilled, of late.

[Ms. Orchard, 5]

CONSTRUCTING CREDIBILITY WITHIN AND OUTSIDE CURRENT ROLE

The remaining thirteen interviewees begin the interview by accomplishing credibility using a third type of accounting in which

reference is made to both past and present experiences. The task here involves relating a social work identity which derives in part from prior experiences to a current role. Furthermore, the credibility of the role is to be demonstrated in terms of that identity as well as the credibility of the social worker within the role.

District Social Services Settings

Of the thirteen, seven work in district social services settings. Two of these, and the only two out of the total sample, do not begin the interview by answering the first question on the schedule. Mr. Walker is one of them. However, looking at how he does manage the opening of the interview, and thinking about why he may begin the way he does, serves to confirm the general understanding that the purpose is to define identity and construct credibility.

Mr. Walker is now in his late thirties. He works in the same social services team as Mr. Hare, Ms. Yew and Ms. Moore and currently is 'acting up' as team leader. He talks of how he has been a social work employee of the same local authority since starting out in social work in his early twenties. He relates something of the local history of the social services department, describing the staffing policies, the different re-organisations there have been, changes of director, and so on. He then talks a little about his own history, how he was brought up and educated in the city and how he has always wanted to remain there. In passing, he distinguishes between work in a rural and work in an urban setting.

Mr. Walker: I like working in the sort of office that gives you an immediate response. I don't much fancy being stuck in a car as being half your office, and I love the team contact. You talk about things. I would hate to go in with perhaps three

people you might see three days later because they're working forty miles away or something like that.

[Mr. Walker, 3,4]

Mr. Walker is setting out elements of his identity and credibility. He has been around in the department for a long time and he is knowledgeable about its inner workings and its personnel. He knows the city as a local resident. He is someone who prefers to work with others rather than spend too much time alone. He now pulls some of these elements together.

Mr. Walker: I actually identify with the city, and the longer I've been here, the more I do.

M.J.: You feel a fondness for the place?

Mr. Walker: Yes. It's my city. Even though I don't actually live in it now, it's still my city. I think that's the best way you can describe it.

M.J.: Has that influenced your doing of social work? Do you think that makes a difference to your work, compared, say, with people who come in from outside?

Mr. Walker: Yes. I'm not saying people from outside can't do it, and many can offer an enormous amount more, but I think you've got to balance that against people who actually feel something for the place that they live in. I think you've got to have some sort of feeling for somewhere, to actually have a bit of pride. I think if your pride is to social work as a whole as opposed to a particular place, I think it can be quite divisive. Actually working on a smaller population within perhaps two or three estates and localities is quite positive, because it's yours, isn't it? The team now feel it's their's.

[Mr. Walker, 4]

Mr. Walker defines himself through his historical knowledge and experience of the city and its social services department, but also through an emotional commitment to the city which he associates with having lived and worked there over many years. His identity is as a social worker who relates his social work to 'a particular place'. He makes this meaningful in respect of his current role by emphasising how positive a locality-centred team can be when it feels it belongs to and with its local population.

Working in the same team as Mr. Walker is Ms. French. She is a statutory social worker who describes herself as working mostly with children and families. She defines herself as a social worker who undertakes 'high risk preventative' work [Ms. French, 1], and as having

Ms. French: ...a very clear commitment to trying to maintain things at home, using slightly unorthodox and maybe lateral methods of handling it.

[Ms. French, 1]

She talks of taking risks and of confidence. In so doing, she does stress the importance of colleagues for her: 'the first thing I needed was colleagues in whom I had confidence - their resources, or knowledge, or whatever' [Ms. French, 3]. It is in considering confidence that she speaks of her own previous experiences and begins to relate her social work identity with her prior, personal life.

Ms. French: Being able to share with other people some of the risks and not leaving you to carry them by yourself, that is also about confidence. You can only do that once you feel confident about revealing your own inadequacies or fears to other people, including other agencies.

[Ms. French, 3]

She continues -

Ms. French: The fact that you have come back out the other side of various personal crises, and had to share, and had to reveal inadequacies and weaknesses, means that possibly you're more used to it...I think it is an extension from my personal life and possibly it's a maturity I've acquired that I might not have done if I hadn't have had crises to handle myself.

[Ms. French, 3,4]

Ms French traces a thread from having crises in her own life, to then having to share and reveal inadequacies, to acquiring a 'maturity' through which it is possible to share with other professionals the fears and inadequacies felt when taking risks in social work. In this way, she links past and present in defining her identity and constructing credibility. Enacting her current role has been

considered by her largely in terms of relating with colleagues. However, she also talks of her personal experience assisting her in relating with clients much in the way of others (Mr. Anstone and Ms. Richards) who talk of increased understanding.

Ms. French: Understanding different people's situations, and how they got there and why they got there, that again is helped by my personal situation. Hopefully, that's made my job easier at times, to try and put yourself into other people's shoes.

[Ms. French, 4]

Mr. James is the second of the interviewees who does not begin the interview by taking the first question. With some similarities to Mr. Walker, Mr. James adopts more of a chronological opening. Again, however, the purpose becomes clear and verifies the significance of credibility, identity and role in managing the initial stage of the interview.

It is the same district office and team as Ms. Wood in which Mr. James works. He too has a role as statutory social worker but with particular responsibilities also as an approved social worker, though it is not with a discussion of this role that he sets about the interview.

Mr. James: When I moved from...moving to the research chemical industry...Leaving aside the nature of the work itself, and the sorts of people I was working with, PhD chemists and the like, and not having any education, or not very much formal education before that, it's really an eye-opener about people who had been through the system. And, I saw in a particular way, and then seeing them as human beings for the first time, working very closely with them. I was actually quite shocked that they had more problems than I actually had.

M.J.: What view did you have about these people before you met them?

Mr. James: It was very much a distant view. Rather like going to the doctor as a patient. I was very ready to listen, and perhaps not question what they had to say. I was in a position where they could pronounce on my physical well-being or mental state, and I would just take that in. Now, if they pronounce on the medical state of a relative, I would question that. But, I think my eyes were opened at that point, that they were human

beings, even though they had doctorates, and responsible research positions. And also, the way that that was abused. The sort of flippant way they were producing the chemicals.

[Mr. James, 1]

These opening comments can be read in many ways. Mr. James is describing himself as someone who did not have very much of a formal education, perhaps unlike many other social workers and perhaps unlike the researcher in front of him. When he is talking about other people 'who had been through the system', he is talking overtly about the research chemists, but again he may also be talking generally about other 'professionals' or 'experts', including social workers and social researchers. He makes the point that they are all 'human beings' and in positions they can abuse. He talks explicitly about doctors, and refers to the change in his own attitude towards them, bringing in how he would respond now if they were to pronounce upon the 'medical state of a relative'. Mr. James appears to be defining an identity for himself in relation to, and in opposition of, a form of 'professionalism'. The credibility he is constructing for this identity derives from his previous experiences within the chemical industry, as a doctor's patient and, it is hinted, as the relative of a doctor's patient.

Mr. James develops the theme.

Mr. James: If I had really wanted to become like these people, I would have to have shed a lot of my views, feelings, beliefs. I always thought people like GPs must be quite caring, helpful, smiling, benign people, somebody who actually had my welfare at heart. But, I think that was the first sign that that was not always the case.

[Mr. James, 2]

Forcefully, Mr. James distinguishes between himself and those (professional) people who feign at being caring and benign. Having 'seen through' this pretence, he affirms his own views, feelings and

beliefs as being at odds with this and continues by talking of how he endeavours to enact his professional role.

Mr. James: I can see people that I see now, especially in the mental health field, who are expecting something of me, and their expectations are a little unrealistic, but I can see them seeing me as I saw GPs and the like before I went to [the research establishment].

M.J.: What does that do to you?

Mr. James: I feel more inclined not to accept that role too readily, and to try to explain to them that, without actually saying the words, that I am human, that really it is up to them. I can act as a catalyst for change for them in some ways. I'm more of a signpost than a doer.

[Mr. James, 2,3]

The identity which Mr. James defines for himself so forcefully he has to reconcile now with his role in mental health work. In so doing, he elicits such metaphors as 'catalyst' and 'signpost', and suggests, 'it is a matter of if you rescue a drowning man who hasn't called for help - he might be deaf and dumb' [Mr. James, 2]. Being a professional himself, with all the possibilities he has described of abusing that position, Mr. James has to construct a credible approach consistent with his 'views, feelings and beliefs' but one that is also credible within a role which includes legislative powers to restrict liberty. Perhaps foreseeing the possibility of contradictions being perceived between the identity he defines for himself and his role, Mr. James manages the beginning of the interview by demonstrating that he is aware of these. Indeed, the credibility he constructs for himself includes that of being able to recognise and live with contradictions rather than being intent always on eradicating them.

Ms. West's role as a local authority social worker in a district office includes being 'on duty' and responding to referrals to the team. She works in the same team as Ms. Wood, Ms. Hooper and Mr. James. She has been talking of going out on a duty call following

suspicion of an incident of child sexual abuse within a family. In presenting how she works in such a situation, she describes herself in this way.

Ms. West: I really feel that I'm an expert in picking up what children are telling me and being able to tell if they are lying or if they are telling the truth - not always, but certainly on something as serious as that.

[Ms. West, 4,5]

The seriousness concerned whether or not the child had been sexually abused, and, in relating how she arrives at an assessment, Ms. West talks of the place of 'gut reaction' [Ms. West, 2] and a processing which may be occurring outside of conscious awareness: 'it's very difficult to describe, because you're looking at so many different things, and you're not even conscious of what goes into an assessment process, most of it is experience' [Ms. West, 2]. The identity she defines for herself, then, is as a social worker who can assess people and situations perceptively and accurately, and who takes notice of her 'gut reactions' in so doing. The extract also provides an instance of the way gut reaction is described as deriving from 'experience'.

When talking of her 'experience' in this respect, Ms. West recalls the professional experience she put before the court.

Ms. West: I had two very strong solicitors asking me why I thought she was telling the truth, and what I felt had led me to make that assessment, and my answer to the court was that I had been dealing with children on and off for about fourteen years and that I felt in a fairly strong position to know whether or not a child was telling the truth simply by the way they were telling me.

[Ms. West, 2]

Later, prompted to elaborate upon her reference to experience, Ms. West talks of the personal aspect.

Ms. West: I tend to be one of these quite philosophical people, I guess. I've had quite a few bad things in my life and I think I've tried, as time's gone on, to pick out the good things from those experiences and to be quite philosophical about them. If I can't find anything else from them, I certainly find learning, particularly in social work, because I think you can use tragedies that have happened to you, or the bad things that have

happened to you, so much in helping you to work with other people. And, I hope that one of my biggest skills is actually being where people are at. If they are in an awful lot of pain when I go to see them, to actually touch that pain with them, and to start from there with them.

Ms. West, 4]

Ms. West constructs credibility by referring to her previous work experience and personal experience. Both are presented as the basis for the identity she defines for herself, an identity which she makes evident in the way she describes herself enacting her current role: drawing upon 'gut reaction'; and, 'being where people are at'. It is such abilities which render her 'an expert', she claims, in assessing the veracity of what children tell her.

Another social worker who presents herself as perceptive of people and situations is Ms. Simpson, who works in the same team as Ms. West. For Ms. Simpson, credibility is constructed around 'analysing what's going on in situations' [Ms. Simpson, 1]. She provides an example.

Ms. Simpson: I feel I can get to the bottom of what is happening. A couple that I worked with came to me, really, because of child care problems, but it turned out their marriage was very rocky, and this led on to finding out that the wife had been abused as a girl.

[Ms. Simpson, 1]

Again, when describing the process this involves, Ms. Simpson talks of how, in interviewing clients, 'I can get to where I want to go, instinctively, by asking questions that lead there, without being that aware of it' [Ms. Simpson, 3].

As she talks further of this ability, it becomes clear how much this defines her identity as a social worker and constructs credibility for herself and her role.

Ms. Simpson: Over the years I've grown to realise that what I take to be normal commonsense, I suppose, about relationships, and understanding other people, is not. It seemingly isn't given to everybody. The older I get, the more amazed I am at how crass people are with each other...And I would think that the most strong influence in that would be my mother, because

she certainly has it. And I can remember she actively taught me to think in that way as a child, to look at the world, and people I'm with, and to think of things from their point of view.

[Ms. Simpson, 3,4]

The uncommon sense through which Ms. Simpson defines her identity is linked with the experience of having a mother who taught her to see things from the other's point of view. This tuition from childhood is spoken of as strongly influential in her being now the kind of person who has an instinctive and subconscious ability, one she sees as directly relevant to her current role, to relate with others in making sense of themselves and their situations.

Ms. Drake undertakes statutory work in a district social services office. She describes two strands to her personal experience which have had an effect upon her identity and credibility as a social worker.

Ms. Drake: Those two strands actually go right through my adult life. I went to the United States when I was about twenty-five and a whole lot of things happened to me, but at the same time I got very heavily into the women's movement and I went into therapy for myself. Both of those have continued hand in hand. So, while I wouldn't maintain the position that everybody who's in therapy gains an understanding of how to be a good therapist, I would say that the therapy gives you an understanding of the kind of issues that need to be looked at.

[Ms. Drake, 3]

Ms. Drake talks about arguing for certain referrals to be allocated to her rather than other members of the team, making it clear that the identity she defines (concerning therapeutic work and issues of gender) is active within her current role. An example she provides concerns her work with young women who have been sexually abused [Ms. Drake, 4]. Later in the interview, Ms. Drake is to expand upon the relation she conceives between her work as therapist, her views on gender and her role as statutory social worker.

A relative newcomer to the region is Mr. Short. He moved from London; where he was working in an inner city team. He talks of how his role shifted, and how his identity as a social worker shifted accordingly.

Mr. Short: I suppose, really, I was dragged into [work with children and families] screaming and kicking. Children and families is the one which grabs the headlines. It's the one where, if it goes wrong, it is horrendous because it goes so badly wrong. And, I thought, I don't really want to put myself in that position...But, all the time my position was being eroded because people kept saying, there's this kid out there being battered.

M.J.: How did you find yourself responding to that?

Mr. Short: It made me decide that if I was going to do it, I was going to do it as well as I could, and there was no way that I could escape from doing it. Then, I found that I actually enjoyed it.

[Mr. Short, 1]

The shift from 'screaming and kicking' to 'enjoying' is attributed to experiences within the team.

Mr. Short: I was really lucky after I qualified in the team that I went to work for, and my team leader.

M.J.: What kind of team was it?

Mr. Short: It was a team where everybody counted...They were enthusiastic, and ready to try anything, ready to try things once they'd thought them through...And, a commitment to going on courses, seeing that courses were important, making time for people to go on courses, workshops, supervising students, getting involved with colleges, working parties...

[Mr. Short, 2,3]

When asked what it is about the work with children and families that he enjoys, Mr. Short talks of 'working out plans and sticking to them, but then modifying them in the light of new events' [Mr. Short, 1]. He continues: 'I do like wardship proceedings. I think it clarifies things...It focusses your mind wonderfully, because of the tetchy barrister and his lordship. It puts you on your mettle.' [Mr. Short, 2]. The precise connection between his experiences in the team and his re-defined identity in relation to work with children and families is not addressed. What is conveyed is a credibility about himself and

the role, in terms of planning and courtwork for example, which is described as having come about through participation in a team which had an innovative and positive culture.

Those who construct credibility within and outside of current role both portray a degree of (personal and/or work) history in defining themselves in relation to social work, and integrate identity with role in a way which affirms that identity and accomplishes credibility. Of the remaining six interviewees who instantiate this type of accounting, three are based in mental health settings, and one in each of an adoption agency, a probation team, and an independent clinic.

Mental Health Settings

Those who work in mental health settings construct the connection between their previous experiences and their current role in terms of choosing to specialise in mental health work, and the methods it employs. Their credibility rests on this linking process. Two social workers work in the same mental health centre. The identities they define for themselves overlap substantially. Ms. Yale is talking about the work that she does there as 'counselling' and states at the outset: 'I always wanted to go into the mental health field and I didn't want to get tied up in child care or elderly work' [Ms. Yale, 1]. She is discussing in particular her work with women who have been sexually abused.

Ms. Yale: The very first time that I met her, what I did was arrange very carefully how I was introduced to her because what I didn't want to do was take control, because in Susan's case there had always been control taken...The sessions after that

consisted very much of non-directive counselling because I feel in cases where you're dealing with a history and a lot of issues and a lot of pain about sexual abuse, incest, rape, whatever it is, that the survivor or the victim has to have all of the control. So, it was about being accepting and about not judging and just listening.

[Ms. Yale, 3]

The theme of control is presented as guiding Ms. Yale's work from the moment she first has dealings with a new client. She employs the term 'non-directive counselling' to mark an approach to practice which is consistent with this. She is not talking solely about work with Susan but with all survivors or victims, that they 'have to have' all of the control. Again, the method of working is presented in terminology from non-directive counselling; being accepting, not judging and just listening.

Ms. Yale continues:

Ms. Yale: The one danger that I always fall into is that I find myself getting very angry when I hear the types of lives that the women who I do counsel have. It's something that I'm aware of, and I know sometimes it's useful to get angry on other people's behalf, if you express that to the person you're counselling, but sometimes it can get in the way, so I have to keep it in check. One of the things I do about that is I get myself some supervision.

[Ms. Yale, 3]

The focus is shifted temporarily but abruptly onto the social worker herself. She, the non-directive counsellor, becomes someone who has strong feelings which can 'get in the way' if not 'kept in check': managing the encounter requires managing herself and her own feelings. This brief episode has the effect of revealing the person of the social worker/counsellor, a woman who experiences anger on behalf of other women. It also has the effect of extending the theme of control: not taking control from the client implies being able to keep sufficiently in control of one's own feelings.

Ms. Yale's references to herself 'getting very angry' and this being something she's 'aware of' suggest that there may be more that she could talk about concerning the feelings she describes herself as having. It is not until later in the interview that, in talking of what constitutes good practice, she refers again to her own feelings and also to her personal experience.

Ms. Yale: I keep saying it, but...I'm talking about if I'd have wanted counselling, that's what I would want...and...I worked through my own experience of sexual abuse, which was [indistinct]...I would have really valued having somebody to talk to, to listen to me, not to tell me things that they didn't know about it, that they just supposed about it, but to actually listen to what I had to say about it, and let me go through being angry and all the rest of it. But, there wasn't anybody around for me.

[Ms. Yale, 10]

The identity being defined is of a 'non-directive' counsellor who endeavours not to take control, and it is personal experience of abuse which is invoked to construct credibility for this approach and the manner in which the role is enacted.

Ms. Wright, who works in the same mental health centre, also talks of non-directive counselling. For her, this approach is consistent with what she describes as a 'political principle' on which she works.

Ms. Wright: I ran, at the horribly tender age of seventeen, a hostel for twelve alcoholics...Then, I worked in a refuge which was a self-help refuge for women and kids, and then I ended up here. All of those places are different, connected by the notion of self-help, self-development, respect for people, belief that people have their own means to solving problems. Non-directive counselling fits with that, and that is a political principle on which I work.

[Ms. Wright, 2]

She continues

Ms. Wright: What I'm saying is, my work with people has a political motive in it, personal-political motive, which is about respecting people, and therefore, it so happens that non-directive counselling fits with that.

[Ms. Wright, 3]

At the outset of the interview, Ms. Wright defines her identity by reference to a 'political principle' and 'personal-political motive' which she sees as connecting the different places she has worked. The approach she terms 'non-directive counselling' is presented as a 'fitting' way of enacting the roles she has had. It is the notion of political principle which is invoked to construct credibility for herself and her role, and she comments about this principle: it is one 'around which I've fortunately always had jobs' [Ms. Wright, 3].

The third respondent who works in a mental health centre, but a different one, is Mr. Mead. He manages the opening of the interview by defining an identity for himself as a certain kind of 'listener'. He talks of having a long-standing interest in how people communicate, and describes how, since studying this on a first degree course, he has been using and refining his knowledge until 'listening by hearing but also by watching what people do has become part of the way I am with everyone' [Mr. Mead, 1].

In relation to his current role, he suggests this is an 'essential skill, since in the mental health field most people have emotional problems' [Mr. Mead, 3]. Enacting the role is seen to entail listening and responding to what the client is saying but also having the 'confidence to act in response to the total of what is being communicated, to challenge what someone is saying' so that 'by choosing the right question, and timing it, you can bring out the issue' [Mr. Mead, 2,3]. For Mr. Mead, political beliefs also have a place in accounting about himself and the work, but it is not until later in the interview, and after he has constructed credibility around 'listening', that talk turns to this area.

Other Settings

Two of the interviewees work within the same adoption agency, though in different offices. Ms. Holmes is one of these, and she has been a social worker for twenty-six years. In defining her identity in relation to social work, she calls herself 'a religious type'.

Ms. Holmes: I am a religious type of social worker. By that, I mean that I have always been more interested in the psychological side of things rather than the political. You know, like Halmos' book, *The Faith Of The Counsellors*...I think supervision today in social work, or the supervision I have seen, is pretty poor from that point of view. Social workers today don't seem to reach the feelings of others, and their supervisors don't seem able, or interested, to help them. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but to me exploring feelings, yours and your clients, is so important.

[Ms. Holmes, 1,2]

Ms. Holmes talks of her own experiences in supervision and the 'psychodynamic' nature of her qualifying training and subsequent social work. She recalls how she was challenged to face certain personal development issues: for example, her mother died when she was in her mid-teens, and one supervisor is said to have commented, 'you haven't yet buried your mother' [Ms. Holmes, 2]. Credibility here is being constructed in terms of such prior experiences which are portrayed as facilitating her psychological growth and her ability to work with and within the emotional (/spiritual) world of others, clients and colleagues. In this sense, her identity is as a 'religious' social worker and she sees herself enacting this in her current role in the adoption agency. She comments, without elaborating at this point, that she was beginning to find social services departments 'too much like policing', adding, 'so I made my escape' [Ms. Holmes, 4].

There is one interviewee within the sample group who works in the probation service, and he, Mr. Alton, has been a qualified probation officer for twenty-three years. It is in the arena of courtwork and report writing that he defines identity and constructs credibility.

Mr. Alton: I find the setting of the court comfortable, and I think that is because I am basically a shy person. When I am in court, I can take charge. Instantly, I know what I have to do and I play out the role: this is Bill Alton, the court officer. People tell me I have a presence in court - and yet, as I say, I am basically a shy person.

[Mr. Alton, 2]

For Mr. Alton, it is important to have an 'overview' of the probation service and he describes this as being to 'service the courts and penal institutions' [Mr. Alton, 3]. Consequently, the reports provided become 'the basis for the service' [Mr. Alton, 3]. He describes the place of the probation officer within that as recognising 'ninety-nine per cent of the time, offenders are not offending', whilst acknowledging that the 'severity of the offence' will 'require the court to protect society' [Mr. Alton, 3]. How does he fulfil that brief? Mr. Alton focusses upon two aspects. One is 'knowing your court'; the other is 'interpretation' of information gathered for court [Mr. Alton, 4]. The task of writing a report which reflects both, he likens to writing music. In his early twenties, Mr. Alton was a professional, classical musician [Mr. Alton, 4]. However, this approach to enacting his current role, an approach which affirms his identity and endorses credibility, is one which Mr. Alton perceives himself as having to defend against what he sees as the unwelcome 'standardisation of reports' in the form of policy guidelines [Mr. Alton, 4].

The final interviewee who accomplishes credibility by this third type of accounting works in an independent, marital and sex therapy clinic.

With considerable similarity to Mr. Scott, the other self-employed worker, Mr. Tate qualified as a social worker but now talks of himself as a 'therapist'. The credibility he constructs for himself and his current role is in relation to 'therapy'. What Mr. Tate emphasises early on within the interview is that, as far as he is concerned, being a therapist cannot be separated from the totality of his experience, past and present.

He begins by distinguishing himself from the approach he perceives clinical psychologists adopt.

Mr. Tate: I tend to be humanitarian in my work, to take on the client's viewpoint. The psychologists I have worked with, well, they have their questionnaires, you know, or they indulge in a lot of hypothesising, sometimes even before they have met the client. But, I don't work like that.

[Mr. Tate, 1]

He portrays this as requiring an 'ability to relate to people as people', also 'a basic compassion, and concern and interest in them, and a hope for them' [Mr. Tate, 2]. The 'skills of everyday life' are insufficient in themselves, however, and Mr. Tate suggests that it is the 'skills of social work' which make a distinction between being a 'good friend' and a 'therapist' [Mr. Tate, 2]. Although 'living life' is an 'education for social work', Mr. Tate continues, 'you have to be a seeker, to be ready to look inwards to consider your experiences' [Mr. Tate, 3]. The account then turns to how Mr. Tate has been practising transcendental meditation for sixteen years, and how he is a trained teacher of it. The 'intuitive qualities' he brings to his work, he says, 'have been precipitated by this' [Mr. Tate, 4].

The credibility that Mr. Tate accomplishes in his accounting is one tied to the defining of himself as a therapist whose approach draws upon humanistic and Eastern philosophies. He talks of the formative effect of past experiences together with a continuing seeking for

their current significance. The credibility of his current role within a marital and sex clinic derives from his credibility as a therapist: he portrays himself as an autonomous practitioner within that setting. Further into the interview, Mr. Tate talks of his antipathy and ambivalence toward social work within statutory settings [Mr. Tate, 6]. He considers himself fortunate to have been able to achieve a self-employed, independent status, unsure what would otherwise have become of his identity.

Constructing credibility outside and within current role is accomplished through providing an account during the opening of the interview in which processes of integrating, or fitting, are performed. Identity outside and within current role is joined. Identity and role are connected. Credibility for the role is constructed through the manner in which it is enacted. The enactment of the role affirms identity, and constructs credibility for the social worker.

There are three interviewees remaining, however, and these three differ from the rest of the sample group in an important way: they provide instances of credibility not being achieved.

CONSTRUCTING NON-CREDIBILITY WITHIN CURRENT ROLE

What of the possibility that, within the sample group, there might be those who do not set about constructing credibility for themselves and their role, but rather the opposite? This is clearly a theoretical possibility. In the first type of accounting that was considered,

four variants were noted derived from constructing or not constructing credibility for self and for role. There are instances amongst the interviewees of each of the three variants which involve 'non-credibility'. Two social workers are based in district social services offices. The third works in an adoption agency.

Credible Self - Non-Credible Role In this variant, the social worker accomplishes credibility for herself within the interview whilst, in her accounting, she dissociates herself from her current role. Dissociating from current role in itself affirms the identity that is being defined in relation to social work.

Ms. Weedon has recently returned to social work in a district office after a four year period spent looking after her own young children. She begins by talking of the value of 'listening'.

Ms. Weedon: It doesn't seem justified, really, to be going round to this old man and just listening to him, you know. But then, I think of my own personal experiences, in the family, you realise how a basic human thing like listening, and having somebody to care for you, is extremely important. That's your experience, and things have a bearing on how you perceive yourself with other people.

[Ms. Weedon, 3]

The credibility of listening is being established, and a credible identity of being 'a good listener' is being defined. The credibility is being constructed by reference to personal experience, and, at this point, by the manner in which the current role is being enacted. But is this a justifiable activity of the current role? Ms. Weedon poses a doubt.

The following lengthy extract indicates the nature of her doubt, and her construal of her role.

Ms. Weedon: I've actually come back and worked for a year doing locums, childcare work in a team which had been quite

understaffed and couldn't cope with all the referrals for child neglect and child abuse that seem to have come in great numbers. They actually had waiting lists of child abuse cases. So, a lot of the work I was doing was visiting families suspected of abuse and I wasn't happy doing that because of the climate of the...What exactly is the role of the social worker in these cases? - the decision about removing them, or keeping them at home, depending on what's current, hitting the headlines. And, of course, there's a lot of questioning by people who are supposed to be the experts.

I felt I was a bit frustrated and wasting my time a bit, and I thought the present social work scene is a bit unsure and unsettled, and that's only in the child abuse/child neglect field. But, when you're also working in an environment where there's also the social security system being tightened up as well...This society's always saying we care about these people, and yet we're left without resources, and we're the last resort for these people, and have no means of helping them, really, due to lack of resources, lack of power over their deprived situation.

So, I am having a slight change of career, and I'm going to be a social worker for under fives, a more clearly defined role. I suppose I find this sort of work not very satisfying. And also, in this four year gap, I've realised that I've got needs; I've got to have time to give to my family. In my observations, coming back to work now, as opposed to five years ago, there's an awful lot of low morale, sickness and people who look really depressed. I don't want to be like that! I just think social work is changing and it doesn't know where it's going.

[Ms. Weedon, 3,4]

Non-credibility of role is constructed by reference to a compilation of factors which are presented as rendering the role ambiguous, undecideable, impossible, unworkable, and so on. Furthermore, Ms. Weedon concludes, the unrealisable demands of the role are borne out by the personal toll evident amongst those with whom she has worked. The forcefulness with which Ms. Weedon dissociates herself from the role in the interview occurs as she talks of making a 'career' move and of finding a job which will suit her altered perspective upon 'work' and 'family'. It is consonant with this re-defining of identity.

Non-Credible Self - Credible Role Rather than an accounting which doubts the credibility of role, a social worker may manage the opening of the interview by talking about doubts she has as to her own credibility in the current role.

Ms. Bates works in an adoption agency. It is the same agency as Ms. Holmes, though they are based in different offices. Ms. Bates had completed her qualifying course some twenty-three years previously, had worked for two years and then had a thirteen year 'break' before returning to social work, when she started at the agency. She begins by noting how this makes her different, and how she compares herself unfavourably: 'I have a lot of fantasies about how much better the training is now, and certainly coming back was quite hard' [Ms. Bates, 1]. She does not remark upon the benefit of her life experiences, for example, but rather focusses upon what she will never be able to experience, improved basic training, noting also that the extent to which training is 'better' may be more a matter of her 'fantasies' than of fact.

The credibility of her role is assumed. Her work with adoptive parents is spoken of as if it is an uncontested area of work, though the 'protected' nature of the agency is commented upon.

Ms. Bates: I think if we were responsible for making the decision about whether a child should stay with their family or not, I think that raises a whole lot of questions, but we don't do that. By the time we are involved, the decisions have been made.

[Ms. Bates, 5]

It is when presenting her performance of the role that Ms. Bates proceeds in a very tentative manner, reflecting the vulnerability of her social work identity. In her accounting at the outset of the interview, any credibility that she constructs for herself occurs through that which the role brings to her. She says, 'I'm not quite

sure that I feel accomplished about anything, but I suppose I have to be accomplished in preparing adopters for adoption' [Ms. Bates, 1].

The accounting is of the order, 'If I am carrying out a credible role, I suppose I must be credible'. There is something of a 'credibility gap' portrayed by the social worker between the social work identity she would define for herself and her performance in a social work role. The role does not affirm her identity so much as confirm her credibility.

Non-Credible Self - Non-Credible Role A social worker who constructs credibility for neither self nor role in the opening stage of the interview is questioning both her identity as a social worker, and the possibility for credible social work within her current role. The double negativity is construed as mutually reinforcing, and, to some degree, there is presented a crisis of social work identity and location. At this moment, there is no resolution in sight.

Within the interview group, there is one instance of accounting of this sort. The social worker is based in the same district team as Ms. Bryant, Ms. Atkins, Mr. Anstone and Ms. Richards, and undertakes mostly statutory child care work, the greatest proportion of which is child protection work. He talks of the absence of positive reinforcement from clients.

Mr. Porter: We say we are safe-guarding the interests of the child, but how do you know? Who knows what is really in the best interests of the child? I'm not sure I do. Your views are at odds with the parents, so you can't expect to receive any positive reinforcement from them. What you get is just the opposite. It's easier when the stakes aren't so high, in, say, a counselling situation.

[Mr. Porter, 2]

Mr. Porter continues by drawing upon an example. It concerns an investigation of child sexual abuse within a step-parent family. Mr. Porter describes how he has been 'barred from the home' with the step-father accusing him of being 'hostile' [Mr. Porter, 2]. Mr. Porter reflects: 'partly I'm pleased because I didn't like the man, but partly I feel I should have been more professional and hidden my feelings more' [Mr. Porter, 3]. He concludes, 'I feel I confronted the man in a way which sounded as though he didn't have a chance of justice' [Mr. Porter, 3]. The social worker displays a self-questioning of his practice which does not result in any positive outcome. Rather, he talks as if he is unsure whether he should be doing the job, and also whether he wants to do this job where there is so little 'positive reinforcement' from clients.

Shortly afterwards, the accounting broadens in scope. Mr Porter talks explicitly about himself and social work: 'I feel about social work now as though I can't live with it or without it' [Mr. Porter, 5]. As he elaborates upon this ambivalence, he talks of conflicts within his identity as a social worker and of conflicts between his enacting a social work role and enacting a 'family' role. Of the former, he says: 'there's part of me that believes in social work with all its inadequacies and failures'; and of the latter, 'I resent its infringements... my wife tells me am I so different when I am at work, so pre-occupied, and that I don't seem to have any time for her or the children' [Mr. Porter, 5].

Defining himself in relation to social work, Mr. Porter expresses ambivalence and conflicts. The contested nature he construes for his current role is without any viable resolution, he is self-doubting as to his competence within the role, and he talks of resenting the

effect of all this upon his personal relationships. Yet, he says also that he 'cannot live without' social work. An alteration either to his social work identity or his current role would seem to be imminent. For the moment, Mr. Porter's constructing of non-credibility portrays a marked tension between self, identity and role.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have analysed the ways in which this sample of social workers open their accounts, by striving to establish their credibility in their role. It is a role that involves formal powers, procedures and knowledge. But, it also involves them in making meaningful relationships with their clients, within which the moral regulation of their lives can be conducted (Jordan, 1990). As the interviewees construct, knowledge of social work's laws, rules and procedures is necessary but not sufficient for good practice: the accomplishment of competence - credibility - requires an ability to improvise and reason on one's feet in informal interaction with people in distress. Hence, social work involves a kind of performance; the achievement of 'order' and 'normality' in situations which cannot be learnt in advance (Goffman, 1959; Garfinkel, 1967). Even experienced workers, who are expert in their fields, can encounter circumstances in which hitherto unrecognised aspects of the work are revealed, that undermine competence and hence credibility. Social work involves the ability to make sense of potentially overwhelming and chaotic situations, to 'manage messes' in a creative way (Schon, 1983).

In their accounts, social workers introduce examples of practice in which they are engaged in a process of dialogical construction of a

normative order in clients' lives (Hilbert, 1986; Rawls, 1989), or rendering the legalistic, professional and procedural world of formal, institutional rationality intelligible to clients, or the everyday social world intelligible to other occupational groups. These examples demonstrate that they can engage with the 'substantive rationality' of members' practices in everyday life, understanding and respecting their normative guidelines, and recognising their autonomy and competence in providing morally adequate versions of their relationships and behaviour.

Hence, already at the start of the interview, these social workers indicate awareness that their practice cannot be properly described in terms of technical skills or utilitarian ethics (for example, managerially defined outcomes). In order to demonstrate the qualities of good social work, they must show their capacity to construct an interactive order in their clients' lives, through informal processes in which meaningful relationships are negotiated creatively, and banal or bizarre actions are interpreted and integrated. For this purpose, the social worker's self, and her previous experiences, must be mobilised in a self-conscious way, through which it changes itself and changes the situation in which it interacts with the client (Travers, 1991). This paves the way for their accounts of what it is to do good social work, and how they have learnt to do it.

