Curriculum, Culture, Supervision and Research
Social work incompatibilities and possibilities

by

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Curriculum

What is a curriculum, whether in our past, our present, or, as the conference suggests, needs to be designed anew for our future?

To ask about curricula is characteristically to be presented with a time table showing subjects and perhaps content, i.e. content to be 'covered', a bibliography, sometimes the number of hours, and often the required number of units and grading of work for graduation. Such information does not take us much further in understanding what actually is imparted to students and what it is they actually receive, let alone retain. (How little one really knows of what our colleagues, even in the same department, actually teach.)

Oddly and significantly, <u>Curriculum</u> derives from the Latin source "*currere*", ' a course of study, to run as in the running of a course in a chariot race' (a murderous activity if such as the scenes from the film Ben Hur are a reliable example). <u>Course</u> (the past participle "*cursus*", a running) has the same Latin *currere* derivative. Robert Graves[1] provided me with insight :

> *"The word 'curse' derives from the Latin 'cursus' - a running -especially circular running as in a chariot race - and is short for 'cursus contra solem'. Thus Margaret Balfour, accused as a witch in sixteenth-century Scotland, was charged with dancing widdershins[2] nine times around men's houses, stark naked; and my friend A. K. Smith (late of the Indian Civil Service) once accidentally saw a naked Indian witch do the very same thing in Southern India as a ceremony of cursing."*

I was inspired by realising the connection of curriculum to a <u>Curse</u>.[3] My experience in many places has been that students profoundly feel that correlation. Even more enlightening at the time[4] was the idea that much of social work in academia was taught at least backwards (and maybe nine times) against the nature of how and what social workers need to learn.

It is difficult to conceive of social work as a profession whose preparatory and formulating learning and education derives fundamentally from other than a practice-based and value-laden foundation. Curriculum must in some way be examined and created as a "total learning experience" of the student to the extent to which it was determined by the intent, behaviour and organisation of those responsible for the education or training, and what is done with the knowledge provided to the student's exposure and response to direct human problems. This approach is fraught with difficulties. The static snapshot way of looking at curricula embodied in time tables is not embracingly conceived as being the product of all that goes into the teacher-learning situation. That is, not just content, but <u>climate</u>, the living social institutional context and critically the <u>culture</u> in which the learning is specifically to take place. This was well put by Ralph W. Tyler at a curriculum workshop in 1960, and David French ...[5]

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[1] Graves, Robert (1961) "The White Goddess", Faber & Faber, p.445

[2] 'Widdershins': in a direction opposite to the usual; contrary to the direction of the sun; considered as unlucky or causing disaster.

[3] 'Curse': an utterance consigning a person or thing to evil; a thing which blights or blasts.

[4] See Drucker, David (1972), "An exploration of the curricula of social work in some countries in Asia with special reference to the relevance of social work education to social development goals",. United Nations, ECAFE/UNICEF, Bangkok.

[5] This approach derives much from the views of Tyler, Ralph W.[5] and David French

"......the focus needs to be on the planning of the educational experience rather than to outline study of content. The student will find many ways of picking up more content as he needs it if he has been helped to see its meaning and its relevance to social work".

In recently celebrating the "Hundred Years of Social Work" in the United States its origins were dated from when the Charity Organisation Society and similar workers thought that a university might offer theoretical structure to enhance the skills of its volunteers and staff and effectively provide a deeper and wider understanding of social work for future recruits.

It was expected, and correctly, that there was much to learn from a range of other disciplines engaged in the study of, and active in, human affairs, that could be utilised by social workers. [6]

However, in entering the universities and academia it was entering a very different culture from its own and clearly social work's roots have become obscured if not lost in the entangling process of acculturation. (Ominously for practice, early on, in both the USA and Britain, fieldwork disappeared for years from the curriculum of some of the major university programmes. Recently social work has disappeared altogether from the London School of Economics, once a pioneer and leader in British social work.). The acceptance and problem of where practice properly fits into university programmes and curricula have a long and painful history that continues today.[7]

"Building the Social Work Curriculum", Council on Social Work Education, #61-18-55.

"The climate or atmosphere of the school influences the student without conscious planning by the faculty ", p 19.

" ... if the total range of the educational programme is considered, these influences are more than the curriculum itself, but these powerful influences are not usually taken into account in considering the curriculum",. p 20.

". the purpose of curriculum organisation is to maximise the cumulative effect of all of the learning experiences",.   p51

".... to consider the curriculum in terms of the learning experiences that individual students are having in contrast to viewing the curriculum as a total collection of course offerings, p 54.