Notes

¹ Such is the phrasing which appears in the covering letter which accompanies the snowball package. See appendix A.

² Taken from the explanatory letter in the snowball package. See Appendix B. A similar form of wording was used in the opening remarks which preceded each interview.

3 Limits to these assurances were also discussed; principally, the consequences of conducting a locally based study where common knowledge and acquaintances might result in 'educated guesses' being made by anyone reading the report as to who had participated and what their contribution had been.

4 This is not to understate the active role of the research interviewer in directing the flow of the conversation. Being ready politely to remind interviewees of the overall purpose of the interview is a necessary feature of the situation.

5 Not all, however, achieve credibility. Three interviewees raise questions about the credibility of themselves and their role. These instances will be taken up at the conclusion of the chapter.

5 CONSTRUCTING GOOD SOCIAL WORK

Introduction

In the preamble to the interview, the interviewees were told that the research was about how social workers learn to do the job and learn to do it well rather than not. This message was given at different points as previously outlined. The accounts that the interviewees were invited to give, then, were to be about themselves, their practice and how they came to be able to do social work well. The accounting task that faced the interviewees concerned learning 'good' rather than 'poor' social work. In the accounting that followed, social workers can be seen accomplishing 'good' for the purposes of the interview in relation to themselves as social workers and in relation to learning. This includes accounting about practice which falls short of the standards being espoused.

There is a clear conjunction in the accounting between learning and practice. As the social worker talks of what she has learned, the frame is of learning that is worthwhile, and constructing takes place to establish a sense of worthwhile, or good. (Arguably, however, even without the framing of 'good', learning is construed in every day usage as having either positive or negative outcomes, rarely as being neutral.) The problematic of constructing 'good' is central to the constructing of 'learning'. It is important to understand how social workers manage this problematic in order to understand how they construct 'learning'.

Role and Identity

How are the concepts of role and identity being used? Role is not being used to explain behaviour or attitude. In such a framework, the operation of expectations, together with the sanctions which accompany them, are held to cause certain behaviours. Roles become the equivalent of positions within social systems, and the bridge between the individual and society. The individual 'occupies' a role, indeed a number of roles concurrently or sequentially, leading to concepts of role sets, role partners, role strain, role conflict, and so on. Whilst not wishing to dismiss the usefulness of the concept of role, it is necessary to distance the current analysis from one which would objectify 'role' and create a dichotomy between 'individual' and 'society' (Corrigan, 1990).

The interviewees do talk of their role as a source of constraint in the work. In such accounting, the role acts upon them and assumes an ontological status which is outside of themselves. The parameters that a role prescribes are not necessarily self-evident, however, and accounting occurs as to how there is a process of finding out where the parameters lie. One manifestation of this is in terms of duties, responsibilities, tasks and procedures which are understood to accompany a social work role. It is an empirical question how social workers construct these accompaniments, define the parameters they place upon their actions and how far they define them as constraining. Neither can it be assumed that social workers, when perceiving themselves to 'occupy' a role, perceive themselves to be defined by it. Rather, accounting occurs around the relation between self and role. There is no simple equation of the two.

Separating 'self' and 'role' itself requires clarification. It is not being used to suggest that there is a 'psychological' self which is separable from the 'social'. The identities which the interviewees impute to themselves, identities defined in relation to social work and in relation to personal experiences, are being portrayed within a social encounter between researcher and interviewee. But, more than this, the subjectivity suggested by the concept 'self' is not viewed as a subjectivity formed outside of 'society'. The 'selves' that are made apparent within the accounting are historical and social selves, situated in versions of identity available for construction (Dews, 1987; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Good Social Work and Learning

The accounts by social workers about their learning includes a great deal of accounting about role. The accounting differs according to the work setting and according to each social worker's means of defining a social work identity for themselves. Role within work setting does not encapsulate the social worker's experience and views of social work. It is possible to construct a social work identity without aligning that identity with a specific social work role. Having said that, each social worker has the task of accounting about the relationship between their social work identity and their place of work. It is on the interfaces of self, social work identity and role that much accounting occurs. The nature of this accounting can be seen in that of accomplishing 'good' - good social work, good social worker, and even good (or at least passable) person.

During the opening stage of the interview, the social workers construct credibility for themselves, and in many cases this entails constructing credibility for their current role also. Following that basic credibility, the interviewees at some point(s) during the remainder of the interview talk of occasions and experiences which portray them as less than good. These 'stories' serve to underline the qualities they are presenting as important, and also involve procedures of accounting which legitimate the social workers and/or their actions despite (or because of) their apparent failings.

It is within these overall areas of accounting that social workers are saying what they have to say about their learning. There are comparatively few occasions during the interviews when social workers talk directly of learning, as in 'this is how I understand myself to have learned'. They do not articulate models of learning, though they do utilise metaphors of learning. What appears to be happening is twofold. On the one hand, the complexity of accounting surrounding 'good' social work may be sufficiently perplexing to thwart any subsequent formulating as to how good social work is learned. On the other hand, the absence of formulated models of learning on behalf of the social workers is not the same as the absence of material pertinent to constructions of learning. Again, the accounting occurs in the frame of interviews that are requesting descriptions of events, experiences, processes that are associated with learning. Because the social workers are for the most part not producing statements of the 'this is how I learned that' variety does not mean that they are not talking about learning. To read the interviews in that way would be to dismiss how social workers do account about learning on the grounds that it does not accord with more formal models of learning.

Another argument may be that social workers do not use the language of learning models because they are simply not conversant with it; or, that they are aware of such language but do not employ it because it does not describe their experience. These are clearly possibilities. It may be the case, for example, that, once the formulating of learning that is occurring through practice teaching initiatives becomes more widely disseminated, languages of learning will become more prevalent generally in social workers' accounts. Similarly, should the work of Schon (1983), for example, become more widely disseminated, social workers may begin to utilise learning paradigms to define themselves and their learning. The irony is, of course, that Schon would be the first to point out that it is antithetical to his 'model' that it become 'a model'.¹ The same is true of Brookfield (1987) in relation to the education of adult educators.² Their argument is that any formal model is immediately redundant once it is brought into a specific setting with specific tasks and contexts. Any theory, including theories of learning, they are proposing, will need to be locally produced.

All the above is not to suggest that there are no repertoires that do have to do with learning within the accounts. Social workers do employ metaphors to make sense of their learning and to account about it. Repertoires rather than models, since the concept of model sticks too readily to the individual and suggests something that is more highly developed than is in fact the case. Social workers move in and out of different repertoires - but this is not to suggest that the employment of repertoires is ad hoc. There are clear uses according to the construction of self, identity, role and good that is occurring. By examining the way social workers construct 'good' social work, it is possible to understand how they deal with the relationships between

these different aspects, and to situate the learning repertoires that they employ within these constellations.

CONSTRUCTING 'GOOD'

What do the interviewees take talking about 'good' social work to mean in the 'frame' (Culler, 1988) of this interview on learning? Firstly, there is the sense of criteria and standards. Here, the social workers talk of what in principle constitutes good social work. Whether or not this is realised in practice, and especially in their practice, is temporarily bracketed. What is being accomplished could be distilled as: 'I am a good social worker since I understand what constitutes good social work'. The emphasis is upon having a sufficient enough understanding of social work such that there can be an understanding of what makes for good social work. In constructing criteria and standards which define good for the social worker, a contested quality to these definitions may also be constructed, in which case there is an explicit allying with the position being defined. Discourses about good may consequently define membership within social work: 'the social work to which I (or, we) subscribe is good social work'.

Secondly, social workers talk of 'good' in the related but different sense of *performance*. The brackets are removed, and the accounting turns to the matter of the social worker's own practice. The issue concerns the extent to which her practice meets the criteria and standards that she understands to constitute good practice. Accounting now is of the form, 'the social work that I do is good'; that is to say, is in accord with the criteria and up to the

standards. Much as the definitions of good principles may be a contested area for the accounts, so may the evaluation of good performance. Particular issues concerning evaluation will be considered when examining how social workers construct 'learning'.

Thirdly, accounting concerned with principles and performance does not rest at their determination as (contested) end states, as described above. There is also the accounting of associated processes. In this sense, being a good social worker is construed in terms of processes of becoming. Subscribing to certain principles, for example, is rendered secondary to the manner of arriving at and holding them. Or again, falling short of standards is rendered secondary: a good social worker is one who recognises it and strives against it. A great deal of the social workers' accounting about 'good' is of this order, and it is in part through this that credibility is maintained within the interview.

The interviewees talk of approaching their work in particular ways. These approaches include ones they describe as being based upon stated theories or methods, but also there are the less formal ways of understanding the work and how to go about it. It is not necessarily the case that any one interviewee would attribute only one approach to herself, though where there is a perceived contradiction between approaches, this becomes a place for explanation and legitimation. Clearly, in talking of approaches, the interviewees are aligning themselves with a certain kind of social work, bringing issues of identity, membership and role into the foreground.

We have seen in the previous chapter that interviewees construct their credibility at the start of the interview in terms of an

acknowledgement of the formal and informal aspects of practice. To ignore the formal requirements of law, procedures and policy would - especially for those engaged in child care work - fly in the face of repeated criticisms of social work by enquiries into child care scandals, by politicians and the media, and by lay people. As chair of the enquiry into the death of Jasmine Beckford, Louis Blom-Cooper, Q.C. went so far as to write, 'We are strongly of the view that social work can in fact be defined only in terms of the functions required of it by their employing agency operating within a statutory framework'³ and that 'the law provides the basic framework in which social workers must operate'⁴.

The period between the death of Maria Colwell (1974) and the enquiry into the death of Kimberley Carlile (1987) can be seen as one in which the formal moral regulation of families with children was most strongly urged on social workers. The major scandals (mostly concerning poor families, several of whom were black, and all well known to social services departments) were described as instances of social workers doing too little too tentatively, and being too unwilling to use the courts, or follow legal agendas for protecting children.⁵ By contrast, the Cleveland Enquiry, in which some middle class and articulate parents had their children removed for alleged sexual abuse, criticised social workers for doing too much too confidently: Mrs. Justice Butler-Sloss's report commented, 'a child is a person, not an object of concern'⁶, pointing out that adversarial approaches were particularly inappropriate for most issues concerning the welfare of children, and making it clear that in Cleveland there had been instances of social workers doing too much too confidently (Packman and Jordan, 1991).

These highly publicised criticisms could not be ignored in the construction of 'good social work' by the interviewees: they had therefore to show how they enacted the statutory role, especially in child care, or at least to locate themselves in relation to those statutory tasks, so definitive of social work in the public mind. Yet, they also had to demonstrate how they implemented their values and standards in practice, and how their credibility in terms of the informal processes of moral regulation discussed in the last chapter was worked out in relation to those tasks. This required them to show themselves to be sensitive to client's everyday world of meanings, and to the significance and subtleties of their relationships, and their ordering of their lives. The common theme in all the versions of 'good' social work is an attempt to do justice to the formal and the informal processes of moral regulation required of the mainstream social work role.

Constructing good social work in relation to the statutory role, and managing these tensions is accomplished by the social workers in certain identifiable forms of accounting. Good social work for those committed to enacting the statutory role requires recognition of the constraints of the role that emerge from the formal dimensions of law, policy and procedure. This recognition and acknowledgement is accompanied by competence in working within the formal dimensions of the role to the extent of being able creatively to direct, negotiate and channel the operation of formal processes. Good social work at this point is seen in terms of shaping the constraining features of the role. Such confidence within the formal organisational and institutional sphere is vital to the identity of these social workers, which rests in self-perceptions (self-presentations) of 'helpfulness'. It is this which enables them to continue to define themselves as

responsive to the particular experiences, needs and wishes of their clients. Remaining open within the informal discursive dimension of the role to apprehend the meanings and experiences of the client's world provides the basis upon which to work as critical practitioners in relation to the constraining aspects of the role. Openness thus includes the ability to remain flexible in mediating between the informal and formal spheres of communicative action and moral regulation.

Enacting the statutory role in these terms occurs in a form of accounting in which good social work is rendered compatible with the role. How such reconciling is instigated in the accounts will be discussed when considering those social workers for whom it is the primary means of constructing good social work. For other social workers, the formal aspects of the statutory role, together with the working conditions in which they strive to enact it well, are presented as such that the tensions between the formal and the informal are too great to allow for any consistent convergence. For these social workers, good social work is to be found in achieving passable compromises, or ultimately is to be accomplished only from outside the statutory role and setting altogether.

District Social Services Settings

The case for a given approach to social work is prefaced within the accounts. Social workers from district social services offices talk much about their understanding (or assertion) of what social work is, and what social work is possible, 'prior' to talking of their approach

toward the work. Accomplished here is the position of having gleaned sufficient about the practical nature and conditions of social work within district social services settings to have arrived at a version of 'good', which the uninitiated may otherwise not have recognised (and may still not accept) for what it is.

The difference between understanding and not understanding the practical nature of social work can be marked by comparing oneself 'before and after', or by comparing oneself with others. On occasion, this is made explicit. Ms. Tanner, now an adoption and fostering officer, comments about social work in a local authority district office -

Ms. Tanner: I wasn't sure what it was all about, I think, at the beginning. I was very confused about it. I'm much more clear about it now. And, it's simple things, and sometimes I wonder, how could I have been so dim about it? I think it's because I was so new to it. The connection between the law and the government and all that took time to fall into place, and realising our place in that, and adjusting to the authority of the role.

[Ms. Tanner, 21]

A colleague from the same team, Ms. Orton, remarks -

Ms. Orton: I find people off courses do tend to come into the office and say, oh, I'll soon change that, or I'll soon...I just think, that's lovely if they can, but I couldn't because I've learned that basically people are what they are.

[Ms. Orton, 12]

What are the kinds of understandings about the practical nature of social work that are produced within the accounts concerning district social services settings? The understandings produced for the purposes of the interview differ, as one might expect, according to the definitions of 'good' for which they serve as a preface. Basic distinctions can be seen between presenting role and setting as compatible with (a certain version of) good social work; constructing the possibility of good social work despite role and setting; and,

finding little place for good social work within role and setting. These kinds of distinctions are foreshadowed by the different ways in which the respondents set about constructing credibility in the opening stage of the interviews.

The Practical Nature And Conditions Of The Work

Work within district offices is characterised generally across the accounts as beset by crises; as laced with uncertainty; as poorly resourced, undervalued and under-appreciated; as poorly managed and administered; and, as very stressful. Such characterisations reflect a number of other studies and commentaries upon social work in this setting, as shown in chapter two.⁷ It will be necessary to examine how accounting in this area differs according to the purpose it is to serve in forming and legitimating certain versions of 'good' social work. Before that, however, the selections which follow are provided to sketch in a more general way aspects of district office social work that occur across the accounts.

Crises

Ms. West construes a particular texture to the work.

Ms. West: Things seem to always come in waves in social work. You don't get a steady thing happening. Either you get a load of crises that come together and you really don't know which direction to jump in first. Or, you get the sort of thing that's happened to me this week, where you go from one conflict to another.

[Ms. West, 17]

Three different types of crisis are depicted here by Ms. Drake, Mr. Short and Ms. Atkins.

Ms. Drake: The school had rung. Fourteen year old disclosing [sexual abuse] at school. I rung the police, arranged to meet somebody round at the school...And, when I got to the school, instead of sending a policewoman in plain clothes, a panda car arrived with two P.C.s in uniform, and as they got out of the car the one in charge said, I hope you know something about how to do this because I've never done it before! So here we are, in the room with the teacher, the girl, me, these two policemen, and another teacher runs into the room and says her mother's just walking up the drive. So, I really felt I had to start thinking on my feet at that point.

[Ms. Drake, 10]

Mr. Short: I found myself stranded with a kid in a kid's home. Well, she wasn't in a kid's home. She was down the road in a phone box, refusing to do anything. And there I was, about thirty miles away from London, and she was refusing to go back to the kid's home and was threatening to kick my head in. And I was thinking to myself, this shouldn't be happening!

[Mr. Short, 11]

Ms. Atkins is talking about a woman with whom she worked who physically assaulted her twice.

Ms. Atkins: Each time it had happened in company, not on my own. I got to learn more about her. She is like that, she 'blows', and then it'll be gone. But, you don't know how far they're going to go. When somebody says they'll knife you, not they'll hit you, or they'll kill you, but they'll knife you, it's a bit worrying, isn't it?

[Ms. Atkins, 24]

The crises which social workers from district offices construe themselves as managing are largely those arising from unpredictable, contingent events, and those which are being experienced as a threat (with accompanying anxiety) rather than as loss (with accompanying depression).⁸ The consequent nature of the work has to do with both the frequency with which one crisis comes upon another, and with the intensity of each crisis situation.⁹ The significance of crises is described by Pithouse (1987) as one of the rites de passage of this work, providing a 'baptism through stress', verbalised through an imagery of 'simmering', 'bubbling' and 'blowing' (pp. 57-60).

Within the accounts, however, there are also those who want to alert to the fact that their experience suggests the picture is not a uniform one. Mr Short again (who has previously worked in London) -

Mr. Short: The bit about the bus driver getting hammered outside the office; girl getting raped in a phone box outside the sub office where I used to work; those are things that, when you're sitting here, looking at the fields, seem a million miles away. And, being interviewed at knife-point in somebody's flat, that could happen equally as well down here, but it's probably more likely in London.

[Mr. Short, 18]

The contrast drawn between London and a shire county is one means of emphasising how volatility (and violence) is a relative matter. If one cannot refer to London from personal experience, comparisons can still be made. Ms. Orton has worked in various offices within one county.

Ms. Orton: Different offices have an effect on you. You work in offices that are very high powered, offices which are get up and go, especially the offices that are situated in the cities. There's a lot of enthusiasm, there's also a lot of tiredness, there's a lot of draining, but there's a lot more enthusiasm. The rural offices are very laid back generally, very calm, very relaxed. Whereas in the towns...

[Ms. Orton, 12]

This extract leads onto further considerations, since the context is of the stated effect different offices have upon members. It is the way in which respondents construct the practical nature and conditions of social work in relation to themselves and good social work that will be taken up shortly. For the moment, there are other aspects to the characterisation of district office social work.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty as a theme within the accounts is broader than the district office setting alone. Uncertainty may pervade all aspects of the work: one's assessment of a situation and one's judgement about it; the quality and purpose of relationships one is forming; ethical

and political issues; effectiveness; and so on. However, the meanings construed for uncertainty within this setting have a particular place in construing the nature of the work.

When talking of crisis situations, for example, social workers may describe themselves as having to take action before having opportunity to gather all potentially available information. Uncertainty over how correct that action may turn out to be is evident in the discussion of 'mistakes'. Ms. French expresses this.

Ms. French: I think, because I make assessments fairly quickly, that one has to recognise the capacity to make mistakes because you make up your mind quite quickly...One has to acknowledge that with further information you change your mind.

[Ms. French, 9]

Uncertainty in the form of ambivalence may be attributed to decision-making in more stable situations where, as is usually the case, major interests are at stake and statutory powers pertain. This is Ms. Drake's version.

Ms. Drake: I have a family where the children are in care, and should we be going for rehabilitation or should we not? I just go backwards and forwards about it. I see the mother, and I think we should be going for rehabilitation. I see the kids, and I think we shouldn't. So, it isn't like a fixed plan, but for all of us there's a lot of mind changing about situations like that. And somebody, in the end, has to say, okay, there's a lot of plusses and minusses to this but we've got to make a decision.

[Ms. Drake, 9]

Construing the role as multi-faceted can bring another dimension to uncertainty, which may be experienced in terms of an ambiguous or conflictual relationship. Mr. Walker provides a vivid instance.

Mr. Walker: A four year old, and she had a six year old brother. Mother was a depressed lady. I was going in thinking, help her with her confidence, get her going, and in some ways just switching off some of the other things that were going on. I ended up having a case conference on this after one or two mutters of concern. Ended up with a whole tirade of stuff. They couldn't cope with me and thought I'd just been double-

dealing them. I could still tell you, day by day, what happened in that case, to the point of getting threatened in court. Had to be dragged out before the bloke got his hands around my neck, and all this sort of stuff.

[Mr. Walker, 12]

Again, the context of this extract concerns Mr. Walker's accounting of how he proceeds now to avoid a similar occurrence. The point to be drawn out here concerns how, within the same role, one form of relationship (enabling the mother) is superceded by another (acting in the best interests of the children).¹⁰ What the extract shows is the construal of the practical experience of working to a role which is located as a site of functions labelled in terms of a care/control dichotomy. Constructed in this fashion, there is uncertainty over how these functions are to be reconciled with the case in hand, and uncertainty over the appropriateness of the particular relationship believed to have been formed.

The incident recounted by Mr. Walker also describes a type of situation readily associated within the accounts with uncertainty: the assessing of risk; taking risks; and, the requirement to protect those vulnerable to danger or abuse. In addition to the uncertainty of assessing current risk and predicting future risk, there are moral dilemmas experienced when invoking statutory powers to protect from risk. With basic human freedoms perceived to be in question, the stress described as accompanying the attendant uncertainty can be very great.¹¹

Poorly Resourced, Under-Valued And Under-Appreciated

The expressed experience of many of the interviewees is one of working in a setting that is resource starved. In the context of talking

about her view of social services ('I can see so many faults in social services as a whole that you feel that actually doing the job is a continual struggle' p.23), Ms. Moore offers -

Ms. Moore: It's lack of funding, lack of resources, lack of placements, lack of facilities, working in an overcrowded office, sharing a telephone, not having a staffroom, not having enough funding.

[Ms. Moore, 24]

For Ms. West, the situation is a deteriorating one.

Ms. West: I think the conditions are dreadful. All sorts of things make the job terribly difficult to do. When I first started working, we could offer people convalescence and telephones, no problem at all. And now, you start arguing. You've got four phones you can offer the entire city for a year.

[Ms. West, 23]

The connection between work that is valued and the resourcing of that work is one made by several of the interviewees. Mr. Parry talks about the district office setting, having moved out of it into a child and family guidance centre.

Mr. Parry: At the bottom line of it, the customers are devalued, the actual practitioners doing the work are devalued, the whole enterprise... Our society says that elderly or poverty or whatever aren't important, and so... Look at the local social services office, its reception and waiting areas, how they treat their staff, the salaries they pay them, the fact that to get a bigger salary you've got to go up into management, remove yourself from contact with the practitioners. So that, I think, is all bad.

[Mr. Parry, 21]

Ms. Yew makes a similar point but by connecting what she takes as the negative public image of social work, exacerbated by a lack of appreciation of the job, with the poor financial rewards.

Ms. Yew: For what it is thought to be, by the practitioners, a helping profession, it doesn't seem to be seen like that at all by the general public and by the media. What I'm trying to do doesn't tie up with how it seems to be seen generally. And, it also relates to the poor rewards, financially, that social workers get for what, I feel, is a very difficult job and a very responsible job. So, there's this great discrepancy between what we're expected to do and how people see that we do it and how much esteem there is for us.

[Ms. Yew, 19]

These perceptions can be placed within the broader perspective outlined in chapter X, concerning changes occurring to the organisation and funding of local government; the series of public (and media) inquiries into social work in situations of child abuse; the debates being conducted into the tasks and functions of social work, and particularly social work within local authorities; and, the erosion of salary levels of social workers vis-a-vis other occupational groups which might be taken as yardsticks (for example, nursing, teaching, and possibly policing).

The accounts given by the social workers, however, need to be seen in the overall context of the interview, that is, as concerning their construction of learning good social work. The references to poor resourcing, and so on, plays its own part in this. Discussion along these lines follows this sketch of the general characterisation of social work which interviewees construct and upon which they draw.

Poorly Managed And Administered

There are relatively few direct references to work supervision within the accounts generally. Those that there are made concerning the district social services setting tend to raise dissatisfactions. These have to do with, for example, time constraints, remoteness and questionable feedback upon the work. Amongst the interviewees there are those who single out experiences of good supervisors who are portrayed as highly important to them.

Ms. Simpson talks of insufficient time.

Ms. Simpson: There isn't always time, is there, to sit back and draw out, okay, what are the ways I responded about all those?

What do they tell me about my weaknesses? Therefore, what am I going to do about it? That's quite time consuming, isn't it? That's what I feel should happen in supervision, partly. But, there isn't the time that's necessary.

[Ms. Simpson, 19]

Ms. Simpson also notes that she is dubious of 'positive feedback' she may receive from a supervisor: 'I get positive feedback, but I don't know if it's just morale boosting. I have a suspicion it is' [Ms. Simpson, p.2]. The doubt expressed by Mr. Allsop concerns the lack of direct evidence on which feedback can be given: 'in social work, one's senior management colleagues have very little direct indicators' [Mr. Allsop, p.2]. Ms. Hooper remarks on what she knows she does not get from her supervisor, though she doesn't provide an explanation.

Ms. Hooper: One of my ways of working anything through is talking about it...That's how I do think things through. It's to do with feedback. I find that a really crucial way of doing something.

M.J.: There are people to talk with?

Ms. Hooper: We have a system, in some ways. I don't use my supervisor for that very much, which is a complaint I've got, because I think that's what she ought to be there for. I use colleagues.

[Ms. Hooper, 11]

Mr. Walker, now 'acting up' as the manager of a team, describes his intention to provide more positive management than that which he has experienced.

Mr. Walker: Positive feedback, I think, managerially, is not a thing that local authorities are good at...The fact that it seems to be the main reason for management is, give them a bollocking when you've messed something up, and that's an absolutely atrocious way of going on. Really, pats on the back are very important.

[Mr. Walker, 15]

Beyond the immediate line manager, there are the upper echelons about whom perceptions are voiced. Ms. Moore talks of what she has discovered about social services in comparison with other settings.

Ms. Moore: I've been proved unrealistic about the amount of support one can expect from social services in the work that we do...It shouldn't be unrealistic to expect support from those employed to give it, but I've learned that one shouldn't expect, that it's not actually all that likely. You can't rely on it. Whereas in other jobs I've been in, you could rely on it. If you were in difficulty or needed some support in decisions or whatever, you got it.

[Ms. Moore, 14,15]

Akin to the emotional reaction of anger that Ms. Moore describes herself as feeling upon this discovery [p.15], Ms. French talks of her cynicism as well as her anger.

Ms. French: I haven't lost the optimism. The stuff that comes out from County Hall about computer inputing which is totally irrelevant to our working practices and current classifications of client groups, which is absolutely daft, and that's where I get cynical. County Hall going off at a tangent and leaving us, who are actually...[indistinct]. So, I get angry about things that come from up there which really don't seem to be relevant to what we're doing any more. And the cynicism at times about the games we have to play to get funding. Once a child's in care, you can get money. When a child isn't in care, you can't get anything. It's a very expensive way of solving problems. So, you get cynical.

[Ms. French, 16]

Optimism, anger and cynicism are all contained in this passage. The latter two are directed toward those 'up there' whose practices and policies are perceived to be irrelevant or even inimical to good social work. Nevertheless, there is still optimism about doing the work, and doing it within a district office setting. In this sense, the extract provides a window onto the kind of relation one social worker constructs between identity, role and good social work. There is still a further aspect of the characterisation of the practical nature of social work to be considered, one that in some ways acts as a channel for the others.

Stress

A certain degree of anxiety is generally recognised to be associated with productive responses in challenging situations. It is the level

of stress and excessive pressures that social workers report experiencing that is at issue.¹² In talking about their experiences of stress within the district office setting, the social workers attribute this to the quantity and intensity of the work, to organisational factors, and to personal history and circumstance. More often than not in the accounts, it is the coinciding of them all which spells disaster.

Once a social worker begins to perceive and talk of themselves as under such stress and not coping, it is not easy for them to give an analysis of the 'sources'. Mr. Allsop relates -

Mr. Allsop: So, by virtue of circumstances, and by virtue of my own shortcomings...Yes, I find now that I'm emotionally drained faster, for reasons which I shouldn't have done three or four years ago. The levels of anxiety, whether it's departmental, my own, or a combination, are draining me faster on some days that when I go home it takes me a long time to unwind.

[Mr. Allsop, 9]

Ms. West describes how fraught she has become at times.

Ms. West: I reached the point where I was actually crying on my way to work and I thought I don't know if I'll actually get into work. I've reached a stage of such terrible emotional exhaustion that I can't handle anything else. I came in in a great state of dread that it would only need one more thing to happen at work, and it would totally freak me out.

[Ms. West, 17]

Ms. Moore talks of the stress connected with attempting to control the amount of work being taken on.

Ms. Moore: I've been saying 'no' in allocation now for the last four or five weeks, but I left it too late. I was taking on cases that I'm not able to adequately service. I left it to the point where I was pulling my hair out. But, if you don't take on the work, your equally overworked colleague is probably going to do it. So, it's very difficult to say no.

[Ms. Moore, 18]

She continues

Ms. Moore: It's difficult to control the amount of work you do when there's so many referrals coming in each week. If you say you can't take them on and everyone else says they can't take them, they're still sitting on the desk looking at you.

[Ms. Moore, 19]

Managing the competing demands of the work are an area of comment for Ms. Drake, leading her to describe feelings of worry and inadequacy.

Ms. Drake: You're constantly prioritising and constantly having to shift everything in order to fit something in that's more important. It's not a job that you can actually plan very well in, it seems to me. Therefore, there is always a layer of things that you haven't done, and they get more difficult to do as time goes by. Something that isn't actually urgent gets shoved back. I constantly have a feeling of not being good enough, not working adequately, because I haven't done all those things. They're the things you wake up in the middle of the night and think, oh shit...

[Ms. Drake, 11]

The combination of stress at work and stress at home is one picked up by Mr. Hare. He recalls a period in his life when he reached a 'low point' which he makes sense of in terms of some major transitions occurring at the same time.

Mr. Hare: It was like a spiral, and I reached a really low point. I thought, I've either got to get this together or I've got to get out. I had only recently qualified and had just got the job here, so there was all the business of starting somewhere new. And, we hadn't been able to sort out a house, so I was commuting in from a rented place, then commuting home at weekends. On top of that, we had just had our first baby, and we weren't at all happy about being apart. It was an awful time. I got completely worn out.

[Mr. Hare, 13]

The occurrence of stress and its experience within the district office setting is an aspect of the practical nature and conditions of work there which is employed within the accounts in various contexts and for differing purposes. As indicated in these extracts, stress is a concept that can be used as a focal point for accounting to do with self, identity, role and membership, and one that can mediate in the legitimating of positions concerning good social work. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that talk about stress and its consequences is very much a part of the local cultures of district teams.

Good Social Work

The social workers accomplish the defining of good social work from within district office settings in distinctive ways. In one type of accounting, the social workers talk of good social work relative to their role within that setting: 'good social work is possible here, and this is what it looks like'. In a second type of accounting, it is the compromising of good social work due to the setting that is emphasised. In the third type of accounting, the social workers define good social work by contrasting it to that which is possible within the statutory role. The manner of accounting that is employed by any one interviewee may move across these types, or it may fall consistently within one type. The social work identity which a social worker defines for herself is an important intermediary here since it is a means of transcending role and setting in accomplishing a version of good social work.

Considering the twenty-three interviewees who are working within district office settings, the accounting of ten of them falls largely within the first type. There are five, on the other hand, who express themselves largely by contrasting good social work with their current role and setting. The remaining eight vacillate somewhat between expressing feelings of being compromised by and having commitment to this work setting.

Reconciling And Integrating

Given the generally adverse characterisation of the practical nature and conditions of social work outlined above, it is apposite to label this first type of accounting as one of 'reconciling'. It is as though there is a job to be done in making apparently conflicting elements compatible. This accounting process can be seen, however, even in the basic framing of the nature of the work and the defining of good, to create possibilities for compatibility.

One rhetorical device for achieving this concerns the ascription of social work in this setting as 'real' social work, and, by implication, of practitioners in this setting as 'real' social workers. Within this rhetoric, the adversity is not minimised but is taken as a measure of just how genuine a social work is being practised. The adversity of the nature and conditions of the job is taken as a mirror of the adversity of the nature and conditions of the lives of those people who are the recipients of the service. This is not to suggest that the situation is portrayed as one to be passively accepted. Rather, there is a dual struggle for betterment. But, it is the experiencing of that struggle that is all a part of 'real' social work.

Ms. Tanner puts it this way -

Ms. Tanner: I don't want to work in any other setting than local authority because that's real social work. It's not piddling about on the fringes...I don't agree with it all. I don't think it's all alright by any means. But, it's there and somebody's got to do it, and I want to do it properly.

[Ms. Tanner, 22]

Ms. West says -

Ms. West: I feel as though we're the dustbin at the end of the line. Other bits are picked out by other professionals along the way and what's left that no-one else wants to deal with, we are left with.

[Ms. West, 22]

She continues -

Ms. West: I guess the challenge and the gory and gut bit of generic social work is actually what appeals to me.

[Ms. West, 23]

Within this framing, social workers in less adverse situations (arguably privileged ones) would be on shaky ground in making any claim to be conducting a superior form of social work. Different would remain defensible, but in no position to criticise. Indeed, the onus is if anything turned around through this rhetorical device, requiring others to legitimate the work they do. The scene is set for a sharply divided membership of social work: those who are willing and able to 'get their hands dirty', and those who retreat to less demanding work.

Nevertheless, this means of uniting role and setting with good social work does not address the moral and political character of the work: it may be real social work, but could it not be doing more harm than good (to the clients and also the practitioners)? How is the work to be approached to satisfy these questions? There are clearly differences amongst those working within this setting as to the degree to which such questions can be satisfactorily answered, if at all.

There are those who adopt a position for the purposes of the interview of reconciling their role in the district office setting with good social work. What is evident in the accounting of these ten interviewees¹³ is an integrating of their social work identities with a version of good social work that is rendered possible within their district office role. In order to accomplish this reconciling and integrating, accounting focusses upon two main areas: enacting the statutory role; and, managing the work. Of the ten, two have

specialist roles within the setting. Consequently, their accounting offers a particular variation. Yet, this is still within the same type, since for them specialising is described more in terms of continuation than escape.

All of these ten begin the interview by constructing credibility for themselves within their current role, with four of them also defining their 'social work identity through prior experiences. Also of note at this juncture are the visual representations made by these interviewees, relating personal life events and work life events. Eight out of the ten completed the life 'path' by making full entries in both columns, presenting a picture of a considerable connection between these two spheres of their lives: a uniting of social work identity with personal history. Of the two who did not complete the chart in this way, one (Mr. Walker) talks of his work history of long service within one department, a feature which he renders as a personal matter. The other (Mr. Short) expresses difficulty in connecting personal and work worlds. His case is an exception within this grouping, an observation which will be considered shortly.

These comments are made to underline an aspect of the type of accounting adopted by this category of interviewees: the portrayal of a strong sense of belonging within and commitment to social work. It is not that these interviewees are unique in so doing but rather that recognising this feature of their social work identities is important in understanding how, within the interview, they achieve the reconciling and integrating of good social work. The form of the belonging and commitment does vary amongst them. What is common is the expression of both a seriousness about the personal significance social work holds for them, and of a commitment to social work as a

means of helping. What is being conveyed is that it is personally of great import that they are engaged in a social work which is not a transgression of their commitment to help others.

Social Work/Personal Identity And The Statutory Role

As mentioned, four out of these ten interviewees begin the interview by defining their social work identities with reference to experiences outside as well as within their current role. Ms. West is one and towards the conclusion of the interview she makes the following statements concerning her personal experiences. Here, she is commenting upon an entry she has made on her life path: 'Bobby Kennedy's assassination'.

Ms. West: I know it's an odd thing to put down. It had such a profound effect upon me...I think it was something to do with being at that age where the world's problems really come in and become your own. That became like a personal tragedy, a personal thing. Somehow you had to better the world. It became like a personal crusade. It became one of the reasons why I wanted to go in and help make this a better world...None of the things led to a conscious decision. It was a culmination of them all.

[Ms. West, 24]

She continues -

Ms. West: I think, subconsciously. I must try and use most experiences to learn from, and I think it still goes back to a deep commitment to social work...I just feel like I'm born to be a social worker, and that is it. I couldn't do anything else.

[Ms. West, 25]

Ms. French, talking further of the personal experiences to which she referred when constructing credibility, ventures -

Ms. French: There've been hiccups and there've been problems, but I've survived them all, and it's a confidence that everybody can survive things. Some people survive the most horrific things. That's really what my belief in my job is about. That's my philosophy behind my job. People live through the most appalling life situations and somehow they survive and, possibly with help they survive slightly better. So, it's an optimism about where I'm going to and where other people are

going to, including one's clients. We wouldn't bother to do the job if we didn't have that optimism.

[Ms. French, 7]

Later in the interview, she says more about her 'optimism' -

Ms. French: My mother was a social worker and I probably had more knowledge about it [social work] than most other people. I worked overseas for five years, went over with VSO and was put in charge of a family centre at the age of twenty-one...And, I suppose my experiences there made me very aware of the circumstances which destroy people, and that people themselves aren't necessarily bad or hopeless, but circumstances make life impossible. So, I suppose that gave me some optimism about human beings, which is my baseline now: what I get out of it and what I think one's contributing to other people.

M.J.: Your mother was a social worker?

Ms. French: Yes, I think I'm quite like her. I argue tooth and nail with her. And, she thoroughly enjoyed her job. She was a child care officer. And, I think it's the bit about when you see somebody with job satisfaction, you have a positive feeling about the work.

[Ms. French, 16]

Mr. Walker refers to his many years of work experience within the same department when constructing credibility, and he claims a distinct status as someone who works in the locality in which he has lived all his life. A consequence of remaining within the same department to which he draws attention is the possibility of seeing what happens to people over a period of time. He describes this as leading him to a certain 'attitude of mind'.

Mr. Walker: I have aimed at not receiving a child into care. I'm not going to do that. It's not an option. And, that's an attitude of mind. I went out with the attitude that that was not an option. That was built on a belief I came to that care doesn't work.

[Mr. Walker, 5]

Mr. Walker proceeds by giving examples which have led him to this conclusion, young people whom he has known over several years, and he restates his aim: 'I feel if you do end up with a child in care, I feel a lot happier in my mind being able to say that we've done what is possible at this point in time' [Mr. Walker, 6].

The fourth of these interviewees, Mr. Short, is an exception within the group of ten in that he makes little reference to experiences in, or a history of, his personal life. The comment he makes about not completing the life path is : 'I think maybe the reason I didn't do the homework was because I found it difficult' [Mr. Short, 17]. Just prior to this, he has been talking somewhat hypothetically about connections between life experiences and the conduct of social work. The experience that he refers to when talking about himself, however, is work related: 'It is the same with my experiences of wardship. I've had good experiences with them. I'm sure if I'd been annihilated by a judge, I wouldn't want to enter into that process' [Mr. Short, 17].

Mr Short is the social worker who describes himself in the opening of the interview as having been 'dragged into [work with children and families] screaming and kicking' [Mr. Short, 1]. It is to the team and office within which he worked at that time, and to the senior of the team, that he attributes the change whereby he states: 'then I found I actually enjoyed it' [Mr. Short, 1]. Later on, he speaks of his commitment within the statutory role as 'to do with the kids, trying to get the best for them in the circumstances that surround them' [Mr. Short, 15], and also adds: 'there are times when I feel that we are punishing people, and I don't think that's what social work's about' [Mr. Short, 16]. There is presented a major shift within Mr. Short's defining of his social work identity to the point where he embraces (critically) a statutory role. Rather than refer to certain formative personal experiences, it is work experiences within a district team and with a team senior that are emphasised in his descriptions of how he has developed both an understanding of the way good social work can be compatible with a statutory role, and developed a commensurate social work identity.

The remaining six interviewees in this category do not refer to experiences outside their current role when constructing credibility at the beginning of the interview. In giving accounts which reconcile good social with their current statutory role, however, they do define social work identities which go beyond their present jobs in very much the same way as the four considered above. As the interviews progress, there are more aspects of the role to be legitimated than those which are presented at the outset in order to establish a basic credibility. These six interviewees define social work identities in a way which integrates them with a version of good social work they make compatible with their statutory role. (As noted earlier, there are others for whom the accounting is rather more that of 'making compromises' than 'integrating' as further aspects of the statutory role are discussed within the interview.)

With some resemblance to the transition described by Mr. Short, Ms. Atkins talks of how she 'didn't want to be a social worker' [Ms. Atkins, 18]. She compares social work with probation work, which had been her original aim.

Ms. Atkins: From the other side of the fence [as a probation ancillary], I was a bit scathing about the work that they [social workers] did. But it's been good for me because you really are in the front line, and you're very much more protected in probation...You can usually think to yourself, I'll do such and such today, and you can usually achieve it...But in social services, you're taken over by events. It's really straight off the streets with social services.

[Ms. Atkins, 19]

For Ms. Atkins, the statutory social work role came as a 'challenge' [Ms. Atkins, 30], in terms of it being 'straight off the streets' and also since 'social workers hold far more responsibility for people's lives than probation officers' [Ms. Atkins, 31]. Responding to challenge is a description that Ms. Atkins presents about herself in

relation to a series of distressing personal events and experiences throughout her life from the time her mother died when she was fourteen. Hence, it is the combination of perceiving herself as someone 'interested in people, why and how they react as they do...feeling warm towards people...able to listen and be absorbed in others' problems' [Ms. Atkins, 30], and as someone who responds to challenge, which is presented as constituting a social work identity fitting to the statutory role.

Ms. Orton portrays herself as drifting into social work eighteen years ago: 'I only took the job for seventeen weeks, to pay the rates, and that's how I got into it, and they kept on offering me more jobs' [Ms. Orton, 27]. She does not attribute to herself any particular sense of mission or destiny but rather, in defining herself and social work, presents herself as someone who tries not to take themselves too seriously. She applies this to her work as regards, for example, whether or not to believe all that her clients tell her.

Ms. Orton: I always have a good laugh at everything. I think it's all quite funny. I don't believe it, you know, when somebody tells me they're not working when they clearly are, and probably doing three jobs. I think it's a great laugh...I think I wear two hats. I wear one when I'm going to a client and when I get back I say, that's a load of bullshit, get in the car and drive to the next one and think, what am I going to be told now. I do feel very caring when I go and visit and I do believe what people tell me until I get out and I analyse it and I think, well that's not right, you know, it doesn't add up. But, if they tell me something, I will believe it at the time, until I go and work it out.

[Ms. Orton, 19,20]

There is a tension expressed by Ms. Orton between 'feeling very caring' (and seeking to establish the kind of trusting, supportive relationships Ms. Orton described when constructing credibility) and 'feeling cynical' (from experiences of having been 'led up the garden path') [Ms. Orton, 19]. Her stated means of resolving, or living with this is through retaining her 'sense of humour' about herself, and, hence, others.

Ms. Bryant, by contrast, records on her life path first investigating a career in social work when she was sixteen. For Ms. Bryant and Ms. Wood, an attraction to social work is linked in their accounts with their christian faith, though Ms Bryant describes this as an 'adolescent phase' [Ms. Bryant, 23]. In Ms. Bryant's case, she talks of her religious beliefs giving way to (egalitarian) political ideals to be 'pursued in social work; whilst Ms. Wood refers to christian values as continuing to be important in her conduct of social work. Both of these practitioners have spent several years working within social services departments (eleven and eight years respectively) and perceive themselves to have a keen knowledge of the 'internal workings' of the organisation, 'both formal and informal' [Ms. Bryant, 12]. This they construe as vital in being able to practice social work which accords with the values through which they define their identities.

Ms. Smart, who has a specialist child protection role, explains her being a social worker by reference to 'life events' which were 'bubbling away' [Ms. Smart, 24].

Ms. Smart: I'm the eldest of five and my youngest brother has just had his seventeenth birthday, and my parents split up three weeks before my A levels, and I've always been the copier in the family. My mother had a nervous breakdown and started a spate of shoplifting, and my father had a suicide attempt, and they all seemed to depend upon me. So, a bit of me didn't want to be a social worker at all, and the other bit of me thought, well if I've managed this lot, there must be some skills and strengths that mean I can do it.

[Ms. Smart, 24]

She also recalls how, as a child, she had a 'sort of feeling for the underdog', which has stayed with her in terms of 'not really caring very much about people who are doing okay, because they are doing okay anyway' [Ms. Smart, 24]. The 'other thread running through', she

says, 'was getting involved in politics' [Ms. Smart, 24]. About all this, she concludes -

Ms. Smart: Even when you have a really awful day, and you think there must be easier ways of earning, I still feel that it's right for me.

[Ms. Smart, 25]

Finally, Ms. Tanner, now a specialist fostering and adoption officer, makes connections on her life path between personal life events and her work. The divorce of her parents, visiting her father on access and then him moving away, her mother's remarriage, and her 'failure' at school up until her late teens, she links with her understanding of the needs of children and with her tendency to 'identify with the underdog' [Ms. Tanner, life path]. As regards local authority social work, she expresses her commitment thus -

Ms. Tanner: I think it's a very important job, and that's why I'm more committed to it...I used to think of doing other things, but I wouldn't now. I wouldn't want to do anything else...I think I'm a very optimistic person on the whole. I get disillusioned, but it's more about things like not being able to do things quickly enough that you want to do when you get an idea, and that kind of thing. And, our public image I get embarrassed about, and the way we are represented. But, as far as the job itself is concerned, I really think it's important and valuable and I wouldn't want to do anything else.

[Ms. Tanner, 21,22]

Enacting The Statutory Role

How, then, do these social workers proceed to construct a version of good social work that accords with their social work identities and is compatible with the role of statutory social worker? What is evident is that much accounting takes place concerning what 'helping' (a common reference point in defining their identities) can mean within the role of statutory social work. To begin with, these interviewees make it clear that reconciling good social work with this role entails

an acceptance and acknowledgement (to themselves and their clients) that they are indeed in the role. This is what one of them refers to as a 'basic honesty'.

Mr. Walker: I hope that the people I work with, the consumer, get a basic honesty. Not necessarily an agreement, but actually what we're doing, a basic honesty. The reason that you're in there has to be reiterated, often many times. You may have a family with a multitude of problems, but at the end of the day the reason you're in there, and the final reason why you're in there, is because of concerns about their parenting...Alright, let's sort them out at the D.H.S.S., and their housing, and lots of other things that come in with the social work task. But, you mustn't lose sight of what that first bit is, what your aim is. Honesty of what you're doing. Otherwise, the consumer, when you change halfway through, hasn't got a bloody clue what's going on.

[Mr. Walker, 7]

The basic honesty is an honesty about 'the reason you're in there', a reason which derives from the role of statutory social worker. However, there are 'lots of other things that come in with the social work task', so that 'honesty of what your doing' may not be a self-evident matter. The 'final reason' is given as that which could cause the social worker to 'change halfway through'. It has to do, therefore, with construing the role as constraining the activity of the social worker as an incumbent of statutory responsibilities, powers and (limited) resources. Good social work, by this accounting, involves apprehending the ways in which the role is constraining, and being honest about this with clients.

For Ms. Smart, in her specialist child protection role, the continuing issue is not whether this is good social work but how to get it right.

Ms. Smart: One of the things about the duty to look at whether care proceedings should be taken is it's a kind of amorphous thing that you could hang over any family or children that you work with. And, being honest to people about the other side of the coin to, we're the nice, friendly social worker and we're going to give you breaks from your children when they get a bit on top of you, the flip side is, at what point do the child's needs take over, and when is there a consideration that the child can no longer go on in that family?

[Ms. Smart, 16]

She concludes -

Ms. Smart: I still haven't got it right. I think one of the things I've learned is that you start way back before...You start talking in generalities...You start talking in a safer way with people about, have you read the booklet about your rights if your kids are in care? And you can start on safer ground like, one of the issues that we have duties to consider when we have a lot of input with families are how that child is coping with life and developing. We might have a number of concerns about that, and sometimes you may disagree with us, but our view is that the basis of their problems is about how they are with you and the family and the relationships. So, this is why we're offering support now, but we will be reassessing this at 'x' point, and it may be at that point that...And, letters and contracts and all of those things. But however much I try to do that, I still come back and think, oh no, I've made a mess of it again.

[Ms. Smart, 17]

Having located themselves within a role which acts to constrain them in a particular fashion, and having learned sometimes the hard way just where the parameters of that constraint lie, the social workers proceed to demonstrate that then they are able, in different ways, to exert control over the role. The expressed experience is one of 'being controlled by' but also becomes one of 'having control over'. By this framing, any passivity that might have been imputed to the sense of reconciling is revoked. It is as if a dialectic is set to work in which good social work shapes role as well as vice versa.

The shape that the respondents give to the role reflects the social work identities which they talk of integrating with it. Ms. French, who opens the interview by defining herself as undertaking 'high risk preventive work' with 'a very clear commitment to trying to maintain things at home' [Ms. French, 1], illustrates with an example how she construes herself as both operating within the role but taking control over it.

Ms. French: One thing I did was, I went to court for a care order with the very clear intention that the children should not remain in our care but should be home on trial. I told the

court that's what we were going to do with it, which I think quite shocked them. It was very much a heavy preventative measure, giving us power to override the mother in certain decisions in respect of the children. It wasn't home on trial with a view to dispensing with the care order because of her medical condition. So, those were the sorts of methods I tried to use, to offer additional safeguards.

[Ms. French, 1]

Being conveyed is a sense of relating to the situation in hand in a clear and decisive way. Ms. French depicts herself as moving between the worlds of the court, the agency, and the family, adaptable and adapting. There has been an 'assessment' of the family and a judgement made about the risks and benefits of maintaining the children with their mother. Substantial risks are felt to exist and 'safeguards' are seen to be required, safeguards which include the 'heavy preventative measure' of statutory power to 'override the mother in certain decisions'. The social worker relates with flexibility in her dealings with the range of people and institutions involved in a way that confirms her social work identity whilst being constrained by, but acting creatively within, her statutory role.

Ms. French later describes herself thus -

Ms. French: I think I'm actually a fighter. I fight for the most abnormal or unrealistic things. And, sometimes you get them...You've got to believe. You've got to hope that there is some way of doing something. And, you come to a dead end and you turn round and go back a little way. You go up another route, and somehow you get there. Realistic about resources and things? I think I am quite realistic. I try the lateral bits and the combinations of different things and, hopefully, end up with something that's viable.

[Ms. French, 10]

In this accounting, then, the possibilities for perceiving situations as conflictual are not necessarily lessened by reconciling good social work with the statutory role. Indeed, the metaphor of 'fighting' for what is believed to be right or just appears frequently in the context

of describing innovative practices. Ms. Wood talks of how the combination of her christian faith and her growing realisation of the extent of the poverty (material and spiritual) of people's lives leaves her 'wishing there was more for people than I'm going to give' [Ms. Wood, 17]. She elaborates by saying: 'my views on human intervention have shifted. My vision for the job isn't as great as it used to be' [Ms. Wood, 18]. But her stated response is -

Ms. Wood: I see myself much more as an advocate now. I do believe advocacy is terribly important. I think you have to be prepared to fight for people...The Department recently paid out twelve thousand pounds Section One money for one of my families. I think it was a record, at least for our team!

[Ms. Wood, 18]

Ms. Smart defines herself in the beginning of the interview as a social worker who is seeking to respond to the emotional needs of her staff. The place of and for 'feelings' continues to be a way of her defining her identity and of shaping how she acts back upon her role as a specialist in child protection work. She constructs a process regarding a development of social work/personal identity within role, associating 'being a person' rather than a role with allowing herself to use her feelings as a social worker.

Ms. Smart: I don't know whether social work courses devalue your gut feeling or your hunch or whatever it is, but it's something I've learned to use, or I've felt happier about using, as I've got more experience. How does this person actually make me feel, rather than being with a social work hat on, just being me as a person...I sit in meetings now, and the hairs on my back stand up when this guy walks into the room, or something...I hope I don't talk about people that way all the time, but if you get a strong feeling about them I think that's an important perspective and it might be the way women feel about something.

[Ms. Smart, 3]

It is not that Ms. Smart sees no place for the analytical -

Ms. Smart: The theories about why people behave in certain ways allow you take a lot more grot from people because there's a process of rationalising and looking back on what's happened to them...I think personally that helps me stick with people and not get judgemental...You've got the general public with very

strong views on child abuse at one end, and what kind of keeps you somewhere in the middle, I think, is to do with the theorism, the ideas. The background bit helps you. And obviously, the tools that help you formulate hypotheses and where you might be able to help, and making an assessment. You need all those things, because just gut feelings don't see you through making a decision after a particularly serious injury, where the child's been removed, if you should attempt rehabilitation.

[Ms. Smart, 5]

Nevertheless, Ms. Smart attaches a particular significance to 'feelings' in accounting about her identity and role.

M.J.: Something you said earlier about gut feeling and relating in that way, you said something about women and doing that. Is that partly how you see it? Is there a difference between men and women and how they see the place of gut feeling?

Ms. Smart: I guess if you asked people they'd say, oh Kate is the feminist in the team, and I would challenge that. That's a sexist perspective in itself. There have been issues that I've tried to address...I think one of the reasons that I like working in the child abuse field is that most of that work is with women, because women tend to be the carers of children, and all the bit about empowering them and getting alongside them, and all we're now looking at in terms of trying to make relationships with non-abusing parents rather than saying they failed to protect their child.

[Ms. Smart, 7]

One of the stated attractions for Ms. Smart, then, in relation to her social work identity and bringing that to bear upon statutory work, is the opportunity to work with women in an empowering rather than demeaning way. She provides other examples of how she would attempt to influence her work setting.

Ms. Smart: When I was initially working in I.T. [intermediate treatment of young people to prevent or divert from care or custody], and looking at a girl's work, you come up with things like the line managers and the senior managers, who have the power to give you some money to do something, tend to be men. And it goes on and on. I suppose it's a sort of sensitivity, if you start looking at something in that way. There are the same issues for racism. It throws up more dilemmas for you and more questions than answers. Looking back, I think I probably spent a lot of energy trying to convince male colleagues and male managers, because I wanted them to believe the things that I believe, rather than...All that energy could have been spent dealing with what I wanted to do, and maybe they only needed to agree in as much as giving me the resources to get on and do it.

[Ms. Smart, 8]

For Ms. Smart, the role is a site from which she can conduct important work in respect of empowering women clients, advancing women-centered initiatives, and challenging sexist practices and policies within the agency. There are many dilemmas for her, especially in regard to the latter. She describes some sources of opposition to the way in which she would render good social work compatible with her role and realise her identity within it. For the time being, however, she expresses a commitment to continuing to conduct the work, with less sense of being constrained by the role than constructing of it.

In affirming their social work identities and reconciling their role with good social work, a further common theme in the accounting of these interviewees is one of openness to the experiences of their clients, an openness which can result in the critical revision of their own practices. It is an aspect of the social work identities of them all that they construe themselves as people who are able to form 'helping relationships', built on such qualities as caring, respect, empathy and genuineness¹⁴. This is not to suggest that they construe their practice in those same terms, as 'counselling' or 'therapy', but rather that the ability to be client centred is presented as a vital ingredient of their practice.¹⁵

The ability to centre upon clients is portrayed as vital in the process of enacting and shaping their statutory role. It is as if, without this component, they would lose the identity which is personally significant to them and they would lose sight of the shape they aim to bring to the role. It assumes seeking to establish the possibility of an interactive, reciprocally communicative relationship

between themselves and their clients. Being client centred, in their accounting, requires being open to apprehend the meanings that clients give to their experiences, and therefore it includes being open to viewing, criticising and revising their own practice from this different perspective.

At its most straightforward, being open is instantiated in accounting around 'flexibility'. The requirement of flexibility is seen to derive from the nature of the situations in which the social workers find themselves. Ms. Orton puts it thus -

Ms. Orton: You've got to be flexible, I think... Perhaps I'm too flexible, perhaps I'm too easy to change, but I think if you don't change with the situations which are constantly changing, how can you see the overall situation? You've got to be flexible in handling the situation presented to you, because it changes so rapidly.

[Ms. Orton, 19]

Immediately, she alerts to her recognition that it is possible to be 'too flexible', and in this sense to act without regard for one's identity or role. In her formulation, however, 'changing with the situations which are constantly changing' enables one to see the 'overall situation'. This somewhat paradoxical phraseology is an important aspect to the accounting since it points to a balance the social workers describe themselves frequently as trying to attain between positive action and responsiveness.

Flexibility also has an important place in the accounting of statutory social workers since it can be contrasted with the perceived rigidity of adhering to bureaucratic rules, routines and procedures. Here, being open and client centred is construed as a way of not being 'bureaucratic'. Again, the emphasis is one of being receptive, willing to revise and adapt, rather than some sense of being free from rules, routines and procedures, or acting in a 'maverick' fashion.¹⁶

This is the quality of her work that, for example, Ms. Bryant refers to in constructing credibility for herself and her role in receiving children into care; and above, Ms. Smart talks of 'getting alongside' the women with whom she works, which has become part of her revising her practice with non-abusing parents.

Rigidity might be construed as rigidity to method or technique and, according to their accounts, this is sometimes more apparent to the social workers on those occasions when they come to realise they have failed to be sufficiently 'client centred'. Ms. West recalls this example.

Ms. West: I was newly qualified and, because we'd had quite a bit of family therapy input on the course, I decided that, with this mentally handicapped lady and her quite violent husband, I'd try some family therapy with them. It turned out to be absolutely, totally disastrous. I ended up having to try and rush for the door as things started to be thrown in all directions...Just because I had read something or tried something on a course, then rather than try and fit a mould on people, it was more important to look at the people first and make a mould to fit them.

[Ms. West, 10]

For those who are working in other settings, perhaps those described as voluntary or therapeutic, failing to be client centred in this respect is often associated with failing to 'engage' people properly at the outset of a piece of work, with the likelihood that they will withdraw involvement. (Mr. Parry in the child and family guidance centre, for example, talks of this in constructing credibility). In so far as those in statutory roles perceive themselves to be working with clients who are more captive, the issue of how 'engaged' people are in the work is more complex to formulate and evaluate. Without diverting into the debate which surrounds the conducting of 'therapy' from a statutory role¹⁷, the point here is that the reconciling of good social work (regardless of whether or not it is 'therapy') is

being described by these interviewees as requiring a capacity to respond to the uniqueness of each encounter rather than apply a pre-determined formula.¹⁸

Accounting which would reconcile good social work with the statutory role, then, includes talk of being open in relationships with clients. This openness refers to the ability to be client centred, and is made manifest in descriptions of being flexible and responsive. It is as a consequence of engaging with clients and situations in this way that the social workers construe themselves as affirming, refining and revising their identities and acting back upon their role to shape it accordingly.

As already seen in the discussion of credibility (for example, in the constructing undertaken by Ms. Bryant and Ms. Tanner), there is sometimes an overt aim of working in partnership with clients; and, issues of participation and empowering feature in the respondents' accounts of good social work. Nevertheless, other situations do develop as part of the role. Yet, in talking of the more adversarial (court) encounters with clients, rhetoric may still assume the form of 'respect'. The declared stance is not to enjoin in battle for its own sake but to present one's own case fairly and to maintain respect for the emotions, beliefs and rights of the other parties, and for them as people. Ms. Wood again -

Ms. Wood: I think you've got to put things across clearly. And, within that, it's recognising that the person that you're talking about, of which one of them's going to be the parent, they are people who need to be respected, even if they've made a mess of things. That's where I think things like case notes are important because you're writing down comments about the situation there and then, you're not digesting it and putting it down as you fancy later on. And in the same kind of way, when you're preparing your court report, and what you're saying in court, you aim to get a fair judgement for all the people involved. I may think it is right for the child to come away; but, that's a blow to pride and a sense of loss to individuals.

[Ms. Wood, 3]

Although the expressed aim of the interviewees may be to avoid such contests if at all possible, they are incumbents of a role through which they can be key players in legal processes which alter people's lives and relationships in fundamental ways. In their accounts, 'being honest' requires them to recognise this 'last resort' possibility, which serves as a reminder of just how far their role is from one of 'counsellor'; and consequently, seeking to be 'open' in relationships with clients has to be set alongside this siting of themselves in roles which do constrain those same relationships.

Managing The Work

The portrayal of the work as pressured and stressful is seen in the interviewees' accounts as they describe incidents or periods in their working lives when they have become worn out. For this category of social workers such occasions serve as reminders of an incipient danger of the work, and perhaps as markers of a time when they took measures to guard themselves against it. Within the ten, one, Ms. Orton, does not describe her present district office as particularly pressured: this office 'is a very rural, relaxed set up' [Ms. Orton 13]. What she has to say about her office in this respect, however, will be taken up later since it leads her towards a position of viewing a possible 'compromise' of good social work.

A period recalled by Ms. French is used by her to make a point concerning the importance of 'telling others' and 'making decisions'

in managing one's working life. She is talking about a sudden influx of child sexual abuse cases.

Ms. French: At that time, when I had these three cases I was working on, I felt like an emotional disaster. I was very aware of the pressure it was putting me under.

M.J.: What happened?

Ms. French: I told other people what it felt like, and I knew that people were backing me up and were aware of it and were taking weights off me in other directions, if and when I requested. I felt able to ask, and was able to bring in other people.

M.J.: Were there any other consequences? At home, for example?

Ms. French: I think I've made decisions about taking holidays at Easter and the summer since my work's got more pressurised. I actually now go away at Easter and the summer, whether I'm broke or not, because I think you don't relax if you just stay at home. So, it's making decisions about things like that. My children know about it, but we've talked about it.

[Ms. French, 12]

The two areas to which Ms. French alludes in managing her work concern her immediate group of colleagues, and the boundary between work and 'home'. These areas feature consistently within the accounting of all the respondents as they talk of negotiating their 'careers' in and through social work. Their importance for Ms. French is here in the context of managing and surviving an aspect of statutory work, the coinciding of several emotionally demanding and time consuming cases. She returns to a theme she raises in the opening of the interview, concerning her ability to tell her colleagues about her feelings. She also remarks that she felt able to ask for some work relief from them, commenting upon a quality of the group as well as herself. The place of the 'team' in these accounts about learning will be a subject for special consideration.

The ways in which the interviewees talk of managing the relation between 'work' and 'home' arise here as they talk of the conditions in

which they are endeavouring to practice good social work. For Ms. French, this has meant 'making decisions' whereby she has regular, relaxing holidays. Mr. Walker has firm opinions as to what is necessary for him.

Mr. Walker: My own family life is quite divorced from work. It tends not to come in. I need that space. I think that's what allows you to do it for this length of time. I think I'd find it very hard if my family was wrapped up in social work, and all that sort of stuff, to be able to carry on doing what I call cut throat social work, really. The amount it takes out of you, you're able to go back and not talk about what that involves. That's not a conscious decision but actually it's how I cope with things, I think. My weekends are vital to me, in terms of whether I'm playing cricket or wrestling with the kids, or whatever...Different people have different methods of dealing with it and some want to go away and talk about stuff with colleagues, but it don't work for me...I think I've controlled who comes into my space. I think I have controlled it very much.

[Mr. Walker, 18]

The 'method' Mr. Walker describes is a strict separation of work and home. This rather invites the analogy of 'separate boxes' in which what is 'taken out of you' in one box is replenished in the other. It is also consistent with a notion of sparing one's family from the stresses of one's job [Mr. Walker, 18], and with the sense of the importance of doing something completely different, uncontaminated with social work. In this way, it is not dissimilar to the purpose expressed by Ms. French about holidays; a place of respite in and by which one is 'switched off' from work (in contrast to 'switching oneself off') and able to relax.

Mr. Short describes how he manages his working day so as to cope with being 'drained'. He gives an example of a stressful incident when a family he had been involved with since their child was born two and a half years' ago arrived at the office and 'ran amok'.

Mr. Short: It was a very long afternoon and evening. We ended up taking a place of safety because mum was hysterical, and we got the place of safety order quite quickly. We took the baby

round to a magistrate who lived round the corner. Then we had to drive through rush hour traffic to the nearest foster parent, miles away. And, I got home about half past ten that night. I was really drained. And, the next morning I had all the paperwork to do and, blow me, when I got to the office about quarter past nine. there was mum and dad on the doorstep waiting for me. By lunchtime I thought I'd had enough, so I went for a run. After that, I felt a bit better, but I really did feel drained emotionally, and exhausted.

[Mr. Short, 12]

A little later, he adds -

Mr. Short: It's to do with doing something completely different, like going for a run at lunchtime. I can remember pounding round the track and thinking, what am I going to say to Charlie when I see him this afternoon. But, at least I was doing something else at the time.

[Mr. Short, 14]

In addition to the personal strategy of 'going for a run at lunchtime', Mr. Short raises the importance for him of the way the 'team' operates around him.

Mr. Short: If I was having a bad day like that, or if anyone was having a bad day, if something came in about another case, then it goes to the duty officer.

[Mr. Short, 13]

He elaborates upon this in terms of the commitment he believes it requires of all the team members to the 'duty system'. This will be a further consideration when examining the place the team assumes in relation to good social work and learning.

Although Ms. Orton does describe her current office as being more relaxed than others in which she has worked, she too describes personal strategies she has developed. 'I go to the shops, or I go and meet up somewhere with other people...I usually try and get two Fridays off a month' [Ms. Orton, 22]. She compares this with when she began: 'I used to work all the time, and practically every evening' [Ms. Orton, 23]. She relates that what marked a turn around for her was 'taking on another job as well, running a farm', and comments: 'when you've got forty little calves you've got to feed, you've just

got to be home more of the time, haven't you?' [Ms. Orton, 23]. It does seem to be the legitimation provided by having other, pressing commitments which permits these social workers to place limits around a job which might otherwise drain them entirely. Once the limits are in place, then a case can be made for the benefits to the work as well as themselves. It follows that the suggestion of a place of respite away from work may be portrayed in terms of relaxation, but not necessarily rest. The social workers tend to talk of full and active lives outside as well as inside work.

The boundary between 'home' and 'work' can, nevertheless, be a perilous one. The 'boxes' may be more or less separate but they are not unrelated. Ms. Tanner recalls a time when she felt under particular strain.

Ms. Tanner: It was partly things going on in my private life as well as working. I was working too much because of it. That sort of situation.

[Ms. Tanner, 16]

In calling it 'that sort of situation', Ms. Tanner is conveying that her experience is to be taken as far from unique. What was important for her was that she 'realised a bit more what was happening' with the result that she 'sorted out the private bit, and the rest followed' [Ms. Tanner, 17]. The way she describes herself as realising what was happening was through recognising the signs.

Ms. Tanner: It was really before it got to the exhausted stage. I was at that sort of throbbing stage, excited, everything going at one hundred and ten per cent. I could feel my pulse going and everything, like a sort of racing feeling, which for me is very unusual, because I'm more the opposite. I'm not hyperactive at all, so it was quite striking.

[Ms. Tanner, 17]

Similarly, Ms. West describes ways in which she recognises when she is becoming overly exhausted.

Ms. West: I always pick out emotional exhaustion when I can't sleep and I wake up in the night going over what's going to happen the next day.

[Ms. West, 17]

She also talks of the possibility of an escalation when there is stress both at home and at work.

Ms. West: Home tends to cause some conflict, because they might be tired too, and you're just not around. And, if you are around, you've got nothing to give. It gets a bit conflictual, and you tend to feel you're very much alone in the middle of things, trying to keep things balanced and not feeling strong enough to keep that balance.

[Ms. West, 18]

As far as Ms. West is concerned, it is 'when you just don't get to the other end of it' that 'you get sick, opt out, break down, or whatever' [Ms. West, 18].

Overall, then, these social workers do not talk of managing the work by withdrawing from the challenges it presents. They are aware of the possibility that they might be perceived as 'hardening' themselves and becoming less 'sensitive' and more 'rigid' as one means of protection from the stress and anxieties of the job. Clearly for them, however, to construe themselves as adjusting in this way would mean effectively that they were no longer practising good social work. The position they construct for themselves is one of finding ways to live with work that, when done well, is unavoidably, extremely demanding, both physically and emotionally. These include team practices as well as individual strategies; and, they relate to 'home' as well as work, and in particular the boundary between these two worlds. When they falter, the costs that accrue are seen to be very high.

The 'tightrope' existence portrayed by these social workers is captured in part by Ms. Smart.

Ms Smart: I know there are times when things get on top of me. I feel tired and I'm taking paperwork home far too many evenings, and, and, and...A bit of that makes me sit down and

sort out my admin' more, or say no to more things. But overall, I think if I didn't want to feel that way at all, that I'd probably have to not do social work.

[Ms. Smart, 19]

For some social workers, it is the (untenable) intensity of this experience to which they attribute their different relation to statutory social work. The relation they construct is one in which their social work identities are less integrated with a version of good social work as compatible with the statutory role.

Compromising

There are eight social workers based in district offices whose accounting concerning good social work is such that they present themselves as compromising their standards, and to some extent their social work identities, as a consequence of their statutory role. They express doubts concerning the possibility of reconciling good social work with statutory social work, and they construct a tension between their definitions of themselves in relation to social work and in relation to their role. On occasion, they are in agreement with the social workers described above as to what is required to reconcile good social work with the role, but remain unsure that they themselves can (continue to) 'pull it off'. Other times, there is the suggestion that the role is inimical to good social work. Within this category, the social workers adopt a less consistent form of accounting about good social work, giving an impression of vacillating between different options. It is important to note, therefore, which aspects of the role, and the practical nature and conditions of social work within that role, are constructed in the accounts so as to be 'compromising'.

One useful way into these considerations is to return to the different manner in which the social workers begin the interview. There are four social workers out of the twenty-three based in district offices who construct credibility outside of their current role. All of these proceed within the interview to construct a version of good social work in which they are, to a greater or lesser degree, compromised by their role. Indeed, two (Mr. Allsop and Ms. Hooper) construe themselves as dissociating from the role, and their accounts will be addressed later. The other two (Mr. Anstone and Ms. Richards) both construct credibility at the outset of the interview by referring to their capacity to understand people. The manner in which the role is construed as being constraining in respect of affording understanding, and the capacity to act upon that understanding, is one aspect of note.

Of the ten social workers who construct credibility through their current role within a district office, four proceed to introduce aspects of that role and setting which compromise good social work, and their social work identities. Again, for one (Mr. Grant) this is to such an extent that he, too, dissociates himself from the role. 'Understanding' is an issue for them, but of import within their accounts also are the adverse conditions against which they perceive themselves to be battling. The three remaining social workers in this category start the interview by constructing credibility both within and outside their current role. In addition to the aspects already noted, it is their construing of the political dimension of good social work which they find hard to reconcile with a statutory setting.

Something of the vacillating and ambivalence present in the accounting of these eight respondents is evident in this extract from Mr.

Anstone. He worked for almost eight years in a family centre before taking up work in the district office, where he has been for just over a year.

Mr. Anstone: Now I'm much more aware of being a local government officer. Whereas, working in the family centre, where you're just counselling people, trying to solve problems in therapy, you can almost shut that part of it off. We realise we worked for social services, but we were shut off from that part of it, really.