French, David (late of Brandeis University) and my colleague in Asia.

"....the most fundamental effects on professional education in social work have come not from curriculum policy statements but from forces in the world of welfare programmes and policies. These forces enter schools of social work through.....the field work experience of students, the consultative and community service activities by the faculty, the research activities of the faculty on social problems and social welfare programmes, scholarly-work,- reading and contributing to the literature of the field and participating in various forms of continuing education."

[6] Drucker, D (1993), "The Social Work Profession in Asia: Look Homeward 1968-1993",.

The Indian Journal of Social Work,. Tata Institute of Social Sciences , Bombay, Vol LIV 4

"In the main, entrance to universities took place at a time when world-wide those elitist and conservative institutions derived their prestige from the laboratory-based myopic ("pure") static science of the nineteenth century or from the more romantically-inclined abstractions of the humanities formulated in the comfort of learned literary discourse in ivory towers far from the misery and chaos of everyday life. Social work, if it had been less concerned with its status and acceptability and more with the workings of society and social injustice, might even have contributed dynamic concepts well before the fixed state of the physical sciences gave way to the flux, uncertainties and living with the unknown, of atomic and biogenetic research."

[7] It has been my experience that the financial cost of locating students in practice agencies and situations; meeting essential travel costs for field visiting; staff ratios for essential person-to-person work; hiring and

Practice, which is the foundation for learning and developing skills, is constantly cited as the venue for the application of theoretical concepts and, allegedly, their relation to stark non-academic reality in the outside world. Nevertheless, practice is rarely, if demonstrably anywhere, properly financed, credited, creatively staffed or researched, nor can it to be seen to adequately influence and specifically determine selection of what should be taught from the available very wide range and diffuse branches of knowledge and academic learning.

Academia, like everywhere else, has its changing fashions and social work departments have not been immune to, and indeed have eagerly embraced, the shifts of intellectual attention.[8] Nor is this surprising, as social work has been eager to become an integral part of the culture of universities, its politics, and especially to receive degrees to take on the mantle of their power-conferring status. To my mind the price has been exorbitant. It has required the disassociation and increasing severance from the culture of social work, from social service, social conditions and social change, that is far from the view perceived from the traditionally privileged university ivory towers.

Social work should be distinguished, and clearly recognisable, by its multifaceted nature of combining and adapting borrowed and contributed knowledge from elsewhere to its hands-on understanding and insights gained from its face-to-face relationships with individuals, groups, communities and institutions. It should continuously take from wherever it might, to clarify and confirm experience, in order to inform its activities and develop skills in identifying, prioritising and attending to what ails people and the societies in which they live. Indeed these activities, thinking and action related to social causes are what should constitute the fundamental culture of social work.

The pressures and demands upon the student within the academic culture are compelling (grades, exams etc.). Confusion is apparent when they are placed and find themselves in the culture of their fieldwork agencies. Some resolve the difficulty perhaps by sliding into research (of which more later) and opting for academic careers and advancement. Social work departments themselves characteristically seem to be the Cinderellas of universities and the students tolerated as a sub-culture, with the accent on sub, which they often feel keenly. Where the social work

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paying experienced practice supervisors; are not what universities are prepared to finance. Compare this say, to special buildings, laboratories, materials, technicians etc., which add to the visible prestige of the university and other departments. Sufficient time available for social work teachers to spend on-going work in the field to keep them up to date with the shifting social scene, to develop case studies, and to keep theoretical work in line with essentials is a rarity.

[8] Atherton, Charles in a 27 May 1998 intsocwork@nisw.org.uk discourse on :"The Decline of Professional Practice at CUSSW" fulminates:
"I submit that, other than the fashion industry, there is no more trendy group than social workers. We have climbed on every bandwagon after about a five-year culture lag. From ego psychology through behaviourism, existentialism, side trips into Adlerian psychology and Gestalt into today's revival of 1920s "versthen" sociology. Hoo, boy! I even know a few disciples of the Esalen Institute and Orgone boxes.... Today social exclusion is "in" in Europe and it is definitely post-modernist in its approach. The post-modernist focus on the person, group and community contributes to social work as opposed to the universal approach of social security.........Yes. Having failed to find a way to deal effectively with poverty, our European cousins have redefined the problem as social exclusion.. The obvious solution is social inclusion, but in what? The good post-modernist rejects contemporary society and its market-oriented values. In what do they plan to include people? . Social work has been hit hard by empiricism, managerialism and trying to be a science." And he adds " *We have abandoned case management to others, and this used to be something we knew how to do fairly well. We have become philosophers and social theorists. I think that we may become increasingly irrelevant if we don't get back to what we know how to do and do it".*