[Mr. Anstone, 26]

He continues -

Mr. Anstone: When I was working in the family centre, the feeling was around that we were doing the real work. We were like the dustbin, everything the field workers couldn't cope with, they gave to us, whilst the field workers just swanned around, could drive off from the situation. Whereas, we were stuck with it, day in, day out. But, now I'm on the other side of it, I tend to feel slightly the other way. It's difficult to find the middle view. I see the pressure on field social workers as just as great, but slightly different. I can't possibly say which is the best way of working.

[Mr. Anstone, 26]

The social work practised at the family centre is characterised as very different to that practised in the district office: first, a 'counsellor', 'shut off' from statutory duties but 'stuck with' situations the field workers couldn't cope with; now, a 'local government officer', experiencing a different but 'just as great' pressure. A little earlier, Mr. Anstone comments about his time at the family centre: 'social work was the job I was doing' [Mr. Anstone, 25]. By this accounting, his social work identity and his family centre role were as one. Following the change of role, things are no longer quite as straightforward.

The vacillating evidenced within such talk would seem to suggest that the social worker presents different versions of identity as a social worker, and correspondingly different versions of good social work; and that one (or more) of these versions is not in accord with the current role. This might be explained in terms of transitional

processes: what is being said is that it takes time to adjust to a new job. Mr. Anstone himself remarks, 'I still feel as though I'm just beginning to understand what people are expecting from me' [Mr. Anstone, 26]. However, other social workers in this category have been in the role for considerably longer than Mr. Anstone, and yet still do not consistently present a 'middle view'. What they do have in common is a form of accounting in which they hold on to contrasting identities as social workers, and contrasting versions of good social work.

'Maximising The Positives'

How is it possible to hold on to contrasting versions? Perhaps the most explicit device is to construct a division of self or of role. This is instantiated in the following. Ms. Simpson is talking about the written records she keeps when her clients have 'opened up' to her, and she says, 'I'm prepared to edit before I put it down on paper, not things which would be evidential in court, but things personal to the client' [Ms. Simpson, 3]. She continues -

Ms. Simpson: The way I rationalise it is that I'm half a local authority social worker, and I'm half not.

M.J.: What's the other half?

Ms. Simpson: Half an understanding individual to help them. Most of the people that one sees don't have access to the private forms of this sort of assistance, and I don't see why they should forgo their privacy simply because they don't happen to be in a social class which doesn't give them access to the more posh, middle class methods.

[Ms. Simpson, 3]

Ms. Drake articulates the divisions as she talks about her move into the district office from a Women's Refuge.

Ms. Drake: My view was that there would hopefully be room for me to do some things that I wanted to do, but that I would have

to do work in ways that I would hate, and that my experience of social workers from working at the refuge was not a particularly happy one...Once I felt I could do it, I began to be more aware of how my other world viewed servants of the local authority, the issues of community workers as opposed to local authority workers, and to feel distinctly uncomfortable about that. To a certain extent I still do, though it subsumes under getting the job done. You can actually get past all that by being so busy. Clearly, there are some services that are absolutely essential services, and there is no doubt but that they offer enormous assistance to people. There are other ways in which people who run departments like this use and perpetuate values that I find difficult. I guess I don't often think about social work as a whole. It's easier for me to break it down into bits, because a lot of the work that I enjoy most I could actually do in some other setting.

[Ms. Drake, 14]

Mr. James has been talking about how his knowledge of social anthropology 'puts into relief our attitudes to sexuality and behaviour in general' [Mr. James, 5]. This leads into a particular self-description.

Mr. James: I find myself a mass of contradictions, really...And, I find myself making decisions about people's children, about taking somebody into care, about whether to section; whereas I know full well that if this person lived in another community, or in a different time and place, then their behaviour would be viewed rather differently. I'm just reflecting the social standard. I've lost my moral fervour. I do it because I'm an emissary for social law. Perhaps I do it less than some.

[Mr. James, 5]

In response to a question inviting him to elaborate upon the contradictions, he continues -

Mr. James: On television, there was a very wealthy socialist living in a very large house, but she still espoused socialist views and was asked to reconcile how they can live that particular lifestyle and still have socialist views. It was an old lady, and all she said was, I don't know, I haven't got a clue. And I can say, too, I really can't reconcile it. I can't give a sensible answer to your question.

[Mr. James, 6]

Despite this stated acceptance of the contradictory and irreconcilable relation between and within identity and role, Mr. James also talks of believing there to be certain limits which operate.

Mr. James: If I was required to act in ways which I...I can compromise, I feel most people compromise, but it seems to be a

point where it's compromising something in me. I don't seem to be able to comfortably go beyond a certain boundary, and I have a blind faith that when that boundary is reached I would have to opt out. I don't even know where that boundary is.

[Mr. James, 7]

What is being accomplished by these accounting procedures? The social workers seem to be saying that there are aspects of their role which go against the kind of social work with which they identify. On the other hand, they are still practising within that role, and, for the purposes of the interview, take on the task of legitimating themselves as practising good social work. Their strategies convey, in one way or another, 'it's not all bad'. For Ms. Simpson, it is possible to construct her role and herself as being in two halves, one of which is given over to the client, the other belonging to the local authority. Ms. Drake fragments social work into bits such that the less questionable bits are those which are either essential services or practices which transcend the local authority setting. The more questionable bits get lost in the business of the job. Mr. James constructs social work within the statutory role as necessarily contradictory: contradictions he is willing to live and work with, up to a point.

Good social work within these constructions consists in minimising the negative aspects of the role and maximising the positive ones. The social work identities of those within this category are constituted in such terms. These are social workers who construe themselves in the interview as having to fall short of their ideals of good social work due to the shortcomings of their work setting: defining a version of their social work identities as being compromised. Their virtue, however, is construed by reference to the ways in which good social work is made possible despite the negative constraints of the

role: defining another version of their social work identities as making good compromises. A key mechanism put forward for achieving this is separating out, in one way or another, negative and positive aspects.

A precise specification of what constitutes these aspects, however, is not found in the accounts. Rather, a vacillating and ambivalence occurs in the accounting as the social workers define their commitment, or otherwise, to social work within a district office setting. This is not surprising in view of the constructing involved (minimising the negative/maximising the positive). The possibilities for rendering social work good become difficult to stipulate in advance, but can be made to vary according to the perceived situation in hand and the practical conditions pertaining.

There are, nevertheless, certain 'anchor points' which are presented in the accounting, rather as if they provide a steadying effect for the social workers as they move up and down the range of compromising positions. Mr. James claims that he would know if something 'in' him was to be jeopardised, reaching a compromise boundary he would not cross. Ms. Moore voices the subject of her commitment thus -

Ms. Moore: What happens with me is that I get involved in individual clients, and when you're involved with individual clients you've got to give quite a lot...If you agree to work with, say, a child, a teenager, or somebody, you've got to give her a commitment of time...So, I suppose it's the commitment to the individual people that keeps you going. You get to know somebody. You get involved in the long term plans you're doing with individual clients.

[Ms. Moore, 24]

In talking of her relation with social work, Ms. Yew compares residential work with field work, and says of the latter -

Ms. Yew: What I'm doing now, I suppose, is not really what I thought I would be doing when I started. But, that's not to say

I don't get some sort of satisfaction out of what I'm doing. It's much more controlling, much more bureaucratic.

[Ms. Yew, 19]

Then, having talked of the low esteem and poor financial rewards of social work, she continues -

Ms. Yew: I think, in some ways, that's made me more firmly believe that social workers are needed, that what we do, despite the fact that we're constantly reviled by the press, what we do is very necessary in society. My commitment to the job is there, but I sometimes feel a bit uncomfortable about the controlling side of it.

[Ms. Yew, 19]

Mr. Hare admits of having 'low times' when he feels himself challenging what he does [Mr. Hare, 18].

Mr. Hare: I think to myself, what the hell, would these people actually be any worse off without me, and, what right have I got to be involving myself in their lives? And, I get really cynical about society as a whole. Take the new Supp Ben rules. Anything I can do will be like putting my finger in the dyke. I used to be very political about social work, but if anything I am a-political now. What keeps me going, I think, is a basic belief in people. My job satisfaction comes from helping them to cope with what society imposes upon them, and making the best out of the situation.

[Mr. Hare, 18,19]

The 'anchor points' are presented in terms almost of a 'core' social work identity concerned with being helpful. The accounting by this category of social workers assumes the form of legitimating their compromised position by saying that overall, weighing up the positives and negatives, they believe themselves to be helping people who are needy, vulnerable, oppressed, and so on. Their commitment to the role, however, remains in the balance, ready to be tilted either way, depending upon whether they construe their 'core' identity to be affirmed or shaken.

Experiences of 'maximising the positives' are given in the accounts as examples of what can be achieved. In constructing credibility for the

role, such experiences are drawn upon; and, in constructing good social work as possible within the role, further examples occur in the accounts. Set alongside these, however, there are the perceived constraints of the role and setting which are construed as producing a less good social work. In examining what it is that the social workers present as detracting from the kind of social work they would (ideally) like to be able to practice, further constructions of 'good' are made evident.

Adverse Conditions

Ms. Simpson, who describes herself as half a local authority social worker and half not, later makes another division. She says, 'perhaps I divide myself into being naive with my clients and cynical with my department' [Ms. Simpson, 10]. She relates the two.

Ms. Simpson: I think that makes it easier to justify things like working with your clients perhaps not just as a dutiful employee. I don't feel a great loyalty to the county council. I'm sure they think I ought to, but then I don't think they feel a great loyalty towards me. It's a two way process.

[Ms. Simpson, 10]

On the one hand, perceiving the county council in this way provides a justification for acting (subversively) on behalf of clients. On the other hand, something important is lost.

Ms. Simpson: The degree to which the department would say one thing and do another, it's sad really. When you know that they might feel very uncomfortable about certain individuals and realise that what certain individuals are doing is not the policy of the department. It is a very unpleasant nettle to grasp, they won't grasp it, and they're perfectly prepared for you to go down the swanee because of that. They lack moral fibre.

[Ms. Simpson, 10,11]

Perceiving the higher management of the department to lack moral fibre, Ms. Simpson describes herself as less likely to stand for what she believes to be right, since she could well find herself standing,

and falling, alone. 'I remember occasions when I'd say, there I stand, and there I'm prepared to stick, and you're not going to budge me. I was different then.' [Ms. Simpson, 12]

Cynicism towards the department is also associated by Ms. Simpson with being less inclined to give too much of herself to the job. She observes -

Ms. Simpson: The people who cracked up in [the other department] didn't get any thanks or sympathy from the department. They just cracked up. They just were used and thrown away. I reckon all organisations are the same.

[Ms. Simpson, 15]

Again, on the one hand, this is construed as no bad thing: 'if you crack up, you're no good to any of your caseload' [Ms. Simpson, 14]. Furthermore, resolve that the department meet their responsibility might be strengthened: 'if [the client] is just a name on a referral sheet, they don't mean anything to me, so I can say no; and, it's the department's job to provide enough social workers to provide a service for this particular person' [Ms. Simpson, 14]. However, determination not to be abused by the organisation can be seen as producing a 'contractualism', whereby one does only that which one is contractually bound to do. Where work is managed by an individual upon that basis, other qualities of good social work may be perceived to be under threat.

The issue of too much work to do arises for Ms. Moore in respect of her personal capacities to control how much she takes on, and in respect of a department which would put her in such a position. She relates the double bind she perceives herself to be in -

Ms. Moore: I know that you can have unallocated cases and waiting lists, but it's very unsettling. It's not a very uncomfortable way of working. When you know that a supervision order made by the court four months ago is still unsupervised, it very much undermines your feelings of how well you're supervising the ones you are supervising.

[Ms. Moore, 19]

However, there are the present cases -

Ms. Moore: I'm not going to take any more on until I feel that all my present cases I'm servicing properly, and all my admin work, all the case notes I haven't done, all the filing I haven't done, is done.

[Ms. Moore, 19.20]

Meanwhile, she observes -

Ms. Moore: I can't imagine the situation in, say, a probation office, where court orders are made and not supervised by the probation office. I think if it came to the crunch, they'd get more staff.

[Ms. Moore, 19]

It is the perceived effect of work pressure, making it difficult to conduct good social work at an individual and team level, together with a sense of being in a department that is not taking active measures to reduce the pressure, that Ms. Moore says leaves her with some hard decisions.

Ms. Moore: I've decided that if I'm not feeling more happy and more in control of the way I work after a certain length of time, then I cannot carry on. And, I think what I'm doing at the moment is to try and get on top of it, like saying no. If I'm not allowed to do that, or it's impossible, then, no, I couldn't carry on. I don't live for the job at all. I live for my own life, and there would come a time when I'd have to make a choice between the job and whether it's affecting my private life.

[Ms. Moore, 24]

The message from Ms. Moore would seem to be that she is prepared to work hard to find the best compromises for good social work in terms of managing her workload. She doesn't know whether she will be supported in this, or indeed whether it is an impossible task. Ultimately, the toll being taken upon her mental and emotional health as she strives with all this is, for her, the indicator of when enough is enough.

Ms. Simpson and Ms. Moore present two different responses to the issue of too much work. Ms. Simpson attributes her somewhat dispassionate and disciplined approach to 'unallocated cases' to her general

cynicism towards the department. Ms. Moore does not construe herself as cynical but is reaching a point where she may conclude the department is putting her (and her team) in an impossible position. The social workers do not conceive of the department as existing in isolation, however, and believe that the senior managers operate in a 'political climate' that is far from sympathetic [Ms. Moore, 19]. They are, nevertheless, looking for some change in the relation between the department and themselves which is not forthcoming.

All the interviewees in this category make some reference to the sheer volume and intensity of the work in their constructions of good social work and what detracts from it. For Ms. Yew, this prompts a reminder of what can happen: 'I actually felt really strongly for Martin Ruddock in his situation [the Jasmine Beckford child abuse inquiry], and related that to what was going on in the office that I work in, and the pressure that we were under, and the feelings that this could happen to any of us' [Ms. Yew, 21]. At these moments, the social worker's grasp upon herself as practising any kind of good social work is very tenuous indeed.

The 'Bureaucracy' and Statutory Powers

For those whose accounting about good social work assumes the form of compromising, the fact of working within a large organisation is one to be justified. It is as though there is something inevitably compromising about doing social work within a 'bureaucracy', and one in which statutory powers can be exercised over people's lives: how can a cog in a machine deliver a human (humane) and just service? Of course, this is a gross simplification, and the social workers know it

to be such. Nevertheless, within their accounts, the characteristics of a public service bureaucracy arise as negative aspects to be minimised.

For Mr. James, this is achieved through the qualities of the team, and through his own (sometimes perverse) individuality. Here, he talks of how flexibility can be nurtured by diversity within an 'experienced' working group.

Mr. James: In practice, I've found those [local authority] requirements are very flexible. Maybe I'm just fortunate to work in a team that has a great deal of experience and a wide background. It's a mixture of ages and we come from many, many different types of backgrounds. Some people have found religion, others are very much against it. Some people are committed socialists, others applaud Margaret Thatcher. And so on. It makes a very lively, testing team, which I quite thrive on, really. I also have a supervisor who's amenable to all points of view.

[Mr. James, 6]

Presenting his way of working, and referring mainly to his work as an approved social worker in mental health, he claims that he 'tends not to have goals', or to work with aims and plans, but rather says to clients 'we'll see each other for three months, and at the end of three months we'll decide where we're at' [Mr. James, 11]. This is not to convey, he asserts, that there is no 'direction' to the work. 'Every time I see the person, there's always some direction there. It seems to come out after about ten minutes of talking, or ten minutes of being there.' [Mr. James, 11] He also gives an example of how he might conduct a mental health assessment, concluding that 'one thing that appeals to me about this type of work is you can 'section' somebody and then help them to appeal' [Mr. James, 12].

What Mr. James appears to be saying, then, is that he does not allow himself to be fixed in his responses to people or situations.

Indeed, he appears to go to some lengths to convey this. At the conclusion of the interview, he returns to an issue around which he constructs credibility at the outset.

Mr. James: When I was married, my wife had a nervous breakdown. So, I went round psychologists, psychiatrists, sat in as a client, because we were a couple, and I think that had an effect.

[Mr. James, 24]

He explains -

Mr. James: They seemed to come along and measure, and judge. You're suffering from this or that, and you need this or that. And, that was about it. Very few people actually spoke to her in a genuine way.

[Mr. James, 24]

As a consequence, he suggests -

Mr. James: To approach it head on, I found totally unhelpful, which is why I say I tend to approach somebody from the side, and move up to their problems. It may not be the best way, but it is the one I find most comfortable. I just wish somebody had done it for her...It has had quite a profound effect on how I deal with people. I think it's given me a certain respect for the people I deal with, not to press them into models, or at least, if I am tempted to do that, to bear in mind the necessity of keeping the model fairly loose.

[Mr. James, 24,25]

What Mr. James is talking about goes beyond the characteristics of bureaucracy alone. However, it is as a local authority employee as well as a professional social worker that he construes himself as being in a position to subject his clients to a 'totally unhelpful' experience. The contradictions of which he speaks have to do with this, and are fed by the motivations he constructs for his way of working and defining good social work.

Ms. Drake talks of conflicts rather than contradictions, conflicts that arise through conceptualising her role as divisible between 'therapist' and 'statutory worker'. She talks here of how she attempts to manage the two.

Ms. Drake: The way I learned to deal with it was just by acknowledging the conflicts before starting work with people...I do it as much as possible. A lot of times that's very helpful

for the other person as well as for me because people have views about social workers. People do not, on the whole, expect to see social workers in a helpful role, so it's an opportunity for some of that to be looked at as well.

[Ms. Drake, 6]

She elaborates upon the statutory task -

Ms. Drake: I'm on the doorstep, and I know I'm not expected or wanted in the house, and my thoughts tend to be about how big the dog's going to be, as opposed to, what the hell am I doing here, I'm not a policeman. As far as I'm concerned, that's a loss. I don't like that change in myself. But, I know one of the reasons that's happened is that when you're actually representing the department in our authoritarian kind of role, that's very clear, very clear what you have to do. It's difficult, and you have to not duck things, but it's very clear. And, there's so much of this work that is unclear, that clarity is almost a relief. Even if it's unpleasant. You know you've got to do a, b, c, d, and e, and you can only go on to c when you've completed b, and, if you can't complete b, you return to base and get further instructions.

[Ms. Drake, 6,7]

For Ms. Drake, and her identity as a social worker, it is important that she maintain a critical, questioning edge as she 'represents the department' in the 'authoritarian role'. However, she construes herself as having become less questioning, and more adept at following the procedures. The procedures offer her clarity within this difficult part of the job, and they are welcome for that. But it is the security of following procedures to which she attributes her dulled critical edge, and the consequent unwelcome change in herself as a social worker. A conflict is set up between surviving the authoritarian part of the role and remaining flexible and responsive to the experiences of those made the object of authoritarian practices. This tension strikes at the heart of Ms. Drake's social (and personal) identity. If she is to continue her practice in the 'other half' of her role, as a 'therapist', the tension, as she is presently constructing it, can only become greater.

The extracts from Mr. James and Ms. Drake are particularly telling instances of the working out of the 'compromising' position in the

accounting of this category of social workers. These social workers are not unaware that there are others who appear to be able to 'pull off' a compatibility between good social work and the statutory role. How might any difficulties they express in so doing, within the interview situation, be perceived? Does it reflect poorly upon themselves, or is it attributable to the impossibility of the working conditions or the organisational role? On the other hand, there are also aware that there are those social workers whose position is one of rejecting the statutory role as impossible for them to reconcile with good social work. If one could characterise the existence of the previous category of social workers as a 'tightrope' one, then for the present category it would have to be a 'torn' one!

Dissociating

Five of the social workers based in district offices construct good social work by dissociating it from their statutory role. Two of them begin the interview by constructing a version of non-credibility. Ms. Weedon constructs credibility for herself but not her role, and Mr. Porter constructs credibility for neither himself nor his role. Both proceed in the interview to define good as other than their experience of the statutory role. Ms. Weedon 'flags up' at the outset of her interview that this is her position, and she does not retract from it. She has already moved into a specialist post and her accounting serves to legitimate her decision. Mr. Porter proceeds to reclaim aspects of his social work identity as a good social worker, though at the expense of the credibility and viability of his statutory role.

As mentioned, two of those who open the interview by constructing credibility for themselves outside of their current role (Mr. Allsop

and Ms. Hooper) proceed to dissociate themselves from the role in constructing good social work. The aspects of the role to which they refer in so doing differ, yet their conclusions converge. The fifth social worker in this category is one of the specialist social workers in child protection (Mr. Grant) who initially constructs credibility for himself within his current role. His accounting in this respect could be read as someone who finds he has been compromising too much for too long.

None of the social workers who begin the interview by constructing credibility for themselves within and outside their current role proceed within the interview to dissociate from the role. Although, as already described, there are three (Ms. Simpson, Mr. James and Ms. Drake) who instantiate the 'compromising' form of accounting concerning their role and good social work. Also, of the four who construct credibility for themselves outside their current role, none proceed to instantiate the 'reconciling and integrating' form of accounting.

'Compromising' emerges as an intermediate (and mediating) form of accounting, where different versions of good social work and social work identity exist in tension and are held in tenuous balance. The five social workers who instantiate the 'dissociating' form of accounting are (re-)constituting their versions of good and of identity as contrary to their current role. Their membership within statutory social work is consequently a nominal one, yet they may still be practising within that role. There are particular issues for these social workers, then, regarding affirmation of their identity and legitimation of their practice.

Ms. Hooper has been talking about the way her previous education in communication studies has given her increased awareness and sensitivity in the ethical implications of working with people. In response to a question about dealing with the ethical questions of local authority social work, Ms. Hooper says -

Ms. Hooper: I think I can, to a large degree, and where I don't it's largely my own fault for being lazy about something, falling back on less positive ways of doing things, because it [report writing] is about making an effort and getting people to talk to you. There is a bit in there which is also about the way the organisation is structured, which doesn't give you time to do that, which is why I'm in conflict with it, which is also a big reason for me that I'm leaving, because I'm continually frustrated by what I want to do and what the organisation, as such, allows.

[Ms. Hooper, 6]

She continues -

Ms. Hooper: I think what I've had to do is compromise, and I don't suppose I'm terribly proud of it, but in some ways I've ignored my own principles sometimes because it's too hard. It's too much effort to keep them going. So, I will have written something without discussing it first, on some occasions.

[Ms. Hooper, 6]

In talking about not living up to her principles, Ms. Hooper refers to both herself and the organisation: she is 'lazy'; the organisation does not allow time. All in all, it's an 'effort to keep them going', which has become 'too much effort'. Invited to elaborate upon the personal and the organisational, Ms. Hooper says -

Ms. Hooper: I see the two things together. Yes, sometimes there is absolutely no excuse and it's me. Like particularly if it's somebody who I don't feel very well disposed towards who I'm writing a report on, and that has to come into it, which is dreadful, really...But, there is also the combination of the two, in that I'm pressed for time to do things, and it's too hard to make time.

M.J.: It's hard to unravel them?

Ms. Hooper: Definitely, because some people respond differently to the organisation, and probably manage to keep their principles...I think there are so many different reasons why people decide to stay or leave. I has to have a lot to do with your outside life as well, your personal life. But also, I'm not a tolerant person, in those terms. I'd probably give up because it's easier, where other people would struggle on, saying, I must try to make the effort. And, I will say, you

trained me to do this work, but you don't give me the right conditions to do it, so I'm not going to put up with it, I can't see that I'm going to change the system, I will leave it. That's about me being valued for myself and my professional skills. I'm not going to do my job badly.

[Ms. Hooper, 7]

Determining whether or not good social work is possible within the statutory role does not come easily and, according to Ms. Hooper, will never have a straightforward answer. Again, she states that she is aware that some people (probably) manage to pull it off. She, therefore, appears to perceive herself as required to legitimate why she cannot continue to do so. She frames the exercise as a 'struggle' which she is too 'intolerant' to pursue, stating her belief (against others?) that she can't change the system, and asserting that she isn't going to put up with it. 'Putting up with it' is connoted with being prepared to be de-valued. Finally, her decision is justified in terms of making a stand for social work.

Alongside the 'fighting talk', Ms. Hooper presents her experience of arriving at this point.

Ms. Hooper: What I've gone through is a lot of self doubt. What it has done to me, or what I have allowed to happen, is that I've started thinking I'm not a good social worker because I can't live up to these principles, or I can't fit in with the system. And, I've come out the other side of that, and ended up thinking, well, because I'm basically a self confident woman, I know what I consider to be good practice. There are certain [indistinct] about which I will compromise, but beyond that I'm not going to go. And, I've reached the point where I think I'm going beyond it. And, I've also got a belief that social work, in its broadest sense, is a positive thing, and that there are other ways of doing it apart from local authority. I think it's local authority that I have my problems with. So, I'm better off not working in it, because I get frustrated.

[Ms. Hooper, 7,8]

Out on the other side, Ms. Hooper construes leaving local authority social work as a positive move, rather than a sign of failure or escape. The practice of good social work is no longer possible for

her within the statutory role, and she presents herself as someone to whom it matters that social work is done well rather than badly. A period of self doubt is consistent with the forms of accounting she adopts: others in the statutory role around her construe themselves as making good compromises, what is wrong with her that she can no longer do the same? She does not reach a final position concerning the compatibility between good social work and the statutory role. She asserts that she knows what she considers to be good practice, implying that she has reached a point of disagreement with those who struggle on. But, she also individualises her position: she is better off leaving because she gets frustrated, implying others may not. Keeping both accounting options open, she can negotiate membership of two groupings: those who continue to see a place for local authority social work within (the broad sense of) good social work; and those who do not.

The path that Ms. Weedon describes herself as taking to a dissociating from the statutory role does not hold the same element of self doubt. Ms. Weedon has returned to employed social work after a four year period with her young children at home. Reference occurs to the consequences of this in several ways. As already noted, Ms. Weedon talks of having to 'have time to give to my family' [Ms. Weedon, 4]. But she also suggests: 'I value myself more. I feel more important' [Ms. Weedon, 5]. This is said in the context of her observation that now, as opposed to five years ago: 'there's an awful lot of low morale, sickness and people who look really depressed. I don't want to be like that' [Ms. Weedon, 4].

The change of role can be justified by the changed domestic arrangements, and this is one aspect of the accounting. However, Ms.

Weedon is saying that the statutory role could also prove harmful to her health and her family, and now she values herself too much to allow that. Furthermore, in the early stage of the interview, she casts considerable doubt upon the continuing credibility of local authority social work. In commenting upon the way her and her life has changed over the past four years, she talks of changes to her personal identity and related changes to her social work identity.

Ms. Weedon: Maybe it's a maturity, maybe having children, being a mother now, you're a different person to what you were. Different demands at home. On the other hand, I think another part of that is that I'm also not so tense as a social worker. Perhaps as a social worker before I got over anxious about working with some families because I thought that my position in the family was critical, where really you're not as all important to that family as you think you are.

[Ms. Weedon, 5]

A contrast is constructed between being 'tense' as a social worker through believing one's position to be 'critical', and seeing that 'you're not all important'. Dissociating from a role is that much easier when it is not so important, of course, but the implication is that 'being tense' is not good social work, nor good for social workers. She continues:-

Ms. Weedon: I think I've got a more relaxed attitude to clients, a more human, less distanced, less formal relationship. I sound like a dragon ten years ago! Perhaps initially in my social work career I felt safer being formal, felt it was more credible, using authority, being in command of the situation.

[Ms. Weedon, 5]

It is not clear whether Ms. Weedon is imputing the distanced, formal approach to the statutory role, or to less experienced workers, or both. It is clear that that is how she is constructing her social work identity at the time she was immersed in that role. Bringing her new perspective into a specialist post becomes an opportunity to leave both behind.

Both Ms. Hooper and Ms. Weedon have broken from their current role: Ms. Hooper to leave local authority social work; Ms. Weedon to take up

a specialist post developing services for the 'under fives'. The three other social workers in this category are still within their current role and have not 'come out the other side' [Ms. Hooper, 7] in dissociating from it. They each have a different story to tell but are united in portraying themselves as victims of their roles within the district office setting after several years' service. It is not that they redefine the work they have been doing over this time as somehow poor practice, but rather that continuing to accomplish good social work has become untenable.

Mr. Porter talks of resenting the way social work infringes upon his personal and family life. As the interview proceeds, he describes how this happens by referring to both his attitude towards the work and the nature of the work itself. He says, 'I feel I have to be conscientious if I am to do the work properly. You have to be reliable. And, you have to see to all the details. It's the details that matter'. [Mr. Porter, 6] Being conscientious is not something he can change about himself, or would want to change. It is also something which he believes is important in doing statutory work well. The coinciding of these features has given him, he claims, a good reputation. On the other hand, he says, 'I know I do more than I'm paid to do' [Mr. Porter, 6]. It is not that he wants particularly more money but that, in order to render good social work compatible with his role, he presents himself as feeling driven to work extremely hard. Even then, the nature of the work is such that there is little in the way of recognition from clients or the department, let alone reward. This has brought him to the point, he says, of feeling he has 'nothing much left to give' [Mr. Porter, 4], added to which his partner has given him an 'ultimatum' for his own and his family's well-being [Mr. Porter, 6].

There is a question for Mr. Porter as to whether it is his being conscientious which is his undoing. His conclusion is that the proper enacting of his role depends upon him being conscientious, and that his continued willingness to do so is being abused. Mr. Porter has begun to have some thought about leaving, and it is in this respect that he introduces a further consideration. He describes himself as always having had a special interest in alcohol abuse.

Mr. Porter: If I'm working in a situation where there is some alcohol abuse going on, then there is a body of knowledge about that, and I know I know something about it...When I am meeting with other people and with clients, my knowledge gives me confidence and I feel confident about what I am doing.

[Mr. Porter, 8]

It is the prospect of obtaining a specialist post which currently holds out the most hope, as far as Mr. Porter is concerned within this interview, of bringing recognition, restoring confidence and regaining his family life.

Mr. Grant has a specialist post, but in child protection. As a concluding comment on his life path, he writes: 'I feel that ironically I have experience and personal maturity which should now contribute to a most productive period at work, but instead I feel undervalued and unrewarded' [Mr. Grant, life path]. There are some striking similarities in the accounts by Mr. Porter and Mr. Grant concerning their expressed disillusionment with value placed upon them and their work. Having opened the interview by constructing credibility for himself and his role, Mr. Grant is later more wide ranging in his references to the state of social work generally, beyond his current role and setting. Mr. Porter remarks that he cannot live with or without social work. Mr. Grant isn't so sure.

For Mr. Grant, the prospects for good social work are bleak. He relates this to poor professional structure and status: low pay; little opportunity for career progression outside management; inept monitoring of standards; feeble public representation; patchy research of methods and effectiveness; and so on. [Mr. Grant, 18] He comments: 'the media coverage of social work is depressing. It hurts me. I am embarrassed by it.' [Mr. Grant, 18] He acknowledges that he might have done more over the years to fight for the profession, but: 'I never wholeheartedly joined social work. I would have liked it to develop professionally, but it hasn't, and I am increasingly finding I don't want to be associated with the sort of job it is becoming.' [Mr. Grant, 19]

There is a specific incident with which Mr. Allsop links his change in attitude toward the district office setting.

Mr. Allsop: My attitude was shaken about two years ago, when, with good will and good intent, [I] went for advice to a divisional director who suddenly turned round on [me] and placed [me] in a serious professional misconduct situation...And that shook me, that shook me to the core. Because, if I had been grossly negligent and willfully disobedient I could understand it. But, I hadn't been.

[Mr. Allsop, 14]

He continues -

Mr. Allsop: A sort of mistrust, almost paranoia set in for management in the agency...The solving of the client's problem as a shared task and shared responsibility no longer proved. I felt suddenly very much alone, and I had to be very careful. I had to see that it was politically expedient before I carried it out. I no longer feel I could act in an open sort of way.

[Mr. Allsop, 15]

An assumption upon which Mr. Allsop describes himself as proceeding in order to accomplish good social work ('shared task and shared responsibility') is shattered by a formal inquiry into the quality of his work. His identity as a good social worker is shaken: 'from there on I lost a great deal of confidence in myself and my work' [Mr.

Allsop, 15]. Furthermore, the altered relations with management call into question for Mr. Allsop whether good social work is any longer possible in such an agency.

There is no clear conclusion drawn within the interview by these three social workers as to what they will now do. Mr. Porter begins the interview without defining himself as a credible social worker. He talks later so as to (re-)establish a credibility for himself. Yet, he couples this with the 'confidence' which he believes would come for him (and his identity as involved in good social work) from practising within a specialist role, and not his current one. Mr. Grant's account does not evidence a loss of belief in himself but rather a discontent with the encumbrances of his (specialist) role which hamper him in practising complex, statutory work to a high quality. He attributes these to the lack of professional status for social work generally, and so frames his dilemma in terms of the demeaning effect continuing in this career would represent for him. Mr. Allsop is participating in an interview on learning to do social work well whilst subject to a 'formal inquiry'. It is the way the inquiry was initiated and is being conducted upon which he focusses, enabling him to comment on his experience of another side of management within the department. Whatever the quality of his practice before, and clearly that for him is called into question within the interview, the consequence is that he cannot now work in the 'open sort of way' he did previously and that the possibility of continuing to practice good social work has been breached.

Having characterised the previous two categories of accounting as being a 'tightrope' existence and a 'torn' existence, finding an apposite work for this category would seem more complete. The current

experiences of the five social workers in the present category are portrayed by them as having to do with facing major questions concerning their relation to social work and the practice that is possible within their role. Although the individual accounts do vary in the the nature of the experiences, what they have in common is the alteration that is occurring in their conceptions as to the association between good social work and their role, with the accompanying alteration to the way they wish to define themselves as social workers. The existence of these social workers could then perhaps be characterised as one of undergoing 'transformation'.

Good Social Work And Other Settings

The constructing of good social work has concentrated so far upon the forms of accounting that are instantiated by the twenty-three social workers based in district social services settings. Before moving on to consider the forms of accounting that social workers adopt in relation to constructing their learning, there are a number of points that need to be made regarding how those social workers based in other settings set about constructing good social work.

Each interviewee knows that she is being spoken with alongside several other social workers. Those who work outside the district office setting are not unaware that they may be perceived as having taken an 'easy' option. In so far as this is a factor for them, some talk justifying themselves in this regard would seem likely and can indeed be seen in the accounts. The form taken varies. For those who have 'served their time' in district social services, there is refutation of any need to justify, and legitimation in terms of 'time for a

change' (Mr. Parry, Ms. Trent and Ms. Orchard). For others who have worked within district offices, the accounting may be more in terms of 'escape' (Ms. Holmes); or, in terms of complementary social work roles that need to be played (Mr. Mead, Mr. Roberts and Mr. Kilroy). Those who have never worked within that setting adopt different postures. Some espouse the virtues of the role and setting they have chosen as against the kind of social work which occurs in statutory settings (Ms. Yale and Ms. Wright). Others doubt their ability ever to have coped well with the statutory role (Ms. Williams and Ms. Bates). Some, whilst critical of statutory social work, acknowledge that they as individuals may not have the necessary abilities or predisposition to do it well (Mr. Scott and Mr. Tate).

The one probation officer in the sample group (Mr. Alton) does not enter into these forms of accounting. As with those based in district social services offices, he does not justify the fact that he is in the role that he is. Those in district office settings do much 'work' in the interview concerning the relation between good social work and their role, and justify themselves (or otherwise) in that respect. There is much less emphasis within their accounts, however, upon their occupation of that role in the first place. The converse is found with those based in other settings. There is less accounting concerning the possibility of conducting good social work within their (specialist) roles but rather more justification occurs around being in those roles.

The social workers do not only justify themselves regarding the occupation of their particular roles. They also construct how they proceed to practice versions of good social work within those roles, versions which are construed as not possible (or appropriate) within

statutory settings but versions which are important for their identities as social workers. Such versions instantiated within these accounts utilise primarily the (not unrelated) features of specialisation; method; and, inter-disciplinary work.

Mr. Parry, now working in a family and child guidance centre, traces his social work identity and change of role by talking of furthering his development. He had previously been working in a statutory setting in a remote rural area.

Mr. Parry: We felt, my wife and myself, that, professionally, in order to progress further, not necessarily up the salary scales, but having greater experience, we had to move...I think I was far from jaded, or burnt out, but I was on a kind of treadmill, in the sense of I'd been in the job and county for something like eight years. And, I thought in order to develop further it would be easier to move.

[Mr. Parry, 16]

Later, he says -

Mr. Parry: When I made the change [out of statutory social work], I wasn't aware of the change before I made it, or I wasn't as aware of it as I am, or have been, since. So, the change was something about needing a change, but also wanting to specialise in child care type of work, work with children and families.

[Mr. Parry, 20]

Mr. Parry links 'work with children and families' with an approach and method which he claims informs his work.

Mr. Parry: Family therapy informs my work...I do not think problems are located in aberrant individuals. They're often a consequence of difficulties that are in the family, community, or even a political system. Poverty is responsible for many problems becoming intolerable. So, I don't feel bad about hauling in others. I feel quite comfortable and confident about that, and I think I can actually give others that confidence because I feel confident.

[Mr. Parry, 6]

This approach is one he says he pursued because 'it seemed to me to ring a bell with how I saw and experienced the world', and speculates, 'perhaps bodies of knowledge or theory or ways of working strike a resonance between one's personality that seem to fit with that individual' [Mr. Parry, 9].

The approach espoused by Ms. Yale and Ms. Wright, who both work in the same mental health centre, is one of non-directive counselling. This is perceived to be consistent with their personal and political values of respect for others, self-help and empowerment. Ms. Yale contrasts the practice available to her through this role with that she might be doing within a statutory agency.

Ms. Yale: I can't do ordinary social work. I don't want to do ordinary social work. It's too shallow. I think it is caring done on a very superficial level. And, I don't necessarily blame the social workers for that, but I think you're pressurised with time and caseloads, boundaries, limitations, what you must do and what you mustn't do. It just didn't fit for me. And, I always think you're so isolated. You may work in a team but you're very much working alone and there's no support.

[Ms. Yale, 36]

The construal of one's role as permitting a counselling relationship with clients is not a case in itself that good social work is being practised. Both Ms. Yale and Ms. Wright are aware of the charge that counselling can be seen as oppressive. Their response is to ally themselves with a version of counselling as empowering. Ms. Wright traces her awareness of these distinctions to early experiences in social work.

Ms. Wright: Social work that isn't about self-help, empowering, valuing and respecting people, to my mind, stinks...When I was sixteen, I was the kind of earnest, caring middle-class person with a conscience, who goes to London and does social work...I was buringing with the caring spirit. We did lots of things for them [residents at a Cynian hostel for homeless men], like wipe their bums, and make their coffee, thing like that...One guy there was an alcoholic, a pill abuser, but what he was was wise. What he knew was how to survive. I went to Cyrenians as a middle-class do-gooder. What I learned from him was respect, because what he did was disabuse me of all the notions of my own superiority. What I gained from him was a political approach to life, which is, don't patronise.

[Ms. Wright, 7,8]

Nevertheless, there remains the question of how possible it is to practice according to these values within a mental health centre. Ms. Yale again -

Ms. Yale: One thing I have discovered about the centre is that supportive as it may be, and it is, there are still priorities of mental health. So, your mental health is secondary to the client. There are times when you are compromised. You have to be pushed beyond what you are prepared to do because there is still this bit about the client coming first...When I first realised that, I was a bit disillusioned because I thought I'd found my dream, and I hadn't. But, what I had to realise was that I'd probably found the nearest place at this present moment in time to the place I really want to work in.

[Ms. Yale, 37]

The issue about therapy and counselling for Mr. Mead, who also works in a mental health centre, is a different one. He begins the interview by constructing credibility for himself around 'listening'. Later in the interview, he constructs his motivations for coming into social work.

Mr. Mead: I came into social work for political reasons, that's politics with a big 'P' and a little 'p'. I felt strongly that we live in an unjust society, and I wanted to do something about it...I saw social work then as a way of rectifying the imbalance. It was about fighting for the underdogs, those in difficulty. Now, it doesn't mean I'm out to convert anybody, but resources to me are important...We had a discussion about how we, the social workers, spend our time, and it became about how much time we put into welfare rights as opposed to family therapy. I felt our time towards the former was too low, and I argued for more, but the others were arguing for more time on therapy.

[Mr. Mead, 6,7]

The two interviewees who define themselves as counsellors and who work on a self-employed basis, Mr. Scott and Mr. Tate, connect their methodological approaches with their personal experiences and biographies. On his life path, Mr. Scott links 'break-up of marriage' with 'major illumination of systemic thinking', adding, 'large commitment to it: systemic thinking is not simply a theory to me, it is what I have experienced' [Mr. Scott, life path]. When it comes to

statutory social work, he finds that he is 'unclear about the theoretical and moral issues'; and that he doesn't 'know how to begin thinking about talking of children going into care' [Mr. Scott, 12]. He also suggests that many social workers with those responsibilities with whom he has spoken are equally unclear [Mr. Scott, 12].

Mr. Tate is more strident.

Mr. Tate: Social services is agency-centred and not client-centred. The social workers are not free to act for the client. They are limited by all the agency rules. The financial limitations mean that their time is restricted, and they can only offer a first aid service, trying to bring people up to a level of coping and not enabling them to grow...Most of the social workers that I know hate the job. So, I tend to work privately or voluntarily.

[Mr. Tate, 5,6]

In different tone, he talks of the alternative that he felt faced him. 'I might have tried to change it from the inside, but I don't know whether I would have had what it takes' [Mr. Tate, 6].

Constructing good social work may occur, then, around the methodological approach that a specialist position is construed as permitting. Those who adopt this way of constructing connect the espoused approach with their social work identity and also their personal identity, talking of a 'fit' between the values they perceive the approach to enshrine and their own values. The approaches which arise in the accounts of these social workers are ones that lay claim to special competence within the informal, discursive dimension of clients' lives. As seen above, however, it is crucial to the identities and forms of accounting of the those within statutory roles that the possibility is retained for them also of competence in this dimension. Ambiguity over the difference or sameness of this area of competency leaves scope for considerable confusion and contest between social workers whose commitments and identities reside in the

contrasting roles. One resolution for those who seek greater integration of therapeutic approach and role is to dissociate from the identity of 'social worker' altogether. Membership issues within social work become clarified, but questions of occupational identity and membership relative to other groupings remain open.

Specialisation, though, is credited with other benefits as well as this 'method' base. Mr. Roberts, working from within a hospital setting largely with children with learning difficulty, talks of his social work identity and 'specialisation'.

Mr. Roberts: I'm very much a believer in needing to specialise to do the job sufficiently well...I went into [social work] on the basis that I would be able to achieve something, other than just on an individual basis. I believed that society should be much more equitable, and that people who were at the bottom of the heap weren't there of their own fault, and that, if they could be given the means to get out of it, they would succeed... And I saw social work as a way of me doing it...I think what I've done is to hang on to those ideals. I couldn't cope, emotionally, with hanging them onto everybody. Possibly one motivation for me in wanting to specialise was that it narrowed down the responsibility, and it happened to be handicap, and handicap is a definable thing, although obviously there are enormous grey areas...At least for me personally, it's something within which I can contain my ideals, if you like. I can justifiably not think about drug abusers, alcoholics, homelessness, a whole range of social problems.

[Mr. Roberts, 16,17]

'Narrowing down the responsibility', becoming effective at one particular area of work, feeling confident in that area, and conveying confidence and effectiveness to others, these are some of the benefits for good social work that are associated with working from a specialist post. Those social workers based in medical, interdisciplinary teams (Mr. Roberts, Mr. Kilroy and Ms. Williams) do not express overt criticism of social work as practised within statutory settings. They talk more of the good work that can be done by social workers within a team which may be (necessarily) medically oriented. The justification for their role is, in this sense, that of

introducing a needed social work contribution where it might otherwise have been neglected.

Mr. Roberts and Mr. Kilroy emphasise the task of interpreting between the informal dimension of clients' lives and the formal sphere of medical, educational and social institutions. In talking early on about his work with parents immediately after a child has been diagnosed as having a handicap, Mr. Kilroy says -

Mr. Kilroy: I suppose it's something which is quite a specialised part of social work, not a lot of people do it, and so the fact that you're perhaps one person doing, makes other people think of you as somebody who knows about it...I also found amongst the staff in the hospital, because I was willing to do that work, and wasn't afraid to take it on, so people would tend to want to involve me, and talk to me about times when they were in difficulty about it.

[Mr. Kilroy, 2]

Elaborating, he explains -

Mr. Kilroy: My role in the first interview [is] very much listening to the parents' questions and if at any point I felt that they wanted to ask something, but were finding it difficult, I might either say it on their behalf or ask the consultant questions as if I didn't know.

[Mr. Kilroy, 4]

And subsequently -

Mr. Kilroy: As a couple, they couldn't talk to one another, really, because the husband was not saying what he felt because he felt his wife was in bits, and she was upset because he was holding himself together and wasn't crying...I spent three hours with them [one] evening...They were able to say it then because there was somebody else there who could hold it...So, it became safe for both of them to say the kinds of things they wanted to say.

[Mr. Kilroy, 5]

Dilemmas can arise over just what is distinctive about the social worker's contribution within a medical, inter-disciplinary team. This is the experience described by Ms. Williams upon entering hospice work, having previously worked in a hospital.

Ms. Williams: Working in a hospital, nobody else had got the time in their job to spend an hour listening to a patient, or family, or whatever. And I found that hard, going into an agency where everybody had got time to do that...I had to compromise and accept, to a certain extent, what they saw my role as being, which was definitely to do with welfare rights, housing, practical problems, and the areas that they felt

incompetent in, and then the bereavement side which they, again, felt incompetent in. At first I struggled to try and do what I thought I ought to be doing, and once I accepted that there was still room for me and enough interest for me if I did what they wanted, then we all got on a lot better.

[Ms. Williams, 16]

The constraints upon her role construed by Ms. Williams arise not from the formal sphere of law and policy, but rather from her membership of a team responsible for a specialist service. Good social work, in her accounting, requires her to 'accept' that membership and to negotiate within it according to the differing perceptions of the social work role.

There are strident attacks upon statutory social work from two of the interviewees working outside of it, Ms. Yale and Mr. Tate (and, to a lesser degree, Ms. Holmes, below). Others who espouse a therapeutic approach question the quality of 'helping' and 'empowerment' within district social services settings. The constraints of the role and the adversity of the working conditions are cited in evidence. Contrasting roles and settings are upheld as being more conducive to good social work so defined. Yet, there are contested elements here also: therapy as a more subtle form of oppression; avoidance of material living conditions. Additionally, there is a recognition that there are constraints associated with all work roles. The two independent counsellors carry furthest the implications of seeking 'freedom' from such constraints, and are those whose identities are perhaps also defined as furthest from social work.

The constructing of good social work within inter-disciplinary teams entails the interviewees in talking about how a social work contribution comes to be defined within such settings. How that is done is an important aspect for them in constructing good social work. The unfixed nature of social work in this respect raises the profile

of the social worker as actively negotiating an appropriate role for herself with other team members within perceived constraints. The opportunity to specialise is associated with the opportunity to practice good social work, yet the tasks and duties of that role are not straightforwardly determined.

An adoption agency is a specialist social work setting with a clearly stated task and purpose, in the accounts of Ms. Holmes and Ms. Bates. It is perceived by them to be protected from the difficulties of statutory social work, and a place within which a circumscribed area of social work competence can be developed and delivered. Separateness can itself, however, raise questions, and does for Ms. Bates in relation to her credibility. At the opening of the interview she states that, if she is working where she is, then she has to be accomplished at adoptive work. This is a consequence of her occupying the (credible) role that she does, but a role which simultaneously sets her apart from the competences of mainstream social work [Ms. Bates, 18].

Ms. Holmes, who unlike her colleague has worked within social services for many years, expresses no such self-doubt. Her view is that -

Ms. Holmes: The trend is for social services to become more and more bureaucratic. It is more and more about management, and less and less about working with people, working in depth. Social workers seem to be to be afraid of conflict these days, they don't know how to work with it, to use it. I put it down to the type of supervision you get in social services now. It is about management, not therapy. Everything's standardised. There is a lot of avoidance and denial. The psychological aspects don't get touched.

[Ms. Holmes, 7]

For Ms. Holmes, moving to the adoption agency represents an 'escape' from social services but not from the taxing aspects of social work, in-depth, psychological work. The ability to work well with people

around major life decisions and conflicts confirms her identity as to the meaning of good social work.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the lengthy passages about 'good social work' which follow the interviewees' initial constructions of credibility have been analysed. What were these social workers doing when they were describing and delineating good practice? What purpose did it serve, within these accounts of learning? The answers which seem to emerge from the analysis are connected with the complex links between 'self', 'role' and 'standards' in the occupation. It was not enough to locate themselves, define their role or demonstrate familiarity with the techniques of practice: 'good' social work involved the elaborate construction of an account in which all three elements are in dynamic interaction with each other.

Although the analysis has distinguished between a number of different ways in which local authority district team workers aligned their understanding of good practice with their role, and has shown how those in other settings referred to their choice of role in relation to this one, a common feature of the accounts was a recognition of the complex relationship between role and standards of practice. Evaluation of individual performance could not be carried on in isolation from a consideration of tasks and constraints of the formal, legal and organisational role in which they were carried out, because social workers were all aware that their practice required them either to act skilfully and creatively as bearers of this role or to find ways of compromising with, disowning or escaping it.

Furthermore, these attempts to reconcile, bargain with or escape the requirements of the role were not conducted in terms of impersonal technical considerations. The social workers self- his or her identity, experiences and life outside work - were all to some extent involved in the dynamic of these processes. The sense conveyed is of there being 'no hiding place' for self, away from the battleground over these issues. Here the accounts show the interviewees trying to accomplish a 'morally adequate' (Cuff, 1980) version of practice, in which they are publicly answerable for a performance in which their selves are inescapably involved. In this sense, good social work is not the display of technical competence, but the achievement of a series of testing 'one off' performances - of which these interviews are perhaps themselves examples - in which the social worker herself is always subject to judgement, and is therefore personally 'on the line'. Here again there are echoes of Goffman's (1959) and Garfinkel's (1967) analyses of how interviewees achieve 'normal appearances' in everyday life, of the public self as *achieved* in such encounters - but with the added requirement that social workers must try to influence and change the situations they encounter (Travers, 1991).

Do social workers make too much of their practice? Need it really be as complex and testing as this? Interviews with clients about their experiences suggest they are right to understand it in these terms. For instance, Sainsbury found that long-term clients saw their social workers' commitment (or lack of it) in moral terms, distinguishing between those who just 'did their job' from those who put themselves out, or gave something of themselves, for the sake of their clients (Sainsbury, 19) Celia Brown, in a study of twenty-five parents who

had been investigated for child abuse, found that the main criticisms of social workers were poor communication, lack of openness and honesty, failure to value parents' strengths and treat them as equals, and failure to involve them in decisions (Brown, 1986). In other words, clients saw even a formal, legal investigation as one in which both they and the social workers were encountering each other as persons and fellow citizens, and were evaluating them for their capacities to respect and acknowledge these aspects of their interaction - a theme taken up in the Cleveland Report, and now incorporated in the Children Act, 1989.

Given their awareness of the complex nature of good social work practice, and its relationship to their personal and professional lives, how did social workers account for the ways they learnt to do it?

Notes

- 1 See Schon (1983) and (1987).
- 2 See Brookfield (1987), chap. 12.
- 3 London Borough Of Brent, 1985, p. 12.
- 4 London Borough Of Brent, 1985, p. 152.
- 5 See Parton and Martin, (1989).
- 6 Secretary of State for Social Services, 1988, p. 245.
- 7 See, for example, Glastonbury, Cooper and Hawkins (1980); Lipsky (1980); Mattinson and Sinclair (1979); Satyamurti (1981).
- 8 See, for example, Parad (1965) and Rapoport (1965) for a discussion of crises; and O'Hagan (1986) regarding their occurrence within social services.
- 9 Mattinson and Sinclair (1979, chap. 15 illustrate with a 'day in the life'; Satyamurti (1981) speaks of 'occupational survival'.
- 10 Compare Packman et al., 1986.

- 11 For a formulation and discussion of 'risk and social work' see, for example, Brearley (1982). Reviewing the definitions of risk and uncertainty, Brearley suggests that such distinctions as between objective risk and subjective uncertainty may not be especially useful, since 'the estimate of risk is also subjective' (p. 13)
- 12 See, for example, Fineman (1985). Also of note is the publishing of a special issue, Stress In Social Work, in the professional magazine Community Care (31.1.91.).
- 13 A list of which interviewees are included in the respective categories can be found in Appendix H.
- 14 'Halping relationships' is being used here very much in the vein of those defined as such within client-centred, humanistic counselling. See, for example, Rogers (1951) and Nelson-Jones (1983).
- 15 The rhetoric of being 'client centred' is, interestingly, appearing within policies regarding the implementation of community care legislation, and here being allied closely with the rhetoric of consumer choice. These two different contexts, within which the same words appear, should not be confused.
- 16 The discussion in chapter 2 of the studies of working practices as organisational behaviour, based upon routinisations, typifications, and so on, is relevant.
- 17 In relation to family therapy, see, for example, Dale et al. (1986), Howe (1989), Manor et al. (1984) and Treacher and Carpenter, eds., (1984).
- 18 This is very much in accord with the epistemology of practice described by Schon (1983), and in particular the metaphor of 'conversing with the situation'.

6. ACCOUNTS OF LEARNING

It has taken this thesis a great many pages to reach the central issue of the research interview - what social workers said about how they learned to be good practitioners. Put most simply, there are two reasons for this. First, they spent a good deal of the interview time establishing their credibility and delineating good social work. Secondly, they did not give any direct, coherent, specific answers about how they learned to do it; or rather, that would seem to be the conclusion that might be drawn from a first, superficial reading of the interviews.

In one sense, the accounts are all about learning, but, in another sense, when they are examined, where is it? Actions are described, incidents related, views expressed and feelings verbalised. But, what has it all to do with learning? Even the word itself isn't used very often. What have they been talking about, though, if not learning? For some time, these questions perplexed me, and clouded my attempts at analysis and interpretation. However, the sense I have finally been able to make of the 'learning talk' in the interviews does relate to my introductory account of learning in the human service professions, and to the interviewees' accounts of good social work.

First, however, it must be emphasised that these interviews are accounts given in a specific context: a research study, carried out by an interviewer who is known to be involved in academic social work training. Hence, the interviewees were accounting for their learning to be good practitioners to a professional trainer, someone perceived

as coming from the world of academic, not practical, learning. This was reinforced by the knowledge that the study was to be for an academic purpose, a thesis for a higher degree. So, these social workers were being required to accomplish what they clearly experienced as a difficult task. They had to show themselves credible as practitioners; they had to demonstrate their understanding of good practice, and that they actually *did* it; and, they had to account to an *academic* trainer as to how they learned to do it. The last step seems in some ways to have been the most difficult one of all.

The fact that practitioners do not easily relate their ability to do social work to formal training and to professional theory has already been noted by researchers. For instance, Stevenson and Parsloe found that social workers seldom align their methods or decisions with theory, and said things like, 'it just feels right to me' (Stevenson and Parsloe, 1978). The problematic nature of 'knowledge' that is 'relevant' for practice has been a source of heated debate, both in the professional literature, and in outside criticisms of social work. While some have insisted that social work should seek verifiably effective methods (Sheldon, 1978), others have cautioned against misleading claims to certainty, especially in such fields as child abuse, where critics have been most scathing in their denunciation of 'poor training' (Parton, 1990).

As argued in the first chapter, these disputes in social work education should be understood within a wider context of learning to practice in 'human service' occupations. The model of training for this work is often uncritically assimilated to that for technical and scientific occupations, where theory about abstract causal links between phenomena is brought to bear, and selects features of a

problem which are susceptible to technical manipulation, in order to prescribe precise solutions. But, human situations are inherently different from the ones addressed by those forms of technical rationality: they are complex, uncertain, unstable and unique. Hence, the rational way to approach them relies on a different paradigm, more akin to art or craftsmanship (England, 1986), which recognises the uniqueness of each situation, and uses spontaneous and 'intuitive' responses (Benner and Tanner, 1987). Recent writings on human service professions accept that tacit knowledge cannot always be specified by skilled practitioners, and that adjustments are often made through extemporising during the process (Schon, 1983). Solutions are not deduced from theoretical principles, but are interactively constructed with the client and others. The professional is not simply accountable (as expert guardian of exclusive, technical knowledge) to his peers, but equally publically accountable to wider members of the community, through standards which are accessible to lay as well as trained people. (Prince Charles's excursions into the worlds of architecture, health and education bear witness to a more open debate about what constitutes excellent or even acceptable standards in all these fields.)

In the previous two chapters, I have argued that social workers defined credibility and good practice in terms of processes of moral regulation which use both formal and informal methods. They were aware that much of their roles, and some of their practices, were derived directly from the formal rules of law and procedure; but, they were equally aware that many of their skills and competences rested on their abilities to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, to retain clarity and focus in sometimes chaotic and dangerous situations, and to reason creatively with people who were emotional, distressed or

evasive. Although their training may have attempted to do justice to both sides of this work, it is unlikely to have clarified the relationship between them. Instead, it may well have encouraged a tendency to 'split' their consciousness, dividing it between competences that can be learnt through the acquisition of principles or technical rules (the academic and theoretical part), and those which are acquired through experience (the practical part). This tendency is potentially reinforced by the acknowledgement of tension between the formal and informal aspects of good practice.

Nor does the study of social work ethics and values - which contributes to their concept of good practice - necessarily bridge this gulf. Jordan has recently pointed out how many influences on practitioners point towards a rule-based understanding of morality and the ethical issues of practice. Moral theory itself (whether in its Kantian or its utilitarian traditions) has tended to seek general principles to apply to human situations. Recent emphasis on the individual rights of clients, and the legal powers of social workers, encourage formal, legalistic understanding of such issues. Yet, there is little value in trying to address issues through social work (rather than through courts or other systems of arbitration) unless they are susceptible to negotiated solutions, in which contested claims and perceived conflicts of interest are resolved by the re-establishment of co-operation, reciprocity and sharing (Jordan, 1990). These social work interviewees indicated some awareness of this in their accounts of good practice, but understandably found it difficult to relate their skills in informal moral regulation, and the sustaining of an interactive social order, to formal theories of social work ethics.

This links with another aspect of the accounts of learning: the practitioners locate their experiential learning in their practice teams, rather than in training or courses. It is clear from their descriptions that the informal discussions of the work that take place among members of the team are seen as a vital part of what is gained from experience. It is through these exchanges that experience is moulded into good practice, and that standards and criteria for recognising and valuing good practice are evolved. This is hardly surprising: we might expect that the forum for evaluating discursive and dialogical methods of work would itself take a similar form, and that the practice of social work should itself be regulated and ordered by informal, conversational sharing of examples from everyday experience. Again, Jordan sees this as a fundamental feature of social work, that the dialogue about ethical issues among team members reflects the topics and methods of practice, and that good social work's values and standards are derived from the sharing and support, as well as the constructive criticism, that are experienced in a group committed to common purposes (Jordan, 1990).

As we shall see, the social workers made many links between experiential learning through confronting issues in practice, and the sharing and support they gave and received in teams. Without saying how this occurred, they indicated that membership of their working group allowed them to evaluate and refine their practice, and to develop their skills as workers. Once again, social work emerges from these accounts as a 'practice', in the sense used by communitarian moral theorists (MacIntyre, 1981), rather than an exercise in the application of specific moral principles to a series of cases. Social workers portray themselves as subject to the culturally accepted standards of their working community, whose members are active in

promoting a shared way of understanding and evaluating their work, and supporting each other in sustaining the standards of good practice.

However, it is also clear from their accounts that they did not feel entirely comfortable with the versions of learning that this implied. This seems to relate to their difficulty (or inability) in specifying the links between experiential learning and formal training, their discomfort being increased by awareness of the interviewer's involvement in academic work. It is as if they believed that they should be able to state either how their practice reflected general principles derived from theory, or how it had allowed them to state new or refined principles of their own, which now guided their practice, and could be used by others.

At the end of this chapter, and in the conclusion of the thesis, I will return to this issue, since it raises fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of training, and the relationship between theory and practice. The main point to make at this stage of the analysis is that the social workers indicated in their accounts a certain ambivalence about their accountability for good practice, and how they learned it. On the one hand, they emphasised the centrality of experience, learning by doing, and acquiring a 'feel' for the work, and they insisted that the team provided the most significant learning environment in which these skills are developed. On the other hand, they recognised a certain obligation to be accountable to the wider organisation of the department (management, elected committee), to the courts, and to the researchers and academics responsible for training, for their standards of practice. They saw themselves as required to legitimate their versions of good social work in terms of the organisational, legal, professional and theoretical framework of their occupation.

This ambivalence once again reflects the social workers' awareness of the formal and informal aspects of their work, and their role in bridging the world of organisation and that of everyday social life. It was difficult to say how the formal rationality that they saw as characteristic of academic training (both preprofessional and in-service) shaped their practice in complex human situations, yet they recognised that they were in some sense accountable to academics like myself for the generalisability of their methods, and to managers, courts and politicians for its effectiveness. In this sense, formal rationality provides an 'accountability framework' (Rawls, 1989) for the informal rationality of practices like social work. Yet, as I shall argue later, there is a parallel responsibility on academics (researchers, trainers) and on managers to provide learning environments in which experiential learning can be recognised and valued, and shared standards of good practice can be evolved.

Credibility, Good Social Work And Learning

'Learning to do the job well' generates much talk by social workers within the interview about their credibility and about good social work. They are being invited to say how they have learned, and how they have learned to do their job well. This is inviting them to talk positively about themselves and about their work; and, apparently, this does not come easily. By examining their accounting around credibility and around good, it is clearer why this is the case and why it is necessary for the social workers to include these areas in their response to the interview.

Accounting around credibility and good is not occurring in an interview about either of these two areas, but in the context of an interview about learning. (What would be said in an interview which was framed on credibility or good could well be very different.) Talk in these areas, then, provides the terms for talk about learning. In this sense, talk about credibility and talk about good are pathways into talk about learning.

The social workers begin the interview by constructing credibility and, in so doing, refer to both their social work role and their social work identity. Common to the accounts is the portrayal of social work as entailing competence in two dimensions; the informal, interactional sphere of the client's world; and the formal, institutional sphere of law, policy and procedure. Social work as practised, however, is not a unitary entity, according to these accounts. There are different 'social works', varying by social work role and by drawing differently upon these dimensions. Establishing credibility for one kind of social work becomes a different matter than establishing it for another.

In the opening of the interview, the social workers are constructing credibility by aligning themselves with practising a certain kind of social work. They are defining themselves in relation to social work, defining their identities as credible social workers for the purposes of the interview. As they describe the kind of (credible) social work they construe themselves as practising, they are also beginning to construct the kind of learning in which they are involved.

For the social workers, there is a task to be done in striving to establish credibility. As far as they are concerned, their occupation

does not enjoy general public respect. They do not assume the difficulties of their job are well understood or that there is acceptance of the way in which they do it. Even within the occupation, there are strong divisions, and their interview is but one amongst many. As well as beginning to construct the kind of learning doing the work the way they do entails, they are also showing that learning in social work involves being able to present oneself and one's work as credible, when credibility is very much a contested issue. Without a basis of credibility as a social worker, of course, there would be nothing worthwhile for them to say about their learning social work; except, perhaps, that.

In constructing credibility, it is the competence within two spheres, the informal and formal, which is utilised in different ways to explicate the complexities and requirements of the job. As the social workers proceed to construct what is good social work, it is their handling of these common aspects which spells differences between them. Again, however, they are constructing good social work not for the sake of it but to provide an account of learning. The purposes served here are threefold.

Firstly, in their accounts of learning, the social workers are constructing what it is that they take learning to practice good social work to entail. They are defining the 'learning task'. Secondly, the role and setting in relation to which they construct good social work is also the site of their learning. Hence, in the same process as determining good social work, they are construing the practical nature and conditions of their 'learning environment'. Thirdly, in connecting their social work identities with their personal identities and biographies, the interviewees talk not only of

the kind of social workers they are but of the kind of person they are, so defining their identities as 'learners'.

The social workers do talk directly about how they perceive themselves to learn. They do construct learning processes so labelled. Having emphasised that this accounting does not occupy the greater proportion of the interviews, it is nevertheless there. There are repertoires of learning that can be identified within the accounts and which are employed in relation to the constructing of task, environment and learner.

Repertoires Of Learning

In accomplishing 'learning' for the purposes of the interview, the social workers employ two distinct accounting repertoires in conjunction with their construction of other elements. These repertoires are accounting procedures and not theoretical models, though they could be given theoretical referents. The repertoires have particular rhetorics and accomplish particular effects within the overall construction of social work and learning.

RATIONALIST REPERTOIRE The guiding principle of the rationalist repertoire is the conscious and systematic acquisition and evaluation of pre-defined aspects of performance. In this form of accounting, the social workers describe their learning as occurring in a planned and deliberate fashion, with a direction and clarity which can be articulated. There is an emphasis upon discrete areas of skill, knowledge and procedure.

EXPERIENTIAL REPERTOIRE The experiential repertoire is characterised by the centrality afforded to experience as a source of growth and development. Social workers employing this form of accounting attribute learning to accumulated experience, the outcome of which cannot necessarily be articulated but which is evidenced by them in the appeal to, for example, the intuitive grasp of complex situations. There is an emphasis upon personal qualities.

Within the interviews, the social workers can be seen utilising these two forms of accounting when describing how they have learned. The repertoires are refined in use, and are employed in order to sustain the constructions of task, environment and learner. Their convergence within the accounts represents a 'clash' which requires other accounting strategies to be brought into play (the use of 'reflection' as an accounting device, for example, and the formative place of 'teams'). The repertoires can be thought of as paradigms of learning, each with their own rhetoric and persuasiveness. What the social workers demonstrate in the accounts is a dexterity in operating with both at once in confirming their version of good social work. What they also show is that these repertoires are insufficient to accomplish an account of learning in the accountability frame of the research interview. The question of how they have learnt to work well is ultimately not answerable by them in any coherent and definitive way.

Repertoires Of Learning And Task, Environment and Learner

The learning task is defined differently within the social workers' accounts. In one form of accounting, good social work is constructed

in terms of combining work within the informal, interactional world and the formal, institutional one. Achieving this requires particular abilities in enacting the statutory role and in managing the work. In a different form of accounting, good social work is the ability to divide these two worlds in a manner which maximises the benefits of each independently. In the third form of accounting, a divorce is made of the informal from the formal world as the only effective way of maintaining viability of work within the informal world.

In all the accounts, a learning task is defined in respect of social work practice in the informal, interactional sphere of clients' lives. The nature of this task, and its associated learning, differs according to the connections which are made between that work and work in the formal, institutional sphere. For example, where the learning task is constructed through divorcing the informal world from the formal, the accounts of learning concern the purposeful development of a (therapeutic) method. Whereas, in constructing the learning task in terms of combining the informal and formal, there is much less formal precision. Nevertheless, the two repertoires are to be found in all three forms of accounting concerning the learning task. It is the manner of their employment which varies.

The constructing of good social work and hence of learning task is accomplished within the accounts in respect of work role (and setting) and social work identity. In combining, dividing or divorcing the formal and informal worlds, the social workers refer to the features of their role and to their experiences, commitments, ideals and beliefs. Hence, their versions of good social work and of learning task are situated within social and cultural practices and personal biographies. The constructing of 'learning environment' and of

'learner' is already occurring in the constructing of learning task. Indeed, the construction of task within the interviews is predicated upon certain definitions of environment and learner.

Repertoires Of Learning: Combining Informal And Formal Worlds

The rhetoric of the experiential repertoire is clear in the response that Ms. French makes to a general question on how she has learned to enact the role the way she does.

Ms. French: It's life process. It's what you've done. It's where you've been, what you've seen. It's who you've been with.
[Ms. French, 7]

This could be rather a glib answer: 'ask a general question, get a general answer!' However, the accounting context in which it is given suggests that such a rendering would be doing a disservice to Ms. French. The personal and social work identity she constructs is one which emphasises personal experience as a source of strength.

Ms. French: I feel that my life experiences have given me strength, and I suppose I am quite pleased with myself.
[Ms. French, 7]

She also carries the place of experience into her construal of her learning at work.

A point frequently put by the interviewer to interviewees who refer to 'experience' in this way is the observation that some people (without a specification of who) would argue that experience itself is no guarantee of learning. This is the reply given by Ms. French, which is worth quoting in full.

M.J.: You've talked about risk, and taking risk. How does one assess risk? Do you feel that you're better at assessing risk now than you were five or six years ago?

Ms. French: Yes, practice makes a lot of difference.

M.J.: The sheer number of times?

Ms. French: The number of times, the knowledge you've gained. In sexual abuse, we're always getting more information about danger signals and things like this, and I think I've got far more information now about what I ought to look out for, and what other people ought to be looking out for. Yes, part of it is academic information that we've been given, about behaviour patterns, or whatever it may be. I suppose it's the number you've visited, or the number of situations you know of personally or other people have talked about. I think a lot of my knowledge is that I work with a very strong team, whose work I respect and from whom I have learned an incredible amount. If I'd been in a team who were less strong, who were not such sharers, I'm sure I wouldn't have learned so much so quickly.

[Ms. French, 8]

When asked to justify the assertions of the experiential repertoire, which the interviewee perceives as being prompted to explicate how experience 'works', the response commonly assumes the form of the rationalist repertoire. Here, this is evidenced in talk about having more 'information about danger signals', dubbed 'academic information'. Importance is given to acquiring knowledge of this kind, the instrumental knowledge of Mezirow's first domain (Mezirow, 1985). Yet, in these accounts, assessing risk is not to be reduced to measuring situations against pre-determined formulae (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). How is the importance of such instrumental knowledge to be set alongside the importance of 'the number of situations you know of'? The rhetoric employed at this juncture turns to the place of the 'team'. The 'academic knowledge' is translated into the cultural practices and knowledge of a 'very strong team'. Such accounting sets the scene for ascribing to the team a crucial place within the construction of learning.

Ms. West constructs her social work identity in terms of personal experience and, 'born to be a social worker', she suggests towards the conclusion of the interview that she 'subconsciously, must try and use most experiences to learn from' [Ms. West, 25]. Earlier, when she

talks of how she has learned to assess situations (of suspected child abuse), she says -

Ms. West: To try to analyse how you have developed a particular skill, I think that's ever so difficult. Some of it is from colleagues, from watching colleagues describe cases and how they arrived at conclusions. Some of it is certain life experiences or events which I felt have been very significant in making me very sensitive to particular situations. Some of it is straightforward experience...Learning from mistakes is another very major way of learning.