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students spend, relative to other students, much time outside the hallowed halls among what ails our societies and have to handle the emotional impact of the great variety and turmoil of lives in a very troubled world, they become actively aware of the difference between themselves and their student contemporaries in other departments.[9] As a sub-culture within the university they are reminded constantly of the pull of the usual internal culture of student life. This being the case, it would be constructive to consider seriously the value and the creation of a reality in which students are taught and function in a social work culture and planning for it positively. In so doing they would be preparing to comfortably accept their life-long minority place in society. It could be welcomed as a creative condition reflecting the role that the profession will hold in challenging the pernicious aspects and injustices of contemporary society and proudly holding to its own professional intellectual and moral integrity. A profession must profess beyond the narrow confines of its current practice and continuously accumulate a body of knowledge of its own as well as seek to provide new perspectives for others.

How might this be attempted?

Social work students as a sub culture

In social work we hold to such important premises as the notion of growth from within, self-determination and participation; this, along with the growing understanding that learning is far from a neutral intellectual activity, but is intimately connected with relationships, emotional involvement, social climate and - specifically when teaching knowledge applied in human situations - requires learning by doing. When considering the nature of the curriculum and the selection of content, the learning patterns of students as well as the methods of teaching are therefore of primary importance. It is not just a matter of covering content and improving techniques; much is caught rather than taught and involves the whole student and the institutions in which he or she moves and is experiencing.

What the student can learn, retain, integrate and use imaginatively and creatively will be much influenced by his inner and outer experience in the learning situation. Much attention must therefore be given to the harmonising of the institutional structure of the teaching situation and its climate with the way in which the student responds and can be helped to respond to it (i.e. starting where the student is).

If the total experience of learning is as important a factor as we think it is in preparation for social work, perhaps we should deliberately plan in such a way as to postpone substantive subject matter which requires memorising and the more academic skills until we have imparted and helped students to practice the learning skills that are commensurate with what social workers will need in gathering and handling information and knowledge. In this way we will make sure that when the more subject-oriented teaching is brought in, it does not reinforce the familiar fragmented subject-oriented learning styles but is perceived and processed through the new social work compatible learning style. This is not to say that each student learns in the same way; here an educational diagnosis will help us in guiding the particular student towards what he particularly needs in using his innate talents, etc. However, there is a culturally academically determined student pattern of learning which is often in conflict with the characteristic way in which social workers set about acquiring, sensing, examining,

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[9] From the student's experience, credits for the time spent in highly taxing and time consuming work in the field, case recording, case conferences, and individualised tutorials and supervision, never get the same amount of credit points for sitting passively in a lecture hall along with maybe a couple of hundred students.

conceptualising and making use of knowledge. It is this characteristic which needs to be fully identified, taught, demonstrated and practised.

Such a view suggests that we must give serious consideration to whether (if all other constraints could be dealt with) we might spend the preliminary weeks of teaching time devising and setting up <u>learning exercises</u>. These learning exercises would consist of "finding out "; "observing" (behaviour of people in social situations such as railway/bus stations, social service/hospital waiting rooms, nursery groups, lecture rooms, religious gatherings, conferences, political meetings, etc.)"; "describing"; "comparing with other students the observations regarding what was seen and thought significant"; "gather together"; "interpret what has been observed"; "present"; "pass opinion"; "explain"; "question"; "discuss"; and "compile"; activities. We would be setting out consciously to familiarise the student with a self-awareness of the new role of social work student (which will differentiate him from many of his fellow students in other departments) and commensurate with his potential role of professional social worker (which will differentiate him from the more generally held values and familiar responses of his fellow citizens). In a sense we would be setting out to deliberately begin to define, teach and set up a coherent sub-culture for the student and in preparation for the profession.

Selection of students for social work

Such a learning exercises foundation for a curriculum might almost be seen as a protracted selection process. Students who are unable to satisfactorily acquire and demonstrate these ways of learning might well be advised early on to seek their education in a field more appropriate to their particular abilities.

Undoubtedly an approach of this kind requires a reconsideration of selection and admittance procedures; the role and skills of teachers; the time tabling and acceptance of these activities by certifying bodies; and alters drastically both what is currently included as our present ideas of sequence and content. In fact, new ways of learning become not just a method but also the content of much teaching.