[Ms. West, 4]

Shortly before this extract, Ms. West has said: 'you're looking at so many different things, and you're not even conscious of what goes into an assessment process, most of it is experience' [Ms. West, 2]. Here, there is a comment upon the premise that it is possible/fitting to try to analyse how one learns to assess. 'To try to analyse how...that's ever so difficult', she says. She is prefacing for the interviewer (who is also an academic trainer) that she is doubtful that she can construct a convincing response for the purposes set out by him. She can, and does, construct an account of herself as a credible and good social worker but in relation to learning she is defining her 'limitations'. Thus, what follows is not an analysis, but an elaboration within the experiential repertoire.

Yet, a little further into the interview when the same question is raised again, Ms. West replies differently, referring to two educational methods.

Ms. West: I wouldn't negate the use of process recordings. I think they helped to really make me look at what I was doing in assessment...You've got to observe and listen at the same time...Then, you've also got to write it all up and try and put some meaning to it. And, I think in that process you actually begin to understand things as you reflect back. In actual fact, I must have found it a very valuable source of learning because I always make my students do it.

[Ms. West, 7,8]

And also -

Ms. West: Another thing that helped. We did a lot of video work [on my basic training course]...We used the video on a different form of social work every week, on assessments, on

interviews, on all sorts. And, you'd play it back and you'd see exactly what you'd done, and what other people were doing. So, that was an awfully valuable tool.

[Ms. West, 8]

The deliberate use of these 'tools', and their effect in making processing of experiences 'conscious', replaces 'subconscious' processing in developing competence in assessing. Now, within the rationalist repertoire, Ms. West describes herself as 'looking at' and 'seeing' what she is doing, rather than simply doing it.

The two repertoires are invoked. Ms. West demonstrates familiarity with both, whilst accounting for their co-existence by separating them out in time. The device she utilises is an analogy based on a lay model of skill acquisition.

Ms. West: If you go back to driving a car, you go through all that business of, am I in the first gear or second gear, and then you reach a point where it's all automatic. But, you had to go through all those processes of thinking all the time what you're at before it becomes instinctive.

[Ms. West, 8]

The analogy is a means of explaining (to herself and to the interviewer) why it is not inconsistent to invoke the two repertoires: the learning of 'rules' and their 'conscious application' is a necessary developmental stage, but one to be superceded with greater proficiency. It is implied that once the skill has become 'automatic', it is as if it has always been there. Thus, an accounting practice such as this can be seen as vindicating one repertoire (the experiential) by another (the rationalist). At the same time, it is defining her 'limits' in constructing a persuasive account of learning. She knows, and she knows the interviewer knows, that the analogy of driving a car with doing good social work cannot be sustained.

Mr. Walker is talking about his work in trying to maintain children at home. He has spoken of the importance of a certain attitude towards

substitute care and of confidence within the work (both of which he construes as being sustained by the team, of which more later), now he turns to the how one might come up with a suitable 'package'.

Mr. Walker: The individual skills that you need to deal with a case is a bit like giving a list of the local resources - family aids, or using family therapists in particular areas of work, or including weight watchers for the mother. It's so diverse, that how you come up with a package...But, it is very much package based because you're co-ordinating a number of areas of work in order to achieve the changes that you want. And, I think you're largely a planner/co-ordinator and at the same time a direct worker...You build up quite a big package as being a method to facilitate and allow a child to remain home with its parents, and to ensure that its welfare is okay. And, I don't think really I could expand on that any more, other than to use specific case examples. I could do that, but they'd vary enormously from one to another. There's one other thing, a very good working knowledge of the law. That, you can teach, not necessarily its interpretation, but you can teach the background to it for people to actually understand why they're involved with a family.

[Mr. Walker, 8]

Within the accounts of those social workers who construe themselves operating across both the informal and formal worlds, the experiential repertoire is predominant in their rendering of their learning. It is qualified at important points as already shown above, yet it is this accounting repertoire that the social workers tend towards. The extract from Mr. Walker shows how it is in accord with the constructing of practice. Coming up with a package is perceived to entail being adept at utilising 'local resources'. One could 'give a list' of these but 'it's so diverse' that listing is inadequate to the task. A working familiarity with local resources is not captured for Mr. Walker by proceeding systematically through discrete items. It will be recalled that Mr. Walker, in defining his social work identity, emphasises his personal biography as someone who has lived and worked within the same place; and, he espouses the benefits of social workers who identify with their locality and know it, and the contingent agencies, through having experience of them. Listing the

local resources does not capture the 'tacit dimension' of knowing (Polanyi, 1966).

Mr. Walker comments upon the commentary he is giving: 'I don't really think I could expand upon that any more, other than to use specific case examples'. What 'specific case examples' would do for Mr. Walker is retain the contextual understanding of his knowledge and practice, rather than 'reduce' it to general rules and discrete items (Benner, 1984). Thus, this 'meta-commentary' or self-reading (Hillis Miller, 1987) works to sustain the accounting repertoire he is employing. However, an occasion of self-reading also acts as a window onto 'aporia' in the text, a moment when logic fails (Culler, 1983). Mr. Walker refers to processes of planning, co-ordinating, organising and direct work rather than listing what it is that is co-ordinated, organised, and so on. Although the specific case examples may vary enormously, these processes may not. Consequently, what is not being addressed here is the learning of these processes, learning in which the rationalist repertoire could well be seen (by the interviewer and what he may be taken to represent) to have a part to play.

It is at this moment that Mr. Walker's accounting repertoire switches: 'there's one other thing, a very good working knowledge of the law. That, you can teach'. The term 'teach' here marks a switch to the rationalist repertoire. And, what is to be taught is construed as making a fundamental contribution to an outcome of social workers 'understanding why they are involved'. It is the question of learning the 'interpretation' of law that is now suspended, the ability to interpret being contrasted with having a 'background' knowledge, which can (in this version) be 'taught'. Mr. Walker also achieves the distinction by talking about 'broad' interpretation.

Mr. Walker: You've got to understand why you're working with somebody, if you are ultimately having to remove [a child], on what basis you do it, the broad interpretation of the '63 Act.

[Mr. Walker, 8]

The interviewer follows on by inviting Mr. Walker to talk about the processes to which he has been referring in constructing his practice. The manner in which Ms. Walker does so reasserts the place of the experiential repertoire.

M.J.: What's going through my mind is, you have one of your skills as co-ordinating and planning to facilitate the child staying at home, how do you know which plan is the best one? What is going on in the assessing?

Mr. Walker: Well, I don't think you ever do, in actual fact. I think you tend to suck it and see. Hopefully, your plan is not a rigid one that you're going to totally adhere to, or whatever, but you actually, through the review process, you actually look at the last six months and plan the next six.

[Mr. Walker, 9]

(Use of the term 'actually' can be regarded as a clue in the accounts that the interviewee is constructing a frame on their ideas and actions which is going to accomplish a certain rhetorical effect. Mr. Walker wishes to question the presumption behind the interviewer's inquiry, and the accounting task being asked of him.) Here, the assessing and planning process is not to be conceived as a matter of arriving at the best plan for the situation and people. You will never know whether your plan is the best one. It is a matter of trying it out, reviewing and revising. The emphasis is upon the plan in action rather than upon devising and applying. Constructing his practice in these terms, Mr. Walker is emphasising a structured but flexible and interactive engagement, responsive to features and contingencies of the situation as they arise. For Mr. Walker, the rationalist repertoire does not do justice to the complexities of learning to engage with the informal and formal worlds in this way. The experiential repertoire may not convincingly ('rationally')

explain how that learning occurs, but at least, according to this accounting, it is more coherent with the learning task involved.

When Ms. Bryant is talking about learning to work with families and receiving children into care, she says -

Ms. Bryant: I think, really, that I learned it on the job. Each reception into care is different. There are so many permutations. I try to look with the parents at a variety of responses we might make, and to discuss it all with them, and then we work through the process in stages. The important is to take a longer term view. It may seem to be the answer to take the children into care but often that only works in the short term, and makes things that much more difficult for the future. If you can sit down with the parents and talk things through, they will sometimes realise that for themselves...The other thing is about the office. You can't always predict what the response of the office will be, and that I think is what makes me most anxious about the whole business. You can have really talked things through with the parents, and have agreed a good plan which includes the children coming into care for a spell, and then you have to convince the office about it, and they may not always be ready to go along with it. That is difficult.

[Ms. Bryant, 8]

In order to explicate how she learned this aspect of the work, Ms. Bryant's response is to say that she 'learned it on the job'. She then appears to proceed by justifying why this is all she says. She could have gone into detail concerning the legal and administrative knowledge she has acquired but instead she concentrates upon the 'processes'. She has already emphasised how for her good social work is more than being adept at procedure, talking of the sense of partnership she tries to build with parents. So, she talks of seeing each situation as different and of exploring, deciding, planning according to the specifics involved. She carries with her into these 'negotiations' the procedural knowledge that she has, but is clear that she does not want to portray this as uppermost as she engages with the people involved. Furthermore, she describes a process of negotiation with the office, suggesting that although there may be guidelines and procedures, there is an issue of interpretation also

within the formal, organisational world. The learning task is one of engaging, negotiating, interpreting, mediating. How this is accomplished she does not articulate beyond asserting it is 'learned on the job'. The experiential repertoire is a means of confirming that the task, as she conceives it, is not a 'rule-governed' one (Hilbert, 1986). However, it is one where rules and procedures pertain, and the experiential repertoire alone does not do justice to her competence.

A little later, Ms. Bryant speaks of her work in supervising student social workers. Asked about the skills that she believes herself to bring to bear in such work (training future social workers), she provides a list.

Ms. Bryant: I think I know something about teaching methods, and about teaching child development, for example. You have to be able to listen carefully to the student, and to draw out the main points when discussing their work. You have to be interested in students, and the learning process for new recruits. There are the forms, procedures, and policies; taking them through the resource provision; liason with other agencies; and, the use of self. I also like to discuss wider issues, how the system works, that sort of thing.

[Ms. Bryant, 12]

Ms. Bryant is talking to an interviewer who is himself involved as an academic trainer with student social workers. Her view about their learning is framed differently to her view about her own. Areas of knowledge are stipulated, as well as relational abilities, and these very much include bureaucratic rules and organisational routines. Competence within the formal sphere is emphasised, as well as the acquisition of formal, professional knowledge ('child development'). The learning which Ms. Bryant construes (for the interviewer) as occurring for 'new recruits' contrasts with the learning construed for herself, and is presented firmly within the rationalist repertoire.

This could be (partially) defended by reference to developmental models of learning which suggest that there is a necessary progression from 'rule-governed' to 'rule-making' practice (Benner, 1984). Alternatively, it could be that Ms. Bryant is making it known that she can employ a 'rationalist' approach, and does do so when implicated within professional education (in front of a 'professional educator'). Or again, it could be that she lacks what for her would be a more fitting repertoire to employ but, for whatever reason, does not comment upon this: the rationalist account will do (Hilbert, 1986).

There is a further twist within Ms. Bryant's account. She is asked how she learned to become a good student supervisor. Here, it would be eminently possible (and arguably more isomorphic) for her to adopt a rationalist repertoire in line with that she applies to work with students. However, she does not.

Ms. Bryant: I put it down to the good supervision that I received as a student, and that I had in my first two jobs. I have tried to emulate that, trying to stretch people, ask searching questions, things like that.

[Ms. Bryant, 14]

Her experience is invoked, that of working under and with good supervisors, whose competence and principles can be 'emulated'. There is no attempt to elaborate upon how receiving good supervision is translated into giving it (apart from the term 'emulate'), though there is some suggestion as to why this was perceived to be good supervision (being stretched, and being made to think). Rather, the emphasis is upon learning to do a job well by being with somebody who does the job well; and, this is another aspect of the experiential repertoire that is found frequently within the accounts.

Ms. Atkins provides an instance as she talks about her ability to listen. She recalls a tutor on her social work training course: 'it

was just the detail he picked up, really listening to what people said' [Ms. Atkins, 17]. Asked 'what's happened to that model he's given you?' [M.J., Ms. Atkins, 18], she replies -

Ms. Atkins: I think it's with me a lot of the time, but perhaps only in a fairly small way. I am conscious of trying to listen to what people say, and to take in not just the words but the way they are presented. This is where I get cross with myself, because when I feel self conscious or nervous at an interview, I'm not observing this because I'm conscious of my being nervous.

[Ms. Atkins, 18]

Invited to consider what the outcome is of her experience of being with and observing somebody who could really listen, Ms. Atkins draws out a rule of practice ('listen to more than the words'). This is what she (consciously) tries to follow in order to demonstrate the same ability as her tutor - or is it? Perhaps the rule is one of remaining calm within interviews in order to be able to listen properly. The difficulty she shows is of reducing the 'embodiment' of good listening practice into a collection of rules, when each rule is dependent upon another (Morgan and Ramirez, 1983).

Although the experiential repertoire is predominant within these social workers' accounts of their learning, and provides a means of accounting which interferes least with their constructing of good social work as a 'rule-making' practice, it does not affirm the element of practice which has to do with the recognition of constraint within the role. There are legal and procedural rules within the formal sphere of their work, and the learning task includes these, as seen in the extract from Mr. Walker. Reference to learning in this area, then, is one possible response to the question of how experience 'works'.

Here is Ms. Wood who has been talking about her competence within the court setting and the importance of experience.

M.J. How do you think you use that experience? The fact of doing it several times might not necessarily mean that you do it better?

Ms. Wood: I suppose, going back to the one where the court didn't agree with our judgment, because the court pointed out an area that they felt hadn't been properly covered by us, that then prompted me to make sure we covered areas more.

[Ms. Wood, 4]

This is presented as learning about a procedural rule through the experience of not following it, and being told so. A clear lesson has been learnt that can be applied to such court situations in the future. But, if it was so clear cut, why didn't Ms. Wood already know it? How much procedure does she have to learn by trial and error? In fact, the context of this 'lesson' is that 'this was the first access order that was heard, and it went against us' [Ms. Wood, 5]. The implication is, perhaps, nobody could know what the rules were going to be. Furthermore, there is the point that the legislature within which social workers operate is complex and changing such that, even here (or especially here) within an apparently rule-bound institutional domain, there is an uncertainty. It is not only the uncertainty engendered due to the matter of 'interpretation', there is a matter of 'what are the rules anyway?'. .

As already suggested, the perceived nature of the learning environment is an important consideration in employing different repertoires of learning. This extract from Ms. Smart shows how the two, repertoire and environment, can stand in complex relation. She has been asked how she views herself developing further in her child protection work with families.

Ms. Smart: Once you begin to think you've got all the answers, the alarm bells should start ringing. My quest for more knowledge, information, training, I don't realise how much it's bound by the fact that there are so few opportunities for training, particularly outside courses, the financial restraints. What happens when you think about it, is you not only stop asking to go on courses but you start flicking more quickly past the pages in the social work mags. And, I think

it's dreadful, but it seems to be a process that happens. It can be quite deskilling because if you think, I haven't been on any training for a while about this particular aspect and that's very important to me, that's either very worrying, or you have to begin to think that maybe you have got some of the answers and maybe you don't really need to go on the training anyway, and the whole office colludes with that.

[Ms. Smart, 10]

An experiential repertoire as the predominant mode of accounting about learning is employed as being more coherent with the practical nature and conditions of the work, and affirming the construction of good social work that occurs in that context. However, there is a sense of contradiction here which is highlighted by Ms. Smart. Although the experiential repertoire permits the constructing of learning within particular (adverse) conditions, this is not to say that those conditions are to be excused. There are two options at this juncture: either to suggest that learning as conceived within the experiential repertoire is being hampered by these conditions; and/or, to suggest that learning within the rationalist repertoire could be advanced if the conditions did not pertain. The first remains within the experiential repertoire, seeing for it potentially greater scope; the second takes the experiential repertoire to be a necessary accomodation to a certain set of conditions (or learning environment).

Ms. Smart picks up this contradiction: how is one to understand the thought that 'maybe you don't really need to go on the training'. Here, Ms. Smart interprets it as a possible 'collusion'. In order to sustain this, she invokes the rhetoric of the rationalist repertoire, advocating the importance of systematic study, including some outside the immediate working situation. The work being done by this repertoire on such an occasion concerns legitimating the case against perceived adverse working and learning conditions, and the under-valuing of staff they represent. (The case is, perhaps, seen to be

more convincingly legitimated by utilising the rationalist repertoire than it would be by the experiential repertoire. If so, this would suggest the social workers hold a perception of 'rationalist' cultural practices and beliefs on the part of their managers.)

Despite being construed as in accord with the 'realities' of practice, and the rendering of practice 'good', the experiential repertoire (of learning by doing and being) lacks the explanatory power of the rationalist repertoire. The major accounting device to remedy this perceived deficiency is to embellish the repertoire with reference to conscious processing of experiences, 'reflection'. The accounts are peppered with stories about specific pieces of practice from the interviewee's experience. Questioned by the interviewer, the social workers can cite a 'lesson learned' or a 'conclusion drawn'. The opportunity to have time to reflect upon their work is a further source of legitimation for the case against resource restraints. However, as an explanation of how experience 'works' it is unconvincing within the experiential repertoire, since the implication is that these lessons or conclusion are somehow stored for ready reference in the future. Such an analogy is more fitting to the rationalist repertoire than the experiential one, suggesting the appropriation of the relevant 'rule' from the reference bank for each situation met.

In the learning cycle proposed by Kolb (1984), experience and reflection are to be complimented by theorising and experimenting, for the purposes of turning experiences into learning. In these terms, what the experiential repertoire within the accounts would appear to do is to omit these two crucial processes. To measure these accounting repertoires against a model of learning which claims to

show how learning occurs, would be to demonstrate how the social workers have 'got it wrong'. One could argue that, accepting the social workers have learnt, they are misrepresenting how they have done so. However, this misses the point. These repertoires are accounting practices with rhetorical effects and cultural referents. They are not attempts by the social workers to produce formal models. On the other hand, the repertoires are at points insufficient to accomplish convincingly in the context of the interview a rhetoric of learning, and indeed they do 'collapse'.

What is being suggested is that the social workers, who construct good social work by combining their practice and competence within the formal and informal spheres of communicative action and moral regulation, employ the experiential repertoire as the dominant mode of accounting about their learning. It is being argued that this repertoire is construed by them as being in accord with the nature and conditions of the work, and so with the learning task and the learning environment as they have constructed it. Further, it has been suggested that these social workers proceed to utilise the rationalist repertoire at key points, primarily in order to legitimate their learning and in order to legitimate their case for improved opportunities for learning. It is in relation to legitimating (to a 'rationalist' audience) that the experiential repertoire threatens to collapse most tellingly. The common accounting device utilised here, 'reflection', cannot retrieve the deficiencies of the repertoire in this respect.

With legitimation at issue, the accounting difficulties with which the social workers struggle concern validation and evaluation of their learning. Their construction of 'good' social work leaves them with

principles such as 'openness', 'client-centredness', 'flexibility', 'creativity' which are central to their construal of good practice but which can appear extremely vague and liable to diverse interpretation. The meaningfulness of these terms as reference points for the work and its learning arises from membership groupings within the occupation. It is the formative place of teams and other working groups that provides the social workers with an alternative but complementary means of accounting about validation and evaluation.

Repertoires Of Learning: Dividing Informal And Formal Worlds

The learning task, for those who construct good social work largely by dividing the formal and informal worlds, arises from the principle of 'maximising the positives'. This is the option that they pursue on the basis of their construal of the 'bureaucracy', statutory powers and adverse working conditions. Hence, there is a great emphasis within their accounts of learning upon the limitations of their learning environment. Ms. Simpson is talking about her ability in understanding people, and being able to 'analyse what is going on in situations' [Ms. Simpson, 1]. About this aspect of her practice, she says -

Ms. Simpson: Every little instant in life adds to it. Every situation I've been in...Whatever your hobby is you pursue it, don't you? Well, I suppose my hobby, in a funny sort of way, is me and life and people around me.

[Ms. Simpson, 6]

She continues -

Ms. Simpson: It [being intuitive] feels as though it's an ability I was almost born with. And, therefore, it's not something...Nobody's given me a book about it. Nobody's given me a sudden experience which has opened my mind to it. I haven't actively gone out there to learn it in a very ordered, structured sort of a way. And, I'm not fully in control of it. I don't really understand completely how it works myself.

Ms. Simpson, 6]

By using the experiential repertoire, Ms. Simpson is able to render the learning of her ability to understand people as an 'internal' process. It isn't dependent upon books, or systematic study. Indeed, it feels as though it was something she was 'born with', and developed as a 'hobby'. An effect of this is to make her self-sufficient as a learner: the learning environment, no matter how adverse, is irrelevant. Hence, Ms. Simpson can portray herself as developing this ability and practising good social work whilst still being critical of her working and learning environment in other respects.

The lack of time to read is one common example. Ms. Simpson again -

Ms. Simpson: I don't read a lot now, I must admit...To my shame.

M.J.: Why to your shame?

Ms. Simpson: I feel I ought to. There's a whole area of potential learning that I'm denying. I get Social Work Today every week and it stays in its packet.

M.J.: You would believe that reading could improve your practice?

Ms. Simpson: It could give me ideas, I should think. Yes. I think it's possible that I could read something about somebody else's ideas. But, I don't have time to do that...That makes me feel a bit frustrated, a bit cross, I suppose. There's nothing you can do about it. It's a question of priorities, and there's other things that take priority over reading.

[Ms. Simpson, 13]

A certain quality of learning environment is necessary to sustain learning as construed within the rationalist repertoire, according to Ms. Simpson's accounting. For those social workers who construct an irresolvable tension between good social work and the district office setting, there is no contradiction here. Although 'ideally' they would like to be able to improve their practice by reading, and so on, this is not possible, and is part and parcel of the compromises that have to be made. Whilst the rationalist repertoire is employed to legitimate the case against adverse conditions, the accounting task is

not to show how the learning represented by this repertoire generates good practice: 'everyone knows' that reading is a good thing (especially the interviewer/academic trainer).

The issue this raises, however, is how far one can compromise before good social work and learning becomes lost. Ms. Moore attributes to herself an 'attitude of mind' -

Ms. Moore: Every time you take on a case at allocation, that is a new situation. You're having to try something new...If you've never had to work with somebody where their father's got multiple sclerosis, you're trying something new. You've got to learn very quickly about multiple sclerosis and what it means to that person, and how best you can work with them...I think that what I'm saying is that trying something new is something that's usually imposed on you by outside demands. You have to try something new because that's what the job involves.

[Ms. Moore, 12]

However, later in the interview, she says -

Ms. Moore: You can get into ruts with clients if you don't review and plan what you're doing. Very important to do plans of work, discuss them with clients, work out what you're going to do together. Otherwise, you can get into a rut. And, it's very much part of my saying, no, to allocations, and until I've got all my admin work done.

[Ms. Moore, 20]

Within this accounting, doing the job well necessitates continuing learning since each new case is 'a new situation': learning is intrinsic to good social work. There is some new knowledge required, or some new method to consider. Yet, the pressure of work is such, and the pressure to take too many new cases is such, that 'you can get into ruts with clients', acting in routinised ways. Invoking the rationalist repertoire in this instance, with its requirement to make a study of the novel aspects of each new case, alerts the social worker to the degree to which she may be over-compromising. Any talk of 'transferring learning', within this context, would most likely be perceived as rationalising poor practice and colluding with adverse learning conditions.

Ms. Richards begins the interview by constructing credibility for herself outside of her current role, defining her identity as someone who can understand others and whose life experiences aid her in this. She is unusual within the sample group in being the only interviewee to hold a Certificate in Social Services award and not a certificate of qualification in social work. She says she is 'bitter' at the way the organisation uses her in this respect, feeling that her course 'is not valued' [Ms. Richards, 21]. As a consequence, her work is primarily with older people. This leads her to believe that she is devalued twice over: allocated work that is of lower status within the agency; and, undertaking work that is complex and demanding but not recognised as such [Ms. Richards, 8]. The account of learning she gives shows the division and compromise entailed for her in constructing good social work: Ms. Richards talks of the expertise she has acquired but also is regretful of working in a setting where her learning is inhibited.

Ms. Richards: In this work, you have to be knowledgeable about matching resources to needs, and to be able to negotiate over needs. Building relationships with older people is a special skill, and of course they take longer to accept new ideas. If I can see a need that they might not be able to, I try to keep working with them and help them to see what might be better. I don't just drop them...I think your knowledge about older people evolves with time, from situations, courses, reading. You learn gradually. Sometimes, I go and seek out knowledge. I will go and talk with a Consultant, for example...But, I do think that life experience is terribly important, and your own personal experiences of death and bereavement.

[Ms. Richards, 8,9]

Ms. Richards has been working with older people for many years, and she herself is one of the older social workers interviewed. She has had more time than some to talk of her knowledge evolving. Yet, the 'evolutionary process' is not portrayed as a passive one: she has gone on courses, read, sought out experts. She does not seek to

explain how the various evolutionary ingredients combine to produce a good worker who can understand, match, negotiate, relate, communicate, and so on.

There is an irony in Ms. Richards utilising the term 'evolving' with its connotations of environmental adaptation.

Ms. Richards: I think the [professional training] course changed me. It made me think more deeply about what I was doing. It made me look at myself, and my life. It definitely gave me more confidence. I found it very exciting.

[Ms. Richards, 10]

However, she compares this unfavourably with her workplace -

Ms. Richards: I feel like I'm sinking into the mire here. As far as the establishment is concerned, I'm the smallest cog in the wheel. And, there's very little interest taken in what I do. I used to have lots of new ideas all the time, but none of them were taken up. Now, I just don't seem to have any new ideas at all. The establishment is a killer.

[Ms. Richards, 11]

The contrast between the course environment and the work environment as places for learning is starkly drawn. Ms. Richards expresses a sense of institutional discrimination against her, regarding her credentials and her work with older people. She sees herself as endeavouring to maintain the vitality about her work and her learning but increasingly this means fighting against the 'environment'. The concern she expresses is that she will soon find she doesn't 'have the energy' [Ms. Richards, 11].

Ms. Yew is both younger than Ms. Richards and has been doing social work for a shorter period of time. But for her also it is 'experience' which counts in learning. She considers the difference that being on a professional training course made to her in furthering her abilities in assessing people and situations.

Ms. Yew: What I learned was to look at techniques, to a certain extent, look at counselling skills, open-ended questions, how you would encourage people to talk to you, that sort of thing. Which, I probably might have done anyway, without being aware of it.

[Ms. Yew, 8]

She continues -

Ms. Yew: I think in terms of development, it's a continuous development process. I think the more experience you gain, should make you more accomplished in making assessments.

M.J.: What do you think the nature of that experience might need to be? Is it just doing it?

M.J.: Mostly it's just doing it. Mostly it's just meeting more people, having to do more assessments. It's also watching other people. Sometimes, it's doing joint assessments, doing different types of assessment work as well. And, I suppose, it's also doing it more quickly in a certain way. And, learning to trust your own judgement.

[Ms. Yew, 8]

One device for running the experiential and rationalist repertoires in parallel is to suggest that what the latter contributes is a labelling of abilities already formed through experience. The labelling makes a difference: it gives (professional) confidence; it enables 'conscious' deployment. However, it is secondary to the 'real' learning which occurs in 'real' life or 'real' work. This is the device by which Ms. Yew manages a place for both but a primary position for experience, which she goes on to emphasise.

Having endorsed the approach of 'learning by doing', Ms. Yew is then prompted to say how and where she would like to develop her assessment work, given the opportunity.

Ms. Yew: An immediate one that springs to mind for me is child abuse work. It seems to have a heavy responsibility to get it right. Not that I'm saying other assessments aren't important.

M.J.: What do you think needs to happen for you to improve your work in child abuse situations?

Ms. Yew: I think I'd need to do joint work with someone who is already experienced in that kind of work. I think I would need more time to take on particular assessments and then have the time to sit back with someone and look at what I've done and see whether there's some sort of agreement about that. So, basically, a kind of training time. Time to examine what I've been doing...There's a lot of talk about social workers being given training to do child abuse work but, basically, I think they're left to get on with it.

[Ms. Yew, 9]

In Ms. Yew's view, which would be shared by many other social workers, there is a 'heavy responsibility to get it right' in child protection work, yet they are 'left to get on with it'. 'Getting it right' could mean making the best assessment for the protection and welfare of the child, or it could mean following the correct procedures. Most likely, within the construction of good social work as given by these accounts, it means competence at doing both. Being 'left to get on with it' is consequently unfair. Yet, 'being left to get on with it' is just what Ms. Yew appeared to be describing when talking about learning through 'doing' assessments.

Ms. Yew gives a very clear description of how she could learn to do better assessments. It would be based upon 'real' work undertaken by her, but there would be a structured and deliberate approach. It would require time and the involvement of 'more experienced' staff, and so on. This is what Ms. Yew is saying she would ideally like in order to further her competence. The experiential repertoire as previously employed is no longer up to the task. However, the ideal is not forthcoming. Ms. Yew constructs a 'no win' situation in terms of both good practice and good learning.

The strategy that Ms. Drake evidences in the interview is find a statutory setting where she can divide her role such that there is an aspect in which good practice and good learning is (demonstrably) possible. 'I have found a job where I can explore some of this [working therapeutically with women] some of the time, and where I have a management which is willing to recognise that and use it' [Ms. Drake, 6]. The learning task becomes divided accordingly. Ms. Drake talks of how she has developed her competence in therapeutic work. She refers to, 'just how I've lived my life' [Ms. Drake, 5]; and, she

comments upon some of her experiences of being a woman and being in therapy herself.

When asked how she would develop further, she says -

Ms. Drake: There's two things that I want to do. One is, I need more of a theoretical understanding. This is an enormous problem in social work, that we don't have any kind of theoretical base. I need that. And, I also want to be able to work more with children. This winter I'm going on a course at the Tavistock about therapeutic communication with children.

[Ms. Drake, 7]

Alongside the statement concerning personal experience, Ms. Drake utilises the rationalist repertoire as she talks of improving her theoretical understanding and attending a course. She marks a divide: therapeutic work does have a theoretical base, and social work doesn't. She also defines herself in relation to it: 'I need that'.

As seen below, the employment of repertoires by Ms. Drake is consistent with how those who divorce the informal from the formal also account about their learning. The rationalist repertoire is in accord with the construction of good (therapeutic) practice around a defined theory and method. The concurrent employment of the experiential repertoire assures that such practice nevertheless is perceived to retain a central position for the person of the worker. The difference for Ms. Drake, of course, is that she is not working in a therapeutic setting. The setting in which she is based is not perceived as a conducive learning environment for developing this aspect of her practice; although, somewhat to her surprise, as she describes it, she has been allowed to go on the course. How can this be explained?

Ms. Drake: What happened was, my team leader, if he thinks things aren't going too well, he says, why don't you look for some training?...County Hall wrote back and said I could go...It was much easier than I thought. And that, I think, is about the climate about, how are we going to work with all the sexually abused kids? So, that's why I think they agreed to it.

[Ms. Drake, 7]

A fortunate, albeit unexpected, convergence is construed between Ms. Drake's particular work interests and the 'climate' at senior management level: therapeutic work with sexually abused children has become credit worthy. This creates an opportunity not so far away from the 'ideal' of which Ms. Yew speaks. It is the team leader who is seen to be instrumental in this, and in a crucial organisational position to facilitate maximising the positives of the situation. Had this opportunity not arisen for Ms. Drake, it is feasible that she may well have sought to change her job for one in which a more conducive environment existed for developing and practising this aspect of her work. In such a change of role and membership, she may well have aligned herself with those who divorce the informal and formal worlds of practice, and so construct a different learning task and construe for themselves a different learning environment.

Repertoires Of Learning: Divorcing Informal And Formal Worlds

Four interviewees define themselves as counsellors/therapists rather than social workers, though all have a professional social work qualification (Ms. Yale, Ms. Wright, Mr. Scott and Mr. Tate). None of them have been employed within district social services settings, and neither, according to their accounts, do they want to be. Their personal and 'social work' identities are associated with an occupational membership other than statutory social work. In their constructions of good social work, helping clients within the informal, discursive sphere is to be realised outside of any involvement on their part in the formal, institutional sphere.

Although two of them are employees of a mental health centre funded by public services (Ms. Wright and Ms. Yale), their affinity with this setting lies in its divorce from what they perceive to be the strangling effect of legal and administrative procedures. The two self-employed workers construe their occupational status as affording them the opportunity to keep their 'therapeutic' work as uncontaminated as possible from the intrusion of formal legal and procedural considerations.

The learning task for these counsellors centres upon their competence and development within dialogic, discursive, interactions with clients. They have principles which 'inform' their practice in this respect, and use 'theory talk' in a way not found in the accounts of other social workers. In this respect, their accounts of learning utilise the rationalist repertoire for there are seen to be therapeutic 'rules' upon which good practice can be based and evaluated. On the other hand, they all emphasise the importance of the 'person' of the counsellor in good practice, which includes the ethical/political stance adopted towards clients, and utilise the experiential repertoire in accounting for the personal learning they have undergone and which they bring to their work. They are all concerned to show that they are not subject to the 'therapies' which they espouse, but that these are now part and parcel of who they are. The difficulty for them in accounting for their learning again concerns a tension between the two interpretive repertoires. Here, however, the focus arises not so much from any link of these repertoires with the informal (everyday) and formal (institutional) worlds of practice, but rather from a link with the informal (relational) and formal (theory/method-based) aspects of themselves as practising counsellors.

According to Ms. Wright, the principles of non-directive counselling are simple.

Ms. Wright: It's about the punter has the power. They make the decisions. They decide the direction that you're going in. You're job is to reflect, to encourage, and to offer back stuff. So, the principles are very simple, and therefore, it's very easy to look at yourself and realise...Non-directive counselling on paper is a very simple thing to do, and a very simple thing to convey to other people. In practice, it's really, really difficult.

[Ms. Wright, 4]

The protocols of this model of counselling are, apparently, easily stated, and a version is stated to the interviewer. Ms. Wright knows them, and is involved in conveying them to others. Within the interview, she speaks of how these (therapeutic) principles fit in with her personal, political principles acquired through past work experiences [Ms. Wright, 2]. Developing practice becomes a matter of 'measuring' against these principles, and adjusting one's practices.

What makes it so difficult to do well?

Ms. Wright: The problem you come up against in non-directive counselling is that desire to negate the feelings, so, no, you haven't been a liar, no, no, it's okay. And actually, you've got to stick with it.

[Ms. Wright, 5]

In this account, being a good non-directive counsellor does not come naturally. It is a means of interaction quite different from everyday conversation. How might a development in accord with the principles be realised? Ms. Wright remarks -

Ms. Wright: Lots of work here is joint work...That's a very good way of learning, not necessarily because you talk about it afterwards. But, it's more like...If someone else is in the room, I am more controlled and more thoughtful really, more aware of myself as a professional. So, if I what I say to myself is, I'm here doing this piece of work with this client with this co-worker and were agreed that is was to be non-directive counselling, then I'm much more likely to really do it than if I'm on my own in the room, where you're less controlled, more private.

[Ms. Wright, 4]

Ms. Wright marks a difference in her accounting to the interviewer between 'doing it' and 'really doing it'. The latter requires a different persona, more thoughtful, more controlled, more professional. It is when working in public with one of her peers that this is more likely to be assured: direct accountability and mutual defining of good practice trigger the difference, talking about it afterwards may not even be necessary.

Ms. Wright shows her ability to account for her learning and practice by reference to a formulated model of practice which she can articulate and which can be employed to legitimate her work and confirm her identity. In so doing, she satisfies an accountability frame which requires a rationalist repertoire. Her dexterity proceeds beyond this, however, for she is also to demonstrate that her learning is not simply the outcome of assimilating formally derived models and knowledge. This is how she describes coming to an understanding of the significance of incest in women's lives, following a friend talking with her about the incest she had suffered.

Ms. Wright: My friend said her bit, and then I couldn't help hearing it all over the place, and because it came in such a rush, I was very lucky in a sense because I was very quick to pick up the themes, the guilt, the rejection, the so and so. Then, I looked for a couple of books to read, and they confirmed what I had learned by experience. I'd never been a person who reads the book and then does the work, always the other way around, invents a way of doing something and then just checks a book to see if there was something terribly wrong with what I'd done. So, I then read the book, got a lot of that stuff confirmed, then got scared by what I was doing, and touted around for supervision, and then discovered that everyone I went to for supervision were either stupid like the first man [who suggested it may be fantasy], or as ignorant as myself...I ended up with three of us meeting for a support group about incest and we meet when we need to...I think that I learn when it suits me, either because it suits me or because I am embarrassed into learning it.

[Ms. Wright, 6,7]

Firstly, she is emphasising the place of experience, and the rather unsystematic and fortuitous (or, otherwise) way in which learning is

prompted. It happened that she had this friend and this conversation with her. She may have read a book on 'incest' before but this would not in itself have contributed to her learning in a way which affected her practice. Secondly, she describes what she then 'did' with the experience, and portrays herself 'reflecting' upon it, 'theorising' it by reading about it, and then 'experimenting' in her practice together with the support of others who were intent on developing new methods in this area of work. Thirdly, she defines herself as a learner who starts with 'experimenting' rather than 'theorising'. One could see this extract as an example of the experiential learning cycle proposed by Kolb (1984), and evidence of an associated 'learning style'. This would certainly give it legitimacy in the accountability frame of professional education and learning, and indeed it is a 'convincing story' of an episode of learning. But, that is different from suggesting that the learning cycle tells us what was 'really happening' for Ms. Wright.

What Ms. Wright is accomplishing here is showing that for her 'books' and theorising do have a place, and that she is someone who does read and think about her work, and goes out of her way to discuss and consult about it with others. All of this is prefaced, however, with the emphasis upon the fact that she learns about that which is (experientially) meaningful for her; and, it is put in the context of informal processes in her personal life (friendship) and in her work life (support group). By implication, she is also saying that her role and setting provide the opportunities in which these elements can combine, justifying her location within such a conducive learning environment.

Ms. Wright, then, apparently does not find it so difficult to talk about how she has learned (though not necessarily to 'explain' it).

She can do so in a way that is not evident in the accounts of the previous social workers. Yet, this is exactly what is required of her given her constructing of credibility and good social work. Divorcing the informal and formal spheres of practice 'narrows down' the learning task, and makes it one that can be 'theorised' from methods and concepts developed within counselling and therapeutic literature. Moreover, the work is conducted in a setting which is construed as conducive to good practice, unlike that perceived to exist within district social services offices. It seems that for these social workers, not to be able to talk about learning, closely allied as it is with counselling in any case, or to show that they have 'reflected' upon their own learning, would be to threaten their credibility and undermine their identity and membership alignment.

The practice of Mr. Scott is as a family therapist in a clinic setting, on a free-lance basis. He talks of how 'systemic thinking' is more than a theory to him: it is what he has experienced. When invited to speak about how he has learned this work, he lists a number of factors, linked with the opportunities that his present working arrangements and working environment offer him.

Mr. Scott: I must have spent hours watching others working, from behind the [one way] screen, and there are some very experienced practitioners at the clinic. You talk with them about what happened, what they were trying to do, how well they thought it went. I think that's been very important. My practice has been observed as well, of course, and you talk over each interview with the team and with your supervisor. We also try to watch a lot of the video recordings we make of the interviews, and give each other feedback. I've done a lot of reading, too. I enjoy reading generally, but I do enjoy therapy books. I make notes, and use things later...There's workshops. I like the ones which offer a clear approach. I find them the most useful. I do workshops as well, and that concentrates your mind. Thinking about it, a big turning point for me was when I became a senior member of the clinic, being responsible for supervising others, I've learned a lot from doing that.

[Mr. Scott, 6,7]

Mr. Scott remarks in his interview that he does not know how to begin thinking about taking children into care. He shows he does know how to think about working therapeutically with families: he can refer to various methodologies and working practices, and articulate techniques and issues. Similarly, in respect of learning, he can refer to a series of learning methods upon which family therapists draw, and which are available to them through the elaborate working arrangements that are part of their therapeutic method. Moreover, as a supervisor and trainer of others, he is also a representative of those methods. Mr. Scott outlines a clear and systematic approach by which he can acquire a delineated competence. His employment of the rationalist repertoire is consistent in this respect with his construal of family therapy as offering a theoretically based method for practice. It is with regard to the salience of this theory for him that his accounting turns to experiential rhetoric.

Where the experiential repertoire is not focussed is upon creative engagement with families. In order to portray his learning as structured and organised, Mr. Scott suspends consideration of this aspect and construes practice as the skillful application of therapeutic rules. In so doing, the therapy he is defining is more akin to the professional hegemony with which he did not wish to be associated when constructing credibility at the outset of the interview. It is further into the interview, when he is talking more about being a senior member of the clinic, that Mr. Scott introduces the importance of 'being imaginative' in the work [Mr. Scott, 9]. The suggestion appears to be that, once one has 'mastered' the rules, then there is a 'responsibility to be creative' [Mr. Scott, 9]. It is at this juncture that the tension between the two repertoires becomes greater. Mr. Scott qualifies his resolution of it by saying that it

is his 'personal belief' that 'one has to build a repository of reading and watching good practice before one can learn it and then use one's imagination' [Mr. Scott, 9]. By stating this as a 'personal belief', he recognises others may not be convinced by his account of learning at this point.

Mr. Tate constructs good practice by contrasting the 'client-centred' work he is able to do with the 'agency-centred work' he sees in social services offices [Mr. Tate, 5]. He presents his conducting of this client-centred work in a 'person-to-person' manner rather than a detached, professional manner [Mr. Tate, 1]. His constructing of good practice, therefore, rests upon certain human qualities and the use of the 'whole person'. Asked to consider connections between personal life events and work life events, Mr. Tate's response is 'everything' [Mr. Tate, life path]. Similarly, asked to consider how he has learned to do counselling in the way he does, he replies that this is like asking him how he has become the person he has: all his experiences, work and personal, have a part to play [Mr. Tate, 4]. Mr. Tate makes it clear from early on in the interview that to present a rationalist account of his learning would be contrary to all he has to say about people, growth and therapy.

Mr. Tate claims that a holistic, experiential perspective permeates his thoughts and practices as a counsellor and person. He extends this to learning, since for him doing therapy in this way cannot be separated from learning. He says, 'you can only help other people to grow to the extent that you can grow within' [Mr. Tate, 8]. In this respect, he has a developed facility in his utilisation of the experiential repertoire. It is an accounting practice that he not only employs but for which he provides a legitimation: it is

consistent with his espousal of Eastern philosophy, which simultaneously would not give primacy to a rationalist approach. Hence, Mr. Tate could be seen to be constructing a (rival) 'accountability frame' in which to render his account.

Compared with those social workers who construct good social work in relation to both the informal and formal spheres, those who define themselves as 'counsellors' and who work in non-statutory settings are constructing a less complex learning task that has to do with competence within the informal sphere. The task is different and so is the accountability frame. Their 'learning talk' varies accordingly. In so far as they construct good practice using principles derived from theories and methods of therapy, they utilise the rationalist repertoire to demonstrate their acquisition of skills and knowledge. Meanwhile, the effect of the experiential repertoire is to counter the portrayal of detached professionalism and to highlight the importance attached to personal experience and understanding. 'Learning' is taken to be intrinsic to the practice in which they are engaged, such that continuing credibility as counsellors rests upon showing that they can 'do learning talk'. Ultimately, this can include setting the frame in which the demonstration of 'learning talk' is to be determined. Presently, accountability for counselling and therapy would appear to be less contested and less regulated, publically and professionally, than that for mainstream social work.

Repertoires Of Learning And Specialisation

The learning task can be 'narrowed down' not only by divorcing the informal and formal dimensions. Whilst retaining these dimensions,

specialisation can be seen to contain them within a certain band of activity. Occupation of specialist roles can be justified on the basis that competence can be developed within such a band. However, the complexity of the learning task in respect of relating the informal with the formal remains, together with the issues of how the learning task within this 'band' stands in relation to social work around it.

Mr. Kilroy, who works in a hospital, paediatric medical team, talks of how he views his learning upon his entry to the role.

Mr. Kilroy: It's not as if I've had any formal training for it, in the sense of..I suppose, if you like, the preparation for it [working with parents with a handicapped child] had been dealing with situations of bereavement and children coming into care...So, it was building on previous experience and knowledge.

[Mr. Kilroy, 10]

Occupying a specialist post, in a sensitive area of work; Mr. Kilroy recognises that he might be expected to have had some 'formal training' in it, and the opportunity to acquire some specialist knowledge and skills through such training. Adopting the rationalist repertoire would be a legitimation of the specialist work, affirming that concentrating upon a limited area of practice brings the benefits of identifiable competences that go with it. However, Mr. Kilroy makes it clear that this is not how he will be accounting for his learning. Instead, he refers to earlier work experiences, suggesting that he can build upon them: work in the specialist post is not totally different from previous work. How this learning is 'transferred' is not made explicit, but establishes Mr. Kilroy as more than a novice in his new job. 'Transfer of learning' emerges as a rhetorical device which accomplishes a rationalist gloss.

Mr. Kilroy continues -

Mr. Kilroy: I think one of the key things is curiosity, in a way. One of the attractions for me about difficult situations,

is that, although they're difficult, they're also times when people are much more honest, forthright, and you can have a conversation at a much deeper level, much quicker, and you don't feel like you're communicating about trivial things. That's part of the attraction of that kind of work.

[Mr. Kilroy, 10]

The attraction for Mr. Kilroy, then, is not the acquisition of pre-packed competences, but the opportunity to communicate with clients (and potentially other workers) at a 'deeper level' in 'difficult situations'. Add 'curiosity', and this account of practice becomes an account of learning.

Mr. Kilroy: I've done some reading, and I've listened to other people, and I've had conversations with people about situations they've dealt with, but I think the strongest driving force has been an interest in what you actually learn from people.

[Mr. Kilroy, 10]

Learning within the specialist post is construed in terms of the particular work situations it provides which can be vehicles for learning. By accounting in this way, Mr. Kilroy shows that 'specialisation' can indeed be seen to produce good practice but that this need not necessarily be put down to rationalist learning. The fact that he has not had any formal training does not, therefore, mean that his competence is in question. Learning from 'people' rather than 'trainers' is emphasised.

Working in a specialist position over a period of years is associated by Mr. Roberts in that area of work, but the expertise is spoken of as deriving from the experience of doing the work rather than the opportunity to make a study of it.

Mr. Roberts: For me, it has been important to know a lot of handicapped adults and to know what they get out of life...I think, as a starting point, for me personally, to be able to put into some sort of perspective, working with very young children...Most parents are in the situation of not knowing how able their child is going to be in the future, and to some extent...As far as the child is concerned, the experience that I have of a fair number of older people of varying degrees of handicap, and varying degrees of getting enjoyment out of life, I would say that one of the things I would be sharing with parents would be, whilst very much acknowledging their hopes and

aspirations for their child, sharing the fact that handicapped people are able to receive and to give in ways which can be important. I think that carries far more weight, really from the basis of personal experience than from an academic or philosophical idea.

[Mr. Roberts, 8]

In his account, Mr. Roberts directly contrasts the communicating of 'personal knowledge' (Polanyi, 1958) with formal knowledge. It is the opportunity to build up in a specialist role the former rather than the latter upon which his rhetoric rests. He relates this with the unique experience of each family.

Mr. Roberts: My tactic would be, yes, okay you are worried, let's look at what you're worried about..What I feel I've learned is that there is no correlation. There's no easy equation between [worry and] the degree of handicap of the child or adult, or social class of the parent. That, for every family and for every individual it's a unique experience which they have to come to their own solution, and that there isn't an overall right or wrong solution. The frustration of the services is being able to offer sufficient options to people.

[Mr. Roberts, 8]

The ability to engage with parents in the uniqueness of their experience, and yet to bring his personal/work experience of handicap to bear, is spoken of by Mr. Roberts within the experiential repertoire. He differentiates himself from other professionals: 'sometimes it feels to me as if they have a model of a parent' [Mr. Roberts, 9]. However, when it comes to the issue of working with the frustrations of mediating between the unique experience of each family and the limited range of service options on offer, Mr. Roberts seems unable to take his 'learning talk' further.

Towards the conclusion of the interview, he comments -

Mr. Roberts: It feels as if it's been a process of absorption. Having thought about it, what it feels like is absorbing influences from a large variety of different things - people, books, circumstances - and making my own personal sense of that, and of putting it back into the situations that I've worked in.

[Mr. Roberts, 21]

This rhetoric justifies him as an experienced and committed social worker, and a practitioner who has progressed over the duration of his

social work career. This kind of statement is satisfactory to affirm his identity. As far as a researcher/professional trainer is concerned, it would seem to leave more questions than answers. But, perhaps that is the import of the accounts as they reach this point: these are questions for others to grapple with if they should want to do so. His version is good enough for the purposes of him doing his job well.

Repeatedly within the accounts of those in specialist roles, it is the experiential repertoire that is invoked as these social workers talk about their learning. Despite the formalisation of specialist areas of work (in literature on bereavement, adoption, mental handicap, for example), the accounts do not contain reference to the systematic acquisition of working practices. This is not to say that the social workers do not show they can refer to certain 'authoritative' works and principles (worry work, permanency principle, normalisation, for example). Maintaining their credibility and demonstrating they are good, knowledgeable practitioners, these specialists workers do refer. The purpose would seem to lie there, however, rather than in 'explaining' how they have become competent. As with Mr. Roberts, they present formalised versions of practice rather as background influences which are (somehow) incorporated into the work.

A difference between these accounts of learning and those of the district social services workers is that there is little criticism of the learning environment. It is as if specialisation brings with it its own learning opportunities. Rather as the social workers' accounts concentrate more on their occupying specialist roles in the first place than on constructing good social work within them, the presentation that specialisation equates with good social work

presumes a certain quality of learning environment exists. The 'stories' might well have been different had the interviews been focussed upon a discrete group of specialist workers, and not with specialists in the minority amongst largely mainstream, district social services employees.

Constructing A Place For Teams In Learning

In first readings of the interviews, I was perplexed by the relatively small amount of 'learning talk' there appeared to be. As described in the introduction to this chapter, it became possible to make sense of this once I began to consider the interviews as productions of accounts with specific, and difficult, 'work to do'. I was also perplexed, though not especially surprised, to find that there was a good deal of 'team talk'. I was aware of the importance teams had assumed in other research (Parsloe, 1981; Pithouse, 1987), yet it was not immediately obvious why there should be this amount of talk about teams in interviews about learning.

Making sense of these two observations goes hand in hand. Having indicated how the social workers employ an experiential repertoire in their accounts of learning, one which emphasises a significance for them of informal processes within learning, it is possible now to consider how they utilise the place of the team in describing further the nature of these informal processes. Again, they do not attempt to show how these informal processes 'work' to produce learning, but they do show that in relation to the learning tasks of good social work, and the learning environments in which it is practised, their membership within a team has an important place.

Before looking at the place afforded teams within the accounts, it is necessary to recognise that the empirical data for this research derives from interviewing individuals, alone. The interviews do not tell us 'what a team is really like', they provide accounting practices and discourse about teams. This is the focus of the analysis, and it would be inconsistent to compare the descriptions given by members of the same team with a view to ascertaining a 'correct' version of that team and, hence, the 'distortions' of an interviewee.

There is no simple equation between the different forms of accounting used in constructing good social work, and team membership: different forms of accounting are adopted by members of the same team. This research is not designed to search out any causal links between teams and learning. It is the place that 'team talk' assumes in the constructing of learning that is of interest. In utilising the experiential repertoire, the social workers talk of how their experiences have contributed to their learning and development. The nature of these experiences, and their 'processing', is not portrayed as purely an internal matter. They refer to the ways in which they engage with their colleagues about the diverse experiences they have had, or are having. There is a public, informal processing, shared and negotiated understandings are generated in making sense of their experiences. In this sense, the team could be viewed as a 'local production cohort' of practical reasoning and practical action (Livingston, 1987; Pithouse, 1987).

It was seen earlier that Ms. French attributes a lot of her learning directly to her team: 'I think a lot of my knowledge is that I work

with a very strong team, whose work I respect and from whom I've learned an incredible amount' [Ms. French, 8]. Asked what they do when they are 'at a loss' in a work situation, the social workers invariably said that they would go and talk with somebody, perhaps their supervisor, but more often than not a team colleague. This may seem to be a somewhat obvious answer, but it is worth reflecting that they could have replied, for example, that they would 'go and read it up'. The knowledge that they show themselves to seek out (and as able to seek out) is local, cultural knowledge, most usually past on as oral tradition through conversational practices.

Ms. Atkins says -

Ms. Atkins: What do I do about it [being at a loss]? I always find someone to ask. When you start doing duty, there are lots of occasions when you don't know what to do...They always think of something that you can't. Almost always. Or, just the fact that you've voiced it sometimes makes the answer for you.

[Ms. Atkins, 24]

Ms. Moore says -

Ms. Moore: I talk to colleagues when I don't know what to do. Have you got any ideas? This is what I've done, this is how far I've got, this is the brick wall I've reached. Have you been in this position? What have you tried?

[Ms. Moore, 21]

Ms. Orton comments -

Ms. Orton: I always like to listen and learn from other people what they do. I always say to them, what did you do then? And then see what their way of doing it was.

[Ms. Orton, 18]

Ms. Weedon talks of the 'informal learning' she associates with teams.

Ms. Weedon: You talk informally with your colleagues. We all do that. You come back and you relay this happened today, I don't know what to do. You get that informal learning from each other...Probably a lot of learning goes on without you realising. And, a lot will depend on the people in your office...I think you tend to talk with whoever happens to be in the room at the time. But, there are certain things, where you've got colleagues who are particularly skilled in one area and you seek that person out to ask advice on something, maybe mental health, or a child who seems deaf, or something.

[Ms. Weedon, 11]

Teams, then, assume an important place within the experiential repertoire both as a source of experiences and a means of processing them. Members are described as sharing their day to day experiences, talking about recent happenings or asking for advice. This is occurring informally, a taken for granted feature of the working environment, and, by implication, the learning environment. In accord with the experiential repertoire, there is not an 'explanation' of how this produces learning. It is not that 'teams' are being put forward by the social workers as a mechanism of learning: they do not theorise about their membership. Rather, the social workers are showing that in order to talk about their learning, and particularly their learning within an experiential repertoire, that they have to talk about what happens in regard to teams and their relations with colleagues.

Here, Ms. West instantiates this when she talks about how being a member of a team provides a basic competence within the work.

Ms. West: [Changing work settings] taught me a lot about knowing how much of your skills are based on simply knowing things like procedures. When you take a referral, whether your team is wanting to deal with that particular problem or not, and how you respond to that initial call. So, I wandered around in a total state of chaos...It taught me that without having been out of the job at all, but changing your work setting, how very deskilled and incompetent you can become. Immediately, all the forms and all the safety bits that you automatically have around you are taken away. All the props you know are replaced by others that you don't.

[Ms. West, 28]

The 'occupational socialisation' which occurs within a team is referred to in relation to competence within the formal world of procedure and administration. Familiarity with everyday working procedures and with administrative detail is emphasised as the basis for feeling that one knows where one is, what one is doing and that

one can indeed do anything of competence. Construing herself in the 'novice' state, Ms. West wants to know what the 'rules' are (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). The working practices are discovered through membership, however, rather than through any 'rule book' which could be read upon arrival.

An instance of how the development of practice is seen to occur can be found in the use of examples available within the team. The examples are portrayed as 'exemplars' for team members as to how to approach particularly troublesome situations. Ms. Orton recalls a situation.

Ms. Orton: There was a colleague, actually, who did something. I was quite impressed with what she did and I thought I'll try this on my load of kids because children keep saying they're going to run away, they don't like it, and they do it, and you get faced with, what shall I do with them now? But this person I tried to copy, she kept on saying, well, she's going back, she's got to stay there. So, I thought, right, that's a good thing to say to my lot that do this...Instead of trying to please the children all the time, I thought, right, I will be quite definite that there's nowhere else for them

[Ms. Orton, 18]

Seeing 'this' situation as 'that' one (Schon, 1983, ch. 5), exemplars work to convey principles of good practice within the moral regulation of clients lives.

Other team members can be perceived as themselves embodying something important about practice. Ms. West again, talking of the influence she ascribes to someone with whom she worked -

Ms. West: I had a colleague...and I tried to emulate her attitude rather than other things about her. She was just one of those incredibly relaxed people, very good at her job, very good with people generally. And, I used her as a model. She was a very motherly person, but it was this wonderful relaxation she brought with her, where all around her were breaking up, she'd sail in and calm everything, just with her attitude. So I tried to, as far as I could, be like her. Learn how to relax a bit, more laid back about work.

[Ms. West, 10]

And here is Mr. Short, regarding his former team leader -

Mr. Short: I think why I feel so strongly about wardship is that the experiences I've had of wardship have been very

positive, and the reason that they've been so positive is because of Don's approach, and his knowledge. And, when I'm preparing for court now, I find myself mentally doing the things to prepare myself that Don helped me to do the first time.

[Mr. Short, 10]

Now that Mr. Short has himself being doing the work for some time, he finds that he has become a person perceived to have 'experience'.

Mr. Short: We did a joint visit, myself and a colleague, and after we finished I said, sorry, I seemed to do all the talking. We should have talked about what we were going to do before we were with the family, I'm sorry, I just took over. And she said, I did feel I was being a bit quiet, but I just felt like I was just picking up your approach.

[Mr. Short, 11]

As members of a community of inquirers, creating, developing and sustaining their shared understandings and common interests, the social workers show how they talk with, watch and listen to, their colleagues and find ways of making order out of the work.

In the everyday discussion and sharing of experiences, the social workers find they are drawing upon their colleagues and supervisors for advice, reassurance, ideas and support. The 'wisdom' of team members is appreciated when striving to make sense of chaotic or bizarre situation, and judging what to do about them. Ms. Drake recalls a phone call she had from a young woman with two small children.

Ms. Drake: I said, I'm sorry, I can't come today. I'll come on Monday. And she said, if you're not here this afternoon, I'm going to throw the kids off the multi-storey. So I found Steve, and I said, Phillipa says if I don't go and see her this afternoon, sh's going to throw the kids off the multi-storey. And he said, oh, she's so dramatic isn't she, don't think about it any more before Monday. And I thought, you fool, meaning me. It was very helpful to me for somebody to say that. It was a good thing I found him because otherwise I would have carried it all weekend, because I wasn't going.

[Ms. Drake, 10]

Yet, as discussed previously, these social workers are not passive receptors of team traditions. They show that they are aware of the

possibility of 'cosiness' within teams, and collusion between team seniors and themselves. Take Ms. Simpson, and her non-complacent attitude, firstly towards 'experience' -

Ms. Simpson: There have been occasions when I have walked out and thought I made the same mistake again, because I didn't remember. What I remember is that I made that mistake before, and it all comes back to me, but I don't see it coming. I'm not learning from the experience.

[Ms. Simpson, 18]

And secondly, towards colleagues and supervisors -

Ms. Simpson: It's no use asking colleagues. They only hear what you tell them, so I wouldn't pay much attention to whether they thought you were doing it alright because they only hear what I say.

M.J.: How about supervisors?

Ms. Simpson: I get positive feedback but I don't know if it's just morale boosting. I have a suspicion it is.

[Ms. Simpson, 2]

Similarly, Ms. Tanner show that she is aware that not all informal discussion within the team is commendable.

Ms. Tanner: Another thing about mistakes is something that happened, about rumour and conjecture. Because, I remember discussing a case with somebody, no it wasn't a case, it was a situation in the office with somebody, and saying what the possibilities might have been, and then that got round that that was fact, and it was something I didn't normally do but we'd got into one of those conversations.

[Ms. Tanner, 14]

However, the response of the social workers, recognising these processes, is not to retreat from team members but to commend the advantages of more contact, and more public contact. The value of 'jointwork', for example, is attested to frequently within the accounts.

Mr. Parry: I can remember it was something like eighteen months before I did any joint work. So, I was floundering about and when I did have this experience of working with other people, that was a good experience.

[Mr. Parry, 7]

Ms. Smith: Beginning to work with Susan, when we were doing groupwork with sexual abuse victims, I remember someone telling me about her and how everything had to be done just right, and I'm sure she heard lots of things about me. But it's been good for me because I've really got to know Susan now, and how she

works with people. And we talk with each other about what we've done, of course, and you really feel you are learning about yourself because you're getting some feedback from somebody who's been with you and seen how you work.

[Ms. Smith, 15]

Social workers may or may not equate their teams with being conducive to continuing learning and good practice. As seen earlier, for Mr. James it is the diversity of people within a team, and their willingness to acknowledge difference, to which he attributes the possibility of flexibility within local authority social work.

Mr. James: I've found those requirements are very flexible. Maybe I'm just fortunate to work in a team that has a great deal of experience and a wide background...It makes a very lively, testing team, which I quite thrive on, really.

[Mr. James, 6]

He construes his continuing learning and his ability to remain innovative within his work as resting, in part at least, upon this lively, testing team. A little further into the interview, he reflects -

Mr. James: It may be that, if it is beneficial to be open to change, you must be in an environment where that change can be acceptable...If I was with a group that all held to the same view, it would make change very difficult and very uncomfortable. It allows me to be open, that sort of environment.

[Mr. James, 10]

Mr. James thus associates the nature of the team, in terms of its membership and processes, with the development of its individual members.

Ms. Orton also shows this association in her account but by presenting her current team in a different light.

Ms. Orton: I think one of the worst things you've got to do...work with your colleagues. It's far harder than working with the clients. I think the people who keep their heads down and get on with their work win far more than the very...people who think they're going to come in and change the office. This is a place that anyone who's done social work for quite a long time...And, you do realise that you're in a bureaucracy, that you can't rock the boat, because if you rock the boat you're not

liked. You get a name for yourself, so we all realise that we just plod on...I think I've become extremely stale.

[Ms. Orton, 15]

The way in which a team is construed as conducive or not to continuing development becomes a vital issue in the accounts of some social workers regarding the possibilities for good practice and their remaining within their role. This relates to the way in which teams are construed to operate in the face of adverse conditions, or to contribute to them.

Disruptions within a team, due to organisational changes, or members arriving and leaving can mean that the team is perceived to be no longer effective in supporting and developing working practices.

Ms. Yew: The team I've been in, because of reorganisation, has had a lot of adjustments to make. It's had a completely new management team, different styles of management to absorb, and feelings of resentment because certain people didn't get the appointments that the team would have liked. It's still resolving itself. It's still resolving itself.

[Ms. Yew, 11]

She continues -

Ms. Yew: Individually, members of the team have been very supportive, and they are very supportive to one another, but...the actual dynamics of the team itself were not positive.

[Ms. Yew, 12]

The team is presented as having become an 'individualist' one (Parsloe, 1981) as a consequence of circumstances external to it. The issue for Ms. Yew was 'not so much what I was missing, as what I was getting, which was just these strong feelings about what had happened...the team had problems, within itself, which were adding to personal problems' [Ms. Yew, 12]. The combination of personal difficulties and a lack of 'positive dynamics' in the team are associated with 'particularly awful' times [Ms. Yew, 12]. Troubles within the working group, together with the troubles within clients' lives, and on top of that troubles at home, is one of the 'worst case scenarios' for the social workers. Not being in a 'positive' team may

be construed as a deciding factor in changing roles, as Ms. Weedon relays.

Ms. Weedon: The team I was in, there was one chap with chest pains and the doctor told him, it's your job, and he was obviously depressed as well. Morale was low. Then, of course, I had a choice. That team was having problems, some personality problems as well, which was affecting the whole team, and I had a choice of jobs. I could have stayed in that team, but I didn't. I moved to a different team. So, I made a conscious decision to leave. For me, I was lucky that I had the opportunity to get away from this very pressurised, stressful team.

[Ms. Weedon, 18]

The team depicted by Ms. Drake is one in which there is seen to be a necessary camaraderie that supports her and protects the quality of her work from being taken over by contingencies and crises.

Ms. Drake: This is an office where I can say, so and so ran away from a mother and baby home in Bristol. I've found her, she needs to go back. I'm not going. I can't. Somebody else has got to do it. And, I've never yet had to experience where anybody gave me a hard time for it.

[Ms. Drake, 11]

This version of a 'collective' team (Parsloe, 1981) is seen in the account that Mr. Short gives of his experience. This is how he describes his induction into the 'group ethos'.

Mr. Short: Looking back, I can see that I was groomed into the group ethos, 'duty work is important'. Everything you do, take responsibility for it. The team takes responsibility for their work, and if you don't live up to it, you're going to be told about it. When you do good work, people are going to tell you as well.

[Mr. Short, 7]

With common purposes and interdependence, the team is portrayed as a place supporting and promoting standards of good practice and holding members to account. Intrinsic to this, it is conceived as a place of vitality and energy. The moral regulation of members practices is at once controlling and creative: it is presented as an environment conducive to learning.

Mr. Walker refers to his team in this respect.

Mr. Walker: Social workers individually evolve a style and I think teams evolve a style as well...One of the biggest things about doing social work is confidence...And, that actually takes a lot of building up. That actually means that you need some sort of common goal. There are certain bits that you all agree with...You look at a team that's got a high number of turnover of staff, putting staff into areas that they're not confident in, they've got no knowledge of all those local resources and all the rest of it, and the number of kids in care will go up...People's risk-taking with that type of work requires knowledge, experience and confidence. Of all those, I think confidence is the most important. If you as a team seem to have some common written or unwritten goal, you actually want to reduce and prevent kids coming into care, then you will achieve it and you will achieve it better as a group.

[Mr. Walker, 5]

The rhetoric here again places learning into the context of group processes rather than individual ones. Ideas such as support and confidence are understood in relation to common purposes and mutual interests rather than as the attributes of individuals alone.

Ms French, who is in the same team as Mr. Walker, uses the same rhetoric.

Ms. French: I think the first thing I needed [to undertake high risk, preventative work] was colleagues in whom I had confidence, their resources or knowledge or what, I don't know. But, it was actually confidence. People who backed me up. People who were supportive. I don't think you can take risks without that.

[Ms. French, 3]

Mr. Walker and Ms. French are presenting a team that is a supportive and discursive forum for its members, one of confidence, trust, respect and so on. One could speculate that the qualities of which they talk reflect those discussed by Smale and Tuson (1988), for example, concerning effective teams. However, the purpose of these considerations is not to focus upon teams as organisational units but upon the invocation of teams within the accounts of learning. These social workers are demonstrating that their talk about learning, which they place within an experiential repertoire, calls upon the construction and rhetoric of teams. The team constructed here is spoken of as having refined its working practices to the point of

articulating 'policies', regarding the team approach towards maintaining children at home. The fact that the team is seen to be operating in this way is integral to the way in which the social workers are presenting their learning, as members of a community with distinctive practices.

The team, then, is portrayed in the accounts alongside the experiential repertoire as sustaining and developing good practice. Within the discussion, sharing, catharsis and challenge, the social workers talk of the evaluative work that occurs, the regulating aspects of team membership and the issue of standards. The team 'policy' regarding the use of substitute care is portrayed as one which belongs to the team, the consequence of their experiences, informal and formal discussions and negotiations. Its meaning for them in practice is embedded within the team and its relations between members, with the neighbourhood it serves, with contingent agencies and professionals, and with the 'managers'. They may well be able to reference it with literature and research studies (and might well do in different interactional contexts), but, for the purpose of accounting about learning and good practice, these are subordinate to the experiential value placed upon teams.

SUMMARY

This chapter has shown the ways in which the social workers did talk about their learning. Predominantly the learning that they presented was of an experiential nature, having to do with learning on the job, or learning through life, and learning from and with colleagues. Talk

about learning alters according to the nature of the learning task construed ('good' practice) and the perception of the learning environment (the conditions of the workplace). For those who seek good social work in the combining of the informal and formal dimensions of practice, the experiential repertoire is the dominant mode of accounting about learning. It is consistent with way in which good social work is conceived. Whereas, those who seek to divorce the informal sphere from the formal, and construct good practice, for example, according to their therapeutic work with clients, utilise the rationalist repertoire to demonstrate their acquaintance with therapeutic models and principles.

The rationalist repertoire emerges as that employed at points where a case for learning is to be legitimated, for example, to managers or professional educators. Similarly, for those who construct good practice by dividing the formal and informal worlds of practice, often demonstrating that this is a necessary accommodation to adverse working conditions, utilise the rationalist repertoire as a means of demonstrating how those conditions (learning environments) have to change if they are to learn. What is seen, therefore, is a tension between these repertoires. The experiential form of accounting is rendered more fitting to the pursuit of good practice but it is unable to legitimate or demonstrate learning.

It is at this point that the social workers do not 'pull off' an adequate account of learning. The experiential repertoire represents something important to them but ultimately is unsatisfactory, and, though the rationalist repertoire is more convincing, it is also more removed from their construction of the learning task that faces them. The issue has to do with, more convincing to whom? The interviews

were with a researcher who is also an academic trainer, and comes from the world of professional education. It is the formal world of social work that provides the accountability frame for the interviews, and that frame is one of formal rationality. Attempting to pull off a rationalist account speaks to the powerfulness of the formal world of social work in shaping the construction of learning. That the attempt does not come off, and that it is contrary to a version of learning that would be consistent with the social workers' construction of good practice, leads us to consider the implications for the social relations of social work. This is the theme for the conclusion to the study.

CONCLUSION: SOCIAL WORK AS 'PRACTICE'

This thesis has been about learning to practice social work well. It has been undertaken during a period of major re-organisation of training and education in social work which has been concerned similarly with learning for good practice. The thesis focusses upon the social workers themselves and their accounts of achieving good practice. The discussions, debates, proposals and papers which aim to determine the shape of social work education in the next decade have not concerned themselves with such accounts. This is a serious omission. The 'voices' of practitioners themselves need to be heard.

At the outset of the thesis, it was put that the preferred reading of social work would be, first and foremost, as a practice. This has been sustained by the analysis of the accounts given by social workers, and it is that reading which has been a thread throughout the whole thesis. It is fitting that I should conclude the study, therefore, by considering its implications. I believe that the failure to read social work as practice undervalues the accomplishments of its practitioners; results in formulations of their activity which are at best puzzling to practising social workers, and at worst debilitating; and, contributes to misguided policies in relation to education, training and development. I shall first review the significance of reading social work as practice before considering the implications that this research suggests would follow from adopting such a position. Finally, I shall reflect on the import of all this given major new legislature within social work.