It should be a firmly held social work view that academic capacity alone is an inadequate basis for working closely with people and with problems of society. Personal qualities and a latent capacity for sensitivity and creative imagination in the <u>art</u> of working with people must be insisted upon by the social work profession in assessing suitability for functioning adequately in the social welfare field. This insistence derives not merely on the religious antecedents, philosophy and values of much social work, but the technical fact that the person himself, his self-awareness, the potentially rich utilisation of his own life experience and its mysteries, his talent for purposeful use of relationships and the values he holds are considered a fundamental fund of knowing (instinctive, emotional, and intellectual) to be harnessed and to become a "tool" of social workers.[10]

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[10] Social workers have too quickly reached for theoretical fragments, and in the process forced reality into straightjackets, often leaving out what doesn't fit and forgetting the limitations of any theory and the narrow areas of effective application of such theory. Can it be that we "professionals" in particular have sought respectability by adopting a pseudo-scientific academic stance? Social workers I think have a scientific duty to describe and tell it how it is, or looks to them - external and internal perceptions, thought and feelings, confusion, mystery, and all. In my teaching I reach out constantly to the non-social sciences, the novelists, poems, songs, films etc. for material to provide understanding and to convey where and how to learn continuously; this includes the availability of a lifetime of learning to be mined from even the most inarticulate of our "clients"

Our graduates leave schools, I trust, properly knowing that they face a lifetime of continuing to discover and learn about the human condition and what ails it. They should also know that they are joining a profession likely always to be a minority in terms of its particular idealism and social concerns, and that they will not receive too much public acclaim or financial rewards. Perhaps also they may too often have the sense of falling short of their highest hopes and aspirations in a job that will by its nature present them daily with so much of society's sorrows. Can we provide a sense of belonging to an organised fellowship of professionals that provide an on-going solid foundation of support and assurance? Can we instil in students a sense of pride and security in understanding and contributing to a maturing recognisable professional agenda, albeit diverse and consisting of many strands?

Social work has not only many strands and deepened its psychological perceptions in its hundred years. In its professional aspirations it has extended its activities internationally. In so doing it has encountered a great diversity of social cultures, with very different ways of life and thinking. It is challenged by discovering remarkable variations in human behaviour, values and organisation and has struggled to comprehend the impact of the uneven spread of communication and technologies along with a burgeoning clash of cultures. Social workers, and their like, have found themselves faced with the resulting problems of the rapidity of bewildering change and the enormous variety of unanticipated confusion in the human process of adaptation from traditional seeming 'certainties' to the profoundly 'development' unpredictable.

Social work and 'DEVELOPMENT' (a condensed historical recap)

In New York in 1968 at the United Nations International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, 89 countries endorsed the recommendation that priority be assigned:

> "..particularly in developing countries, to the developmental tasks of social welfare and therefore, to orienting social welfare training toward preparation for such tasks."(United Nations,1968)[11]

By 1970 the Asian Ministers meeting in Manila extended this concept more specifically:

> "Curricula on social work training should be geared to social development goals and constantly examined, reviewed and evaluated in the light of the countries' changing needs." (United Nations, 1970)[12]

. See Singer, Isaac B.and Burgin, R. (1978) Conversations with Isaac Bashevis Singer: "Every life is strange. ...This visitor..... is, after all, part of the big universe,...... I'd like to hear what he has to say. I am sure in his telling it, I will hear something which is completely new as far as my knowledge of human beings is concerned. ...The more you see what other people do, the more you learn about yourself. ..... I say to myself, why don't they look into the human ocean which surrounds them where stories and novelties flow by the millions? It's there where my experiments take place – in the laboratory of humanity, not on a piece of paper."(pp 1-2).

[11] United Nations, (1968) Proceedings of the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, New York.

[12] United Nations (1970) Recommendations of the First Asian Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, Manila.

At the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) conference[13] in Manila at the same time (1970) the in-thing was to exult at the prospect of social work operating effectively "in the corridors of power".[14] Leaving aside the hubris, the leaders of social work (then congregated in Asia) had authoratively had its attention drawn to the widening nature of social work once more as a cause.[15] They seemed to determine a renewed focus upon society and its social aberrations as critical priorities for the profession's future direction. Presumably social work was to operate within the mainstream of "Development". Social development was to be the challenge of the 70s.

At that time, almost exclusively Western affluent-focussed social work influences had been widely exported and enthusiastically embraced. However, social workers on the international scene were beginning to realise that Western-dominated approaches left out much of what was needed in the developing countries.[16] Slowly there was a growing appreciation that social problems at all levels were of such magnitude and complexity that familiar social work could not provide more than very narrow palliative activities. The causes and breeding ground of human problems had to be imperatively tackled. [17]

There was clearly a need, of course, to translate fine words into detailed defining of social work in the development context. The "Explorations... " study in 1972[18] sought guidance by taking the repeatedly pronounced key phrases to see what they actually represented to the social work educators and professionals in terms of the roles to be taught and undertaken. These were:

(1) Social policies and planning in development

(2) Ensuring social justice (with particular reference to more equitable distribution of national wealth)

(3) The essential need for participation by the people in policy formulation, planning and implementation

(4) Improving the social and cultural infrastructure by institution building

Where to place traditional social work methods in this developmental framework was approached as follows:

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[13] Along with the International Congress of Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

[14] "Corridors of Power" was the title of a book by C.P. Snow (1964)

[15] Social work as a cause and/or function has exercised debate at least since Alexander Flexner early in the twentieth century, on through the Milford Conference in 1929 and beyond.

[16] *"Poverty, as an observed cultural phenomenon in most Asian countries, is striking because of its pervasive presence in the lives of countless people who exist on the brink of starvation. Yet the handling of poverty in professional social work as an observed cultural phenomenon in Asian case records is more striking in its absence".*

United Nations (1966). Report of the Regional Training Centre for Social Work Educationand Field Work Supervisors, part 2, Asian Records for Teaching Social Work. Bangkok.

Visiting five predominantly rural developing countries in Asia, Brigham in1984 continued to find that they:

"... had adopted American urban models of education ..." and added " ... social work arose in the West to help a few marginal people to adjust to society; whereas, in most of the developing countries the poor are the vast and significant majority!"

Brigham, Tom M., (1984) Social Education in Five Developing Countries: Selected International Models. Vienna, IASSW.

[17] It is salutary (and depressing 30 years on) that it was back then that POVERTY emerged as a priority issue on the international agenda. "Plus ca change ... "

[18] Drucker, D,. Ibid "Explorations ..." (1972).

(5) Social work helping methods

The situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies and the gaps and inconsistencies in our policies and programmes. The social worker's role is to be alert and sensitive to this and to systematically report these matters, thus contributing decisively to policy and planning in the normal course of their "helping" activities.[4]

In the course of the "Explorations" study, the importance and the outlining definitions of these roles were emphatically endorsed by the Asian educators and professionals as fundamental to developmental social work. Nevertheless, on investigation it was not found possible at that time to identify coherently what was actually taught and what might be the nature of an overall curriculum to impart these roles. It was concluded that:

> *"The fact of the matter seems to be that the current machinery linking schools, supervisors, agencies, professional associations, policy makers, planners, etc, is not adequate to the task of producing personnel for the important developmental roles which are currently being canvassed. This lack of coherent machinery constitutes the major problem confronting the schools and the profession".*(Drucker,1972)

It can be seen here that if there was to be a unity between academic teaching and the field, theory and practice, and social workers were really going to operate in the widening development arena, they would need to locate themselves in new and unfamiliar settings. The implications for the profession and recommendations were made back then to tackle the shortcomings of where the profession and its education stood at that time

Three decades on, the agenda of our present Kentucky-initiated conferences suggests that the affluent West also recognises that its traditional social work approaches and the attack on the issues such as prevailing poverty and social injustice remain inadequate. Wider areas of operation, organisation, methods of education and extended skills of social work are required.

So much then for the above diversion to past events and intentions. To return to this paper's attention to the role and positioning of what, who, and how of the social work profession:

Bridging the chasm - Supervision?

Social work has tried to deal with the disharmony and incompatibilities of academic institutions with its social work practice roots by trying to maintain substantial field work experience in social agencies, where students are said to be "putting theory into practice " "integrating knowledge" and so on. A more or less characteristic role has been invented by social work in the person of the "supervisor"[19]. It is they who are supposed to supply the bridging device between teaching and practicing institutions, theory and practice.

The literature is rich in material concerned with the function and development of this role of the supervisor. Much is expected of such a person and by and large the role is the focus of widespread dissatisfaction on all sides. Supervisors as models are commonly located in the established agencies which respond less quickly to change and tend to be seen as maintainers of a status~quo rather than agents of change.[20] Frequently the supervisor conveniently becomes a

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[19] One with vision which is super?