My first concern is to emphasise the accomplishments of these social workers. Social work is embattled and contested. It seems 'fair game' for politicians, the media and academics, all of whom have their criticisms and their views as to how social work ought to change, or indeed, disappear. The work itself involves the most dire, difficult and distressing human situations within the community. Being invited to talk about their job and how they've learned to do it well, in the midst of strong criticisms and scepticism, gives the social workers much work to do in the interviews if they are to vindicate themselves and their occupation in an intelligible fashion. Their accounts show how they do pass themselves off as credible, but only by reference to an elaborate interplay of identity, role, setting and personal biography. Their constructions can only 'work' through dealing with the cultural particulars of their trade and its relations to clients, other professionals and powerful institutions. The ensemble of social relations within which they constitute their credibility can be seen in terms of the formal worlds of policy, law and procedure, and the informal, everyday worlds of their clients.

The social workers do not only work to establish their credentials as regards the standards and quality of the work they do, and the social work to which they are committed. In accounts of learning to do the work well, the ensemble of social work is such that much rests upon providing versions of what constitutes good practice. Furthermore, the social workers' identity (personal as well as work) and continuing commitment to, and membership within, the occupation are inextricably related to the pursuit of good practice. It is important to their identities that they can define themselves as helping others; and, they locate themselves in distinctive ways in relation to the possibilities for helping when working within the formal dimension of procedures and rules.

Social workers are not a homogenous group and the divisions and differences concerning their occupation are internal as well as external. The constructions of good social work instantiates these cultural particulars too, and displays the different relations that are forged between the formal and informal world in satisfying the principle of helping. The evaluative and moral quality of social work is a feature of the accounts, and of the definitions and constructions invoked by the interviewees. In achieving the constructions of good practice, then, these social workers show how they manage in differing but innovative ways the tension between formal and informal spheres of moral regulation and communicative action.

It is in talking directly about learning that the social workers show themselves to be on less sure ground. As they manage the complexities of credibility and good practice, and the processes of organising around these, the social workers are situating their learning as being that which enabled them to do this. Yet, they do not show themselves to be adequate to the task of producing learning accounts. They can only go so far, and that is to generate accounts which are consistent with their constructions of learning task (good) and learning environment (working conditions). Thus, their accounts draw upon the place of experience, of being a social worker and of doing social work. Once again, it is social work as practice that is displayed in their accounts, but with no satisfactory accounting repertoire available to them which would be convincing in this regard. They find themselves caught in an accountability frame which looks for more. Only those who construct good practice in terms which removes it from the formal world are in a position to display a version of learning which promises to satisfy the accountability demands of technical rationalism, or to maintain their own accountability frame.

What are the cultural particulars about the ensemble social work that are being displayed at this point. There is a disjunction between the activity 'social work' as constructed by social workers (that is, social work as practice) and the frames within which they are to account for its acquisition (the formal rationality of professional and institutional bodies). Hypothetically, the social workers could respond by challenging that frame but that they do not do so shows further how their cultural particulars are embedded in the moral regulation of social work. There is nothing intrinsic to learning that requires it to be conceived, executed and evaluated in a certain form. The forms that learning assumes are cultural ones sustained through social processes within social work and in its relations to other forms of discourse.

Where does this argument lead? Commentaries related to Foucauldian versions of social work have (properly) challenged them to translate their conceptions into meaningful actions (Gould, 1990). Where this has been attempted, the proposals have been rather weak (Rojek et al., 1988). This thesis, however, does not rest squarely within such a tradition. It has been as interested in communitarian moral theorists (MacIntyre, 1981; Jordan, 1989); and, in the approaches to discourse as texts, as seen in the work of Derrida (1987). This thesis, however, has attempted to be less ambitious than those which proclaim a new vista for social work from poststructuralist works, but only offer another 'theory' for application. It has attempted to undertake its analysis and discussion by starting and staying with the 'voices' of social workers. As a consequence, the implications are perhaps, at first reading, more lowly. They are, however, arguably more connected with social work, more comprehensible, and hopefully sufficiently convincing to those within the profession to engage them in dialogue.

Central to the thesis and its attempt to study learning as socially and culturally constituted has been the argument that social work be read as practice, in the two senses provided in the introduction: social work as a practical activity; and, social work as a social practice, or 'form of life', in which social workers construct, perform and evaluate their activities as members of a cultural group with common purposes and standards, and processes for sustaining a moral order. The disjunction within the social relations of social work has to do with the suppression of this reading of social work and its subordination to a technical version of rationality. It is this disjunction which provides the focus for a discussion of the implications of the study, since it is this disjunction through which the social identities of social workers are alienated from the conditions under which these social identities are constituted and reproduced. The most obvious parallel, perhaps, is the disjunction whereby women's social identities as women have been denied to them through the processes by which gender is reproduced.

With the intention of avoiding too loftier or grandiose a discussion, the most obvious starting point in examining implications has to do with the relations between the formal and informal worlds of social work (that is, the institutional and procedural dimension of social work, and the everyday activities of social workers). The overall aim of these considerations is that of generating the conditions in which the 'voices' of practitioners have a place in constituting that relation. The primary responsibility here rests with social actors (Hindess, 1986) in the (dominant) formal world, and has to do principally with professional and organisational issues.

My argument is in part that the preferred reading of social work as practice is not represented within the formal world of social work, and that it needs to be. This is not because this study claims to have found (at long last) what social work really is. Such a claim would be yet one more in a long and abortive list. Rather, it is the reading of social work as practice (and there are and will always be other readings) that articulates the current disjunction within the social relations of social work. This reading itself is a historically and culturally constituted one, and to argue for its greater representation is not to argue that difficulties will be resolved once 'everyone becomes aware of what social work truly is'. The purpose is to enter into the textuality and power relations of social work to de-stabilise the current forms which fix the 'meaning' of social work as representable in terms of formal rationality.

In suggesting that responsibility rests with those in the institutional domain of social work, I am suggesting that it is not an option to adopt the view that it is up to practitioners themselves to make their voices heard. Such a view would be to misunderstand the argument in two important ways. Firstly, it is not a simple matter of allowing social workers a voice, allowing them to express their opinions, fundamental though that is. I am suggesting that social workers have been denied, through the moral regulation of social work, access to a formulation/reading which affirms the accomplishments of their social practices and validates their social identities. Secondly, in so far as the formal world does dominate and regulate social work, any formulation/reading would have to be convincing within that world. This suggests that what is required is an involvement of social actors from professional and institutional positions within the formal world in partnership with practitioners

jointly to determine the 'reading' and to engage in the process of revision. This study has been a small move in that direction, but itself stops short of full partnership: practitioners have not been engaged in the analysis or reporting of this study (Harding, ed. 1987).

Hence, and more specifically, the implication is that the professional literature and research should engage with the reading of social work as practice, in the double sense spoken of above. The perennial debates on theory and practice in social work are in part a consequence of a failure so to do, and are integral to the replications of the social relations of 'academics' and 'practitioners', 'the college' and 'the agency', 'ivory towers' and 'grass roots'. The moves within the professional institution of social work to re-organise training have been associated with the declared intention of overcoming these divisions. However, the view of theory/practice sustained within the regulations still adopts the 'penetrative model' of theory, knowledge, skills and values. In this model, good practice is informed by knowledge and methods, improved by skills, and morally appraised through the appropriation of value systems. Despite the rhetoric of competence being the product of these elements, suggestive of an holistic dynamic rather than an atomistic addition, the elements themselves are derived from current (non-'practice' oriented) literature, and their dynamic combination is not assured by the educational processes proposed. Arrangements for 'partnership' in the provision of training programmes have concentrated upon institutional and constitutional forms of partnership rather than partnership between social actors in informal and formal worlds. As a consequence, provisions for the accreditation of practice teachers are such as to draw members from one domain

(practitioners) into another (professional education). Their competence as practice teachers is evaluated in terms of their abilities to perform as professional educators, applying teaching methods, educational theories and philosophies to their work. Hence, the accusation that they become lecturers/tutors based in agencies. There is nothing 'wrong' per se about having lecturers/tutors based in agencies, but it is not a break from the current 'paradigm': such an arrangement replicates the tensions between theory and practice, though shifting them to another site.

The sort of partnership consistent with this study would not be a further instance of the 'penetration model' but, to make the contrast, would be a 'cultural practice' model. This latter model would suggest the empowerment of practitioners involved in educational processes and procedures, rather than their displacement into the formal, educational world. Empowerment in this sense would entail, for example, partnership between academics and practitioners in reading their activity as 'cultural practice' and refining the everyday 'methods' employed by competent practitioners as they accomplish social work. Again, this would not be with a view to providing a more correct model of learning in social work. It would be to affirm and validate, and make possible the representation of social work as practice within the formal world so as to de-stabilise its current formulations and enable a move towards different practice/learning environments in which practising/learning social work as a cultural practice can proceed.

In line with deconstructive criticism (Derrida, 1981), it is my contention that the 'unfixing' of current meanings/reading requires a stage of 'heirarchical inversion' (Culler, 1983). For present

purposes, this would suggest a necessary stage of promoting the accomplishments of competent practitioners 'above' current authoritative versions as rendered within the professional and academic literature. By this process, a displacement of the hierarchy can occur, the outcome of which cannot be seen this side of the process. Nevertheless, there are two observations that can be made. Firstly, this argument does not imply that there can be no place for the critical commentaries and research activities carried out within the professional and academic institutions. On the contrary, the version of partnership suggested here would tend to re-vitalising that relationship. But, the power relations between practitioners and academics/researchers would not assume its current, hierarchical form. Secondly, social and cultural changes such as these do not occur uniformly or necessarily coherently. Consequently, we can consider whether there are any 'embryonic' developments of this nature which could provide clues as to the future forms.

In the latter regard, two windows onto possible developments can be mentioned. The work of Schon (1983; 1987) has been referred to many times within the thesis. His image of the reflective practitioner and his proposal for a reflective practicum use the metaphor of 'coaching' to cast the relationship struck with the 'learner'. This could be seen as yet another attempt to find a fitting analogy for complex, practical activity: not science; not art; not craft - but football! However, the import lies in the abilities of the coach to work actively and critically with the learner in the context of practical activity. The focus is on 'in-use' knowledge, skills and values and attention begins and ends with how the job is done (which includes, how well it is done). The coach introduces the accumulation of cultural practices of the community to the learner, not as principles

to be followed but as practices to be lived. Meanwhile, Argyris et al. (1985) propose the use of 'action science' as a means for educationalists working with occupational groups to investigate with members their cultural practices. Argyris describes how he works with the membership to elucidate and if necessary change the processes whereby they negotiate their relations, understandings and standards.

Professionals educators, academics and researchers are one group implicated in the representations of social work as practice within the formal world. The considerations covered in that respect apply equally to the second main group of interest: the social actors in social work organisations with responsibility for the learning environments within which social work is carried out. Partnership between managers and social workers concerning the representation of social work as practice is crucial in respect of the learning environment within which they operate. Again, it is not a simple matter of proposing that managers listen to social workers' criticisms of their working conditions (though that is not to be discouraged, of course). The perceived and presented nature of the learning environment is integral to the way social workers construct and locate their identities, their role and their learning. It is the social relations between managers and social workers that is at issue, such that abstracting 'learning environment' out of this ensemble for diagnosis and repair would not of itself alter those relations. This is evidenced, for example, in the provision of 'training courses' as fast but often unsatisfactory solutions for all concerned. It is partly the content and format of the courses themselves which creates dissatisfaction (because they are not relevant, or too simple, or too advanced, and so on). What is of relevance here, however, is the way courses can signify that something "is" being done, or "isn't"; which

of the two being dependent upon the structure of social relations between managers and social workers within which such evaluations are constituted.

Again, it cannot be determined prior to the event what form of learning environment would be construed by social workers as conducive to social work as practice. One suspects that opportunity for the 'community of inquirers' to have time to reflect upon their membership, processes and projects would be one feature. In a sense, though, the 'content' of the learning environment is less significant than the 'process' of its determination. Managers would need to engage with social workers (and vice versa) upon the re-definition of their accomplishments in terms of 'practice' and social workers would need to be ready to take responsibility for negotiating with managers over what kind of learning environment they believe the organisation should endeavour to provide. The overall implication is that any learning environment imposed, no matter how conducive it may appear according to a given (formally derived) model of learning, will not be received as 'good' or 'appropriate'.

It has been seen from other research literature and from these accounts that social workers construe themselves as lacking control of a working environment that is determined by managerial, procedural and legislative forms. As shown in the accounts, the majority of these social workers portrayed themselves as adopting a 'realistic' view about this. Their accomplishments were derived in great measure from their 'acceptance' that this is indeed a feature of social work; and, that standards, role and identity involve the relation they construct between the formal dimension of their activity and their work in the informal worlds of clients' lives. Hence, there is a variation within

the occupational group 'social work' concerning 'accomodation' to managerial and legislative forms: some seek to escape or disown, others to compromise, others to reconcile. None, however, deny the centrality of these forms.

The accomplishment of social workers, and the practical activity of social work, has to do with the formal and informal dimensions, and the relation between the two. Social work as a practical activity and social practice speaks to the 'indeterminate zones of practice' (Schon, 1987), characterised by uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict. These characteristics have to do with both dimensions, the formal and informal, and their relation. The task of managing the tension between the two dimensions is potentially different according to how the formal world of managerial, procedural and legislative forms is constituted. It is this issue above all others, perhaps, upon which the study focusses attention for the immediate future. With the implementation of two major pieces of legislation, the formal dimension is set to undergo marked changes. What will this mean for the task of managing the tension between the (altered) formal dimension and the daily lives of clients? It could be hypothesised that some styles and forms of managerial and legislative control sit more easily than others with the discursive, interactional practices of moral regulation. What differences will these new laws make in that respect to the practising of social work and to social work as a cultural practice?

A study by Packman et al. (1986) found that some child care work in the early 1980s was characterised by an 'adversarial' style on the part of social workers: a contest with parents over the best interests and welfare of the child. Is it one of the intentions of

the Children Act (1989) to replace adversarial approaches with partnership between parents and social workers. The nature of partnership is more consistent with the constructions of good social work shown in these social workers' accounts. From the point of view of this study, the empirical question arises as to whether this change in legislation is perceived as helpful, as more fitting to the way good practice is constructed by them. To what extent will this kind of shift within the formal domain reshape practice so that the tensions to be managed are easier to handle?

The second piece of legislation, the Health Service and Community Care Act (1990) can be used to illustrate another set of questions that arise from the perspective of this study. In the intended re-organisation of service delivery, there is to be a contractually based approach to care. The procuring of 'packages of care' will be distinct from their provision and, it is anticipated, more provision will come from the private and voluntary sector. Hence, it would appear that the role of many social workers will undergo a quite dramatic change. It has been seen within the accounts that the aim of social work as helping people was significant to not only the social work identities of practitioners but also their personal identities: social work was firmly rooted in the self-descriptions and constructions of personal biography. The interplay of role and identity has pre-occupied much of this study. The question must be posed, therefore, as to how great a change of role the social workers will perceive these re-organisations to engender. One would anticipate, on the basis of this research, that if the role was perceived to be more tightly constrained by law, policy and procedure, social workers will re-evaluate and relocate themselves in relation to their role in identifiable ways: attempting an innovative reconciling

of identity with (new) role; finding passable compromises; disowning the role; or, divorcing themselves from it.

For the social workers of this research, social work is a job in which they have made a great personal investment. Proper boundaries are sought between professional and personal identity, but ultimately, they do merge, and, according to these social workers, to the accomplishment of good practice. Major legislative and organisational changes which are perceived to heighten the tension between their practice in the formal world of law, policy and procedure and the interactional, discursive world of everyday living, will result in re-evaluation at a personal as well as work level.

I have demonstrated in this study the research value of talking in depth with social workers about their work and their learning, and have tried to do justice to their accounts in my analysis of them. I have sought to connect this analysis with the literature from the professional education of adults and social workers, and the organisational context within which social workers practice. In bridging these literatures of learning and organisations, I have produced both a more 'optimistic' view of social work practice than that found in the literature on organisations; and, a more 'realistic' view than that found in the literature on learning. My thesis is that reading social work as a practical activity and a cultural practice provides a fitting and different perspective, whereby the accomplishments of social workers can be recognised whilst locating those accomplishments firmly within their historical and social context. I propose that taking social work as practice seriously would re-energise the tired theory-practice debate in social work;

would provide a vantage point to critique the current re-organisation of education and training in social work, and offer steps towards alternatives; and, would generate productive research questions in the light of major legislative and organisational changes within social work.

This opportunity to study the activity of social work and learning would not have been possible without the co-operation of the social workers themselves. I remain grateful to them.

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APPENDIX A - Snowball Package: Covering Letter

Dear

My thanks to you for giving your time and thought to this piece of research.

As you know, to make the study a substantial one, I really need to interview a fair number of social workers and this faces me with the difficulty of how to reach people. One way seems to be to use the means whereby you were approached and I would like to solicit your help in keeping the chain going.

I have taken the liberty of enclosing a couple of interview schedules with covering letters attached in the hope that you would be willing to pass them on for me. If you think you might be happy to do this, read on. If not, please would you simply send them back to me with the slip below. They each need to go to somebody who is (or has been until very recently) doing social work in one form or another and whom you have reason to consider is relatively good at the work they do. They can be working in any setting, locally or further afield, and may or may not be professionally qualified.

Deciding on two people is the difficult part. Having done that, I only ask that you pass to them (in person where possible) the package as enclosed. You are not at all obliged to try to persuade them to participate. Whether they do or not is their decision on the basis of my covering letter to them. Then, would you kindly return to me the slip below so that I can keep track of where things are up to.

Once I have got some conclusions out of this research, I shall be inviting yourself, and all those who have participated, to a discussion about them. If you are able to assist in this next step, thank you again.

Best Wishes
Yours sincerely

Martyn Jones

Please detach and return in the s.a.e. provided.

NAME DATE

* I have passed the schedule/s on to:

Name (1) (2)

Address
.....
.....

* I am sending back the schedules as requested.

* Delete as appropriate

APPENDIX B - Snowball Package: Explanatory Letter

Thank you for taking receipt of this package. The person who passed it on to you for me volunteered to take part in a research project and judged that you might likewise be a potential candidate.

The piece of research is about the way people learn to do social work and all the various influences that bear on what they learn and how they learn it. What I am hoping to do is to get in touch one way or another with a fair number of practitioners to talk with them about how they believe they have learned to do the work and developed in it. I would be grateful if you would consider being one of these. From these conversations, it will hopefully be possible to offer some recommendations about how social workers can be better prepared for the job and assisted within it.

Enclosed is a copy of the interview schedule I am using as a basis for the conversations. There are four sections to it and as you can see they all address the same subject matter but each tries to approach it from a different angle. For us to go through it all properly takes two hours or so (probably best to be ready to pencil out half a day) and since some questions tap matters that may mean dredging the subconscious, you would have to reckon on about an hour's preparation on top of that - including one question (section four 'b') which needs to be completed beforehand. I do recognise this does represent a not inconsiderable demand upon you. If the topic holds some attraction for you and the project itself seems worthwhile, I would only add that the majority of those who have done the exercise so far have commented that in so doing they did derive benefit from it for themselves.

In taking receipt of the package, you have in no way obligated yourself to proceed as far as I, or the person who passed it on to you, are concerned. If you decide you are willing to volunteer, I ought to reassure you that whatever we discuss will be treated in utmost confidence. Should you wish to check out anything before committing yourself, do get in touch with me. If you wish to decline, please would you return the schedule to me with the reply slip below.

Thank you for reading this, and I hope we shall be meeting soon.
Yours sincerely

Martyn Jones

Please detach and return in the s.a.e. provided.

.....
NAME DATE

ADDRESS TEL. NO.
.....

- * I am willing to assist and can be contacted at the above address.
- * I am sending back the schedule as requested.

* Delete as appropriate

APPENDIX C - The Interview Schedule

SECTION 1

(a) Think of something in which you engage as a social worker, some social work activity or task, at which you consider yourself to be reasonably accomplished. Make a few notes on how you became accomplished.

- What is it?
 - Think of a specific example or two to illustrate it.
 - What persuades you that you are accomplished at this?
 - What, if any, are the skills you have had to acquire in becoming accomplished?
- What, if any, is the knowledge you have had to acquire in becoming accomplished?
- What, if any, are the ethical questions you have had to find a way of dealing with in becoming accomplished?
- How did you become accomplished? What were the processes and circumstances?
 - Do you hope to develop further? If so, how would you see this happening?

(b) Think of a second social work activity or task, and repeat as for (a).

SECTION 2

Below is a list of situations, generally described, a selection of which most social workers will have been in at some time or another. They are all situations which are likely to influence people's way of going about their work.

Please read through the list and pick out any situations with which you identify - those which ring bells about things that have happened to you and which seem important as far as your own social work development is concerned. If necessary, make a few notes on what the specific circumstances were. There is certainly no expectation that every description will speak to you - and you may well have others you'd like to add.

Try, then, to recall periods or associations when ...

- 1.....you decided to try something new.
- 2.....you knew somebody you tried to emulate.
- 3.....you changed your mind about something.
- 4.....you felt you had been proved to be naive/unrealistic/...
- 5.....you got some unexpected results which led you to reconsider.
- 6.....you felt you had a glimpse of how others must see you.
- 7.....you learned important lessons from a mistake you made.
- 8.....you had to rely wholly upon yourself.
- 9.....you suddenly began to use something you had once read or heard.
- 10.....you feared you were becoming exhausted, physically and/or emotionally.
- 11.....you heard some precious home truths about yourself.
- 12.....you got yourself out of a rut.
- 13.....you realised that something you thought you knew all about you didn't really understand at all.
- 14.....you were totally at a loss as to what to do next.
- 15.....you received 'positive feedback'.
- 16.....you consciously changed your whole approach.
- 17.....you learned a great deal all at once.

- What happened? Why did it happen?
- What effect did it have on you? Why do you think this was?
- What was the outcome for you?

SECTION 3

We are all influenced by people, events and circumstances. I want to review briefly some of the things that may have influenced you as a social worker, but which may not have been covered so far (in sections 1 and 2).

In each category, try to think if there has been anything/anybody else who has been particularly influential on your approach to the job, and/or who has had a significant effect on your social work development.

- | | | |
|---|-------|----------------------------|
| (a) People: | (i) | colleagues |
| | (ii) | senior colleagues |
| | (iii) | educators |
| | (iv) | friends |
| | (v) | others |
| | | |
| (b) Courses: | (i) | basic training |
| | (ii) | post-qualifying |
| | (iii) | others |
| | | |
| (c) Writings: | (i) | social work books/articles |
| | (ii) | literature |
| | (iii) | others |
| | | |
| (d) Cases and clients, or other practical experiences of doing social work. | | |
| | | |
| (e) Changes of job, role, environment, setting or circumstance. | | |
| | | |
| (f) Technology: audiotape, videotape, television, computers, etc..... | | |

- In all cases:
- Why was X influential?
 - In what way?
 - An example?
 - How did it happen?
 - With what results?

SECTION 4

(a) Think about your overall commitment to and belief in social work. Make a few notes on how this has altered over time.

- What was significant in your choice of a career in social work?
- In what way, if at all, has the job differed from your hopes and expectations?
- Can you trace any evolution or sudden changes in your attitude towards the work? What have been the processes and circumstances?

(b) PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SECTION BEFORE WE MEET.

When asked to think back over the course of your time in social work - the way you've seen the job and how best to do it, how much personally you have invested in it, how you've survived in it, the questions and issues that have seemed important - it may be that you see currently certain connections between markers along that route and particular events in your personal life of which you are conscious. Such events might be any of a number of occurrences, for instance: becoming a parent; a bereavement; a publicised outcry, disaster or injustice; a chance relationship; an intimate tragedy...

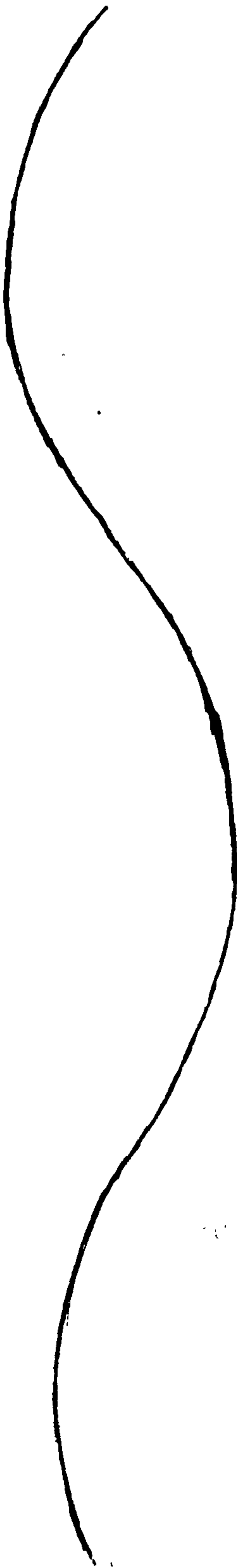
Try, then, to think over what turning points, big or small, you can see in your outlook or style as a social worker, consider what you feel to be significant events in your personal life - and note any links you make from one across to the other. Use the space overleaf to chart these connections.

Section 4(b) cont'd.

BIRTH

Personal Life Events

Work Life Events



NOW

APPENDIX D - Background Information Sheet

SOME BACKGROUND DETAILS

Name:

Age:

Current Post:

Number of years in social work:

Number of years since completing a qualifying course:

Previous Employment:

DATES

JOB

EMPLOYER

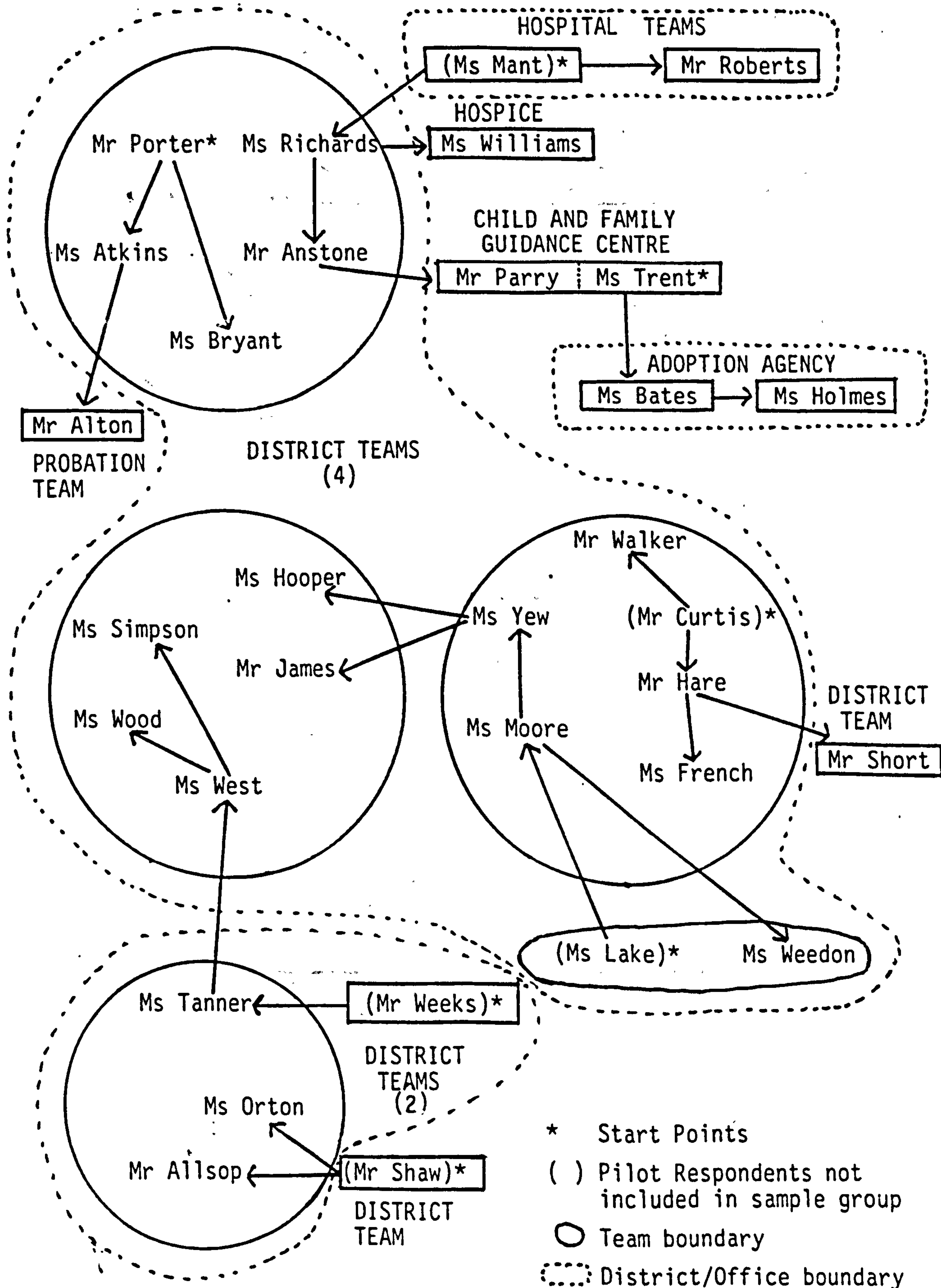
Academic and Professional Courses attended:

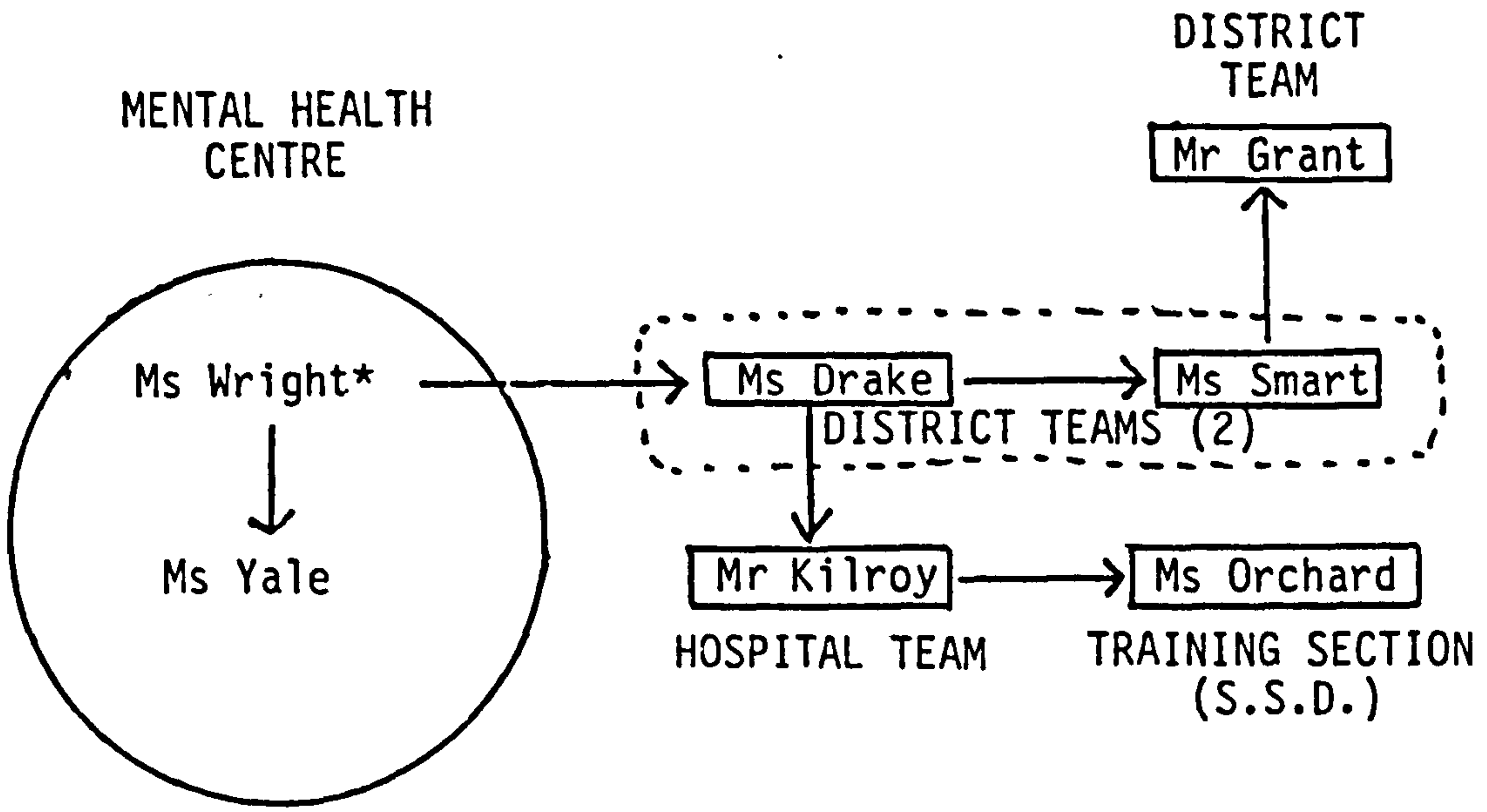
DATES

COURSE

INSTITUTION

APPENDIX E - Snowball Networks





MENTAL HEALTH CENTRE

Mr Mead*

INDEPENDENT THERAPISTS/COUNSELLORS

Mr Scott* → Mr Tate

APPENDIX F - Profile Of Interviewee Sample

SEX	22 women	15 men
-----	----------	--------

AGE	<u>Years</u>	<u>No.</u>
	25 - 29	3
	30 - 34	10
	35 - 39	12
	40 - 44	4
	45 - 49	4
	50 - 54	3
	55 - 59	1

YEARS IN SOCIAL WORK (Total years of all interviewees - 383 years)

<u>Years</u>	<u>No.</u>
0 - 4	7
5 - 9	11
10 - 14	11
15 - 19	6
20 - 24	1
25 - 30	1

YEARS SINCE OBTAINING BASIC SOCIAL WORK QUALIFICATION
(One interviewee without a basic qualification)

<u>Years</u>	<u>No.</u>
0 - 4	15
5 - 9	8
10 - 14	7
15 - 19	3
20 - 24	2
25 - 30	1

APPENDIX G - Constructing Credibility: Main Types and VariantsFigure 1. Constructing Credibility : Main Types

Constructing Credibility

		Within Current Role	Outside Current Role
<u>Constructing</u>	For Self	A C	B C
<u>Credibility</u>	For Role	A C	X

- A. Constructing Credibility Within Current Role
- B. Constructing Credibility Outside Current Role
- C. Constructing Credibility Within and Outside Current Role

Figure 2. Constructing Credibility Within CurrentRole: Variants

		<u>Role</u>	
		Credible	Non-Credible
<u>Self</u>	Credible	1	2
	Non-Credible	3	4

APPENDIX H - Constructing Good Social Work: CategoriesDistrict Social Services SettingGood Social Work Constructed By:ReconcilingCompromisingDissociating

1. CREDIBILITY CONSTRUCTED WITHIN CURRENT ROLE:

Ms Bryant

Mr Hare

Mr Grant

Ms Orton

Ms Moore

Ms Atkins

Ms Yew

Ms Wood

Ms Tanner

Ms Smart

2. CREDIBILITY CONSTRUCTED OUTSIDE CURRENT ROLE:

Mr Anstone

Mr Allsop

Ms Richards

Ms Hooper

3. CREDIBILITY CONSTRUCTED WITHIN AND OUTSIDE CURRENT ROLE:

Mr Walker

Ms Simpson

Ms French

Ms Drake

Mr Short

Mr James

Ms West

4. NON-CREDIBILITY CONSTRUCTED:

Mr Porter

Ms Weedon