[20] One respondent who expends a great deal of energy in the field sighed that she wondered whether all the time and energy expended on fieldwork actually paid off in educational returns. Another experienced

scapegoat, taking the blame from the agency for the naivety and unrealistic attitudes of the students and by the university for not properly demonstrating the applicability of theory.

One suspects that the separation of agency and school, practice and theory with the supervisor as scapegoat is currently functional. Bringing them together would too painfully clearly reveal the chasm of fundamental differences between the two and the unsatisfactory correspondence between values taught and service rendered - as well as the marginally related nature of the theory taught to the social conditions experienced by the agencies. This may well be the reason why true co-operation and collaboration are so difficult (including at Professional Association levels) and why all the energy that has gone into clarifying the role and "educating the supervisor" activities seemingly are attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable and do not bring the desired results. At least the separation allows the schools and the agencies to function coherently individually, rather than having to face the confusion that might paralyse coherent action otherwise. The penalty seems to be paid by the supervisor, the student and no doubt the public. The gap between theory and practice, school and agency, has been and is obviously too wide to be bridged by a supervisor. It maybe that at start-up of the profession the supervisor role was an innovation but a more rewarding structure and provision might be attempted.

This was seen even in the 1970s. If there was to be a unity between academic teaching and the field, theory and practice, and social workers were really going to operate in the widening development arena, they would need to locate themselves in new and unfamiliar settings. Unfamiliar, that is to the increasing number of Western-trained teachers and to most available existing agency-based would-be supervisors with altogether very different backgrounds, mandates and objectives.[21] Within the profound implication for the profession the effective positioning of supervision was recommended as:

The see-saw approach

It was proposed that staff members of the schools themselves be assigned to try out possibilities of the envisioned developmental social work activities. This would entail an exploration of the dimensions of the tasks and to identify realistic assignments that might be set up for students eventually. The staff member would explore and practice the social work role and from first-hand experience draw up as detailed a job description as possible, based on an analysis of the tasks involved. Objectives and Goals of the service or agency and the learning objectives and goals that students might be expected to achieve would be spelled out. In the course of the practice the staff member would keep a detailed record of happenings, to be worked up into case-material for teaching.

In identifying the theory, knowledge and skills required to function in this position, the staff member would check whether and where such matter appeared in the school curriculum and would prepare to supplement the teaching, together with teaching materials, either to highlight and reinforce what was already being taught or to introduce new content. After perhaps a year the staff member would have paved the way for the introduction of students into the practice role, having prepared the setting and the agency staff to receive them.

The second phase of the school staff member's activity, having fulfilled the role himself, would consist of supervising the students' practice and learning. The staff member being familiar

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teacher says that "field practice is field practice," and that its rationale of putting theory into practice and integrating knowledge is not only unproven but under present conditions untrue.

[21] A situation that I have found again now in the former Soviet Eastern European States.

with the service requirements and the knowledge and teaching base, could then concentrate on the educational diagnosis of the student and the students needs.

The staff member would in time introduce a worker designated to take over the supervisory role in subsequent years by means of apprentice-type training. As his fieldwork and supervisory role diminished, the staff member would prepare to move back into the teaching role in the school.

Ideally it might be arranged for two members of staff to address the same areas of work. One would be moving through from practice, on to supervision and back to classroom teaching, while the other was moving from classroom teaching in the opposite direction - thus the idea of a see-saw.

Of course it was realised that there were dozens of problems inherent in such a proposal career-wise and within university and agency structures. However, if we were seriously to consider the role of institution-building, social policy, planning and so forth, we would need to demonstrate our ability to manage change within and between those institutions and structures including those of academia of which the profession had become a formal part and over which the profession therefore might be expected to have some participation in decision-making, before we could make any claim to competence outside our main domain.

Perhaps the members of this present 2001 conference might recognise that the profession continues to have similar difficulties and could well consider some such resolution today?

Research

It is certain that today research is an area which can be seen to illustrate well a continuing divergence and incompatibility of academia and social work. It seems that academia demands of social work students research, which, however inadvertently, diverts attention from critical social work concerns and the particular nature of social work learning and knowledge.

Prof. Richard Cloward [22](1998) of Columbia University, as part of the "celebration" of USA's social work centenary year, was invited to be enshrined in a "Hall of Fame". He declined the honour. Cloward might well be too abrasive for some but he raises important issues very relevant to our discussions. In his letter to Social Work (1998), and on the Internet, he declared that instead of a celebration there should be a "wake". He explains:

"What I see on social work's centennial is a divorce between professional education and professional practice .... Graduate schools of social work, especially the better-known ones, are taking on the attributes of research institutes, with faculty venturing into the field of practice only to collect data. .... We need balance between practice and research, and as much integration as possible. What is happening instead is that the practice traditions of graduate social work education, including the tradition of close integration with social agencies, are being superseded, even extinguished, by this growing research."

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[22] Cloward, R. (1998), 'The Decline of Education for Professional Practice' Letters, 43 (6) *Social Work NASW. Inc.*

It has been common for universities to expect students to identify their own research topics. I argue that such an academic requirement places upon the student an unreasonable and unnecessary burden. It is likely that students will not be too experienced in the overall state and cutting edge of the profession to make a useful choice or formulation. Completion of research projects, given the study time available for students, has commonly been a problem resulting in other demands of the overall programme being neglected. Whether students were engaged in research or theses, they should <u>not</u> have a totally free choice of subject matter.

The primary responsibility for identifying research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. It is the practitioners who are faced with questions that arise out of their daily work and require answers. These questions are not seeking answers to eternal verities but are required for <u>practical application</u>.

Some 35 years back a research focus for social workers was well stated by Virginia A. Paraiso (1966):

"Social workers should be trained to make use of the findings of basic research in their practice as well as in the formation of social work conceptions. At the same time, they should provide social researchers with information as to the areas of basic research that would have bearing on social service. This is an essential co-operative relationship between the social researcher who tends to direct investigations to general social phenomena and the social worker who should translate into action and practical achievements the result of such investigations.

In operational research, which should be within the competence of social workers, the following topics .. (see Paraiso footnote below) .. are suggested for priority, because they would provide important basic information for programme planning and implementation:

Many other operational and organisational aspects of the functioning of social service can be the subject of studies that can be made by social workers themselves within the limits of their daily work activities. Besides the practical value of such endeavours, they also serve as "morale" builders and as incentives for free and objective communication among professionals."[23]

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[23] See Virginia A. Paraiso (1966)
1. *Contributions of social service in the promulgation of social legislation.*
2. *Differences between the written law and its operation in social service.*
3. *Effects of legal provisions on the operation of programmes and their compatibility with social work principles.*
4. *Social welfare needs of people in rural and urban settings.*
5. *Inventory of existing social service facilities and measurement of their adequacy.*
6. *Identification of elements that can be used as bases for comparative measurement of costs and effects.*
7. *Identification of elements that can be used as bases for determining priorities and allocations.*
8. *Identification of areas of relationships that social service is replacing with its activities, and an evaluation of the effects of such replacement, i.e., institutions for children on parent-child relationships, subsidised workers and communal restaurants on family relationships, mothers' clubs on mother-child and husband-wife relationships, etc.*
9. *Effects of programmes on the lives of beneficiaries - relationships, attitudes, behaviour and general ways of life.*
10. *Effects of local authority or its weakness on the development and administration of programmes.*
"Social Service in Latin America: Functions and Relationships to Development", Economic Bulletin for Latin America, Vol. XI, No.1,. April, 1966.

Clearly this concept of the integral unity of identification of areas for social work research, practice and implementation activities can be seen very much in accord with the 1972 beginning to define social work in the widening development context, repeated here:

"Social work helping methods
> *The situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies and the gaps and inconsistencies in our policies and programmes. The social worker's role is to be alert and sensitive to this and to systematically report these matters, thus contributing decisively to policy and planning in the normal course of their "helping" activities"*[24]

In any case, social workers themselves need not be researchers in the formal academic sense, unless this is to become their professional speciality.[25] Primarily social workers should be eager <u>consumers</u> of research in order to examine, discover and extrapolate what it can tell us regarding what we should do, do better, or avoid doing. In addition, as a profession we also have a critical responsibility to identify from our practice, and convey to appropriate resources like the Schools of Social Work what needs to be researched.

At its simplest, as a profession which in practice recognises it needs to act frequently, albeit with very limited information, research which tells us anything better than guess work is to be welcomed. Of course we ourselves have much to learn from non-social work colleagues, but we must reinterpret their experience from our own social work perspectives. We must begin to identify the questions we need answered, which spring from our own professional practice, and develop theory that can be derived from it. Social work research must be directed to social considerations.[26]

The implications to emphasise are that professional practitioners must have a very strong life-long commitment to identifying and initiating areas for research. This includes on-going full consultation with the educators to select from the subject matter priority questions - priority, that is, according to social and professional <u>priorities</u> and <u>needs,</u> and the likelihood of effective use of the material researched. The schools have the corresponding responsibility for constructing a curriculum in which the research component will constantly relate to, and involve the students, in the main concerns of the profession.

Professional associations

Associations of Social Workers would certainly need to play a major role in this matter of research and to vigorously become professional institutions for gathering together the experience and opinions of their membership to feed and support social workers on policy and decision-making bodies.

The Association of Schools and individual schools should be responsible for collecting from the professional practitioners through their associations the range and lists of subjects for research which clearly state the problem and indicate the practical implications which are likely to flow from an investigation.

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[24] Drucker, David, Ibid., 'Explorations .. ' p16-17.

[25] Few entering social work with ideas of direct service would ordinarily want to go on to become full-time researchers. For them a specialised social science programme would be more appropriate.

[26] I was told recently quite bluntly at one distinguished American school of social work that what gets researched is determined by the funding source.

Working collaboration between practitioners and teachers in the judgement of priorities and needs clearly requires specific operational machinery within the associations.[27]

It would be then be the responsibility of the academic social work research group to examine the proposed research subjects and involve the students in sketching in the broad lines of method best fitted to the matter under consideration, and to judge whether it is appropriate for students to undertake the development of the research project.

The range of topics thus identified and examined is likely to give a student a much broader and practical view of social work and its priority professional concerns than can be expected from those with limited experience in the field, as is the case with most students. Indeed, the rationale for the choice of subject matter might well be presented by the teacher in the form of a model social analysis of a situation that would also demonstrate the specific need for information and the practical value of obtaining it. The element of choice of involvement for the student would take the form of a selection from a prepared list of such subjects. In an exceptional case he/she might be allowed his "own" subject if as effective a case of professional need can be argued as is presented in support of the "official" list. In such an event the subject would be added to and becomes part of the list.

It can be seen that there are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with and between the schools, in order to produce this professional agenda for research. The need for relatedness of the research to the profession's progress, and the relatedness to the teaching to professional practice cannot be over-emphasised. All this cannot be achieved without effective professional organisation and resources to carry out clearly defined responsibilities. The appellation "Profession" cannot be just borrowed finery.

Social worker research - an approach and sequence

What would be the effect of building into the curriculum a process along the following lines? (As students would be expected to become competent <u>consumers</u> of research, from this perspective, of course, they would need to be familiar with and <u>understand</u> the range and limitations of social research <u>methods</u>.)

Each accepted research project would be divided into a sequence in which succeeding intakes of students would complete one stage. However, they would become operationally involved with projects in different stages of progress and taught each of the stages of research, from statement of problem; formulation of a researchable subject; identification of appropriate method; data collection; analysis; implementation of recommendations and evaluation (the latter carried out with the initiating agency of the problem). They would be actively contributing one of the succeeding steps to a range of work-in-progress at each stage. Each stage would be taught as a mini-course in its own right.

1. Appreciation of the genesis, methods and objectives of practitioner's proposed research

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[27] The nature and operation of this machinery might well be the subject for workshops leading to assignment of specific responsibility.

Initially at stage one, social work students would start from examining the need for and purposes of a practitioner's identification of problem and the associated research questions. They would be taught the general skills of formulating research questions, the processes of coherently collecting and connecting information and ideas, and how to present these cogently and consistently in intelligently arguing a case. This should be a major teaching objective and could be met by reading a range of research papers, and making presentations of such materials at discussion seminars.

2. Research methods

Identifying the appropriate <u>research method</u> for a selected topic and devising <u>work plans and schedules.</u> (These selected topics and the schedules, questionnaires etc. would be prepared to become the task of the next intake of students.)[28]

3.Collecting of data

On the research topic for which the method and work plan had been devised at a previous stage by a former group of students.

4.Analysis of data

Collected by the earlier students

5. Social policy and programming planning (SP&PP)

The function of the SP and PP seminar would be to identify the new knowledge which the research material (or theses) supplies; to work out its implications for policy (or alternative policies); and follow through from these to realistic considerations of programme or changes in programme, manpower requirements, new or refined job descriptions, training needs, factors of timing, finance, etc.[29]

<u>Interpretation of research and recommendations for action should be seen and differentiated as skills in their own right</u> and quite distinct from research skills.[30] This being the case, it must be acknowledged for curriculum planning purposes as a separate stage. Teachers would provide the seminar with resources as discussion developed in relation to each research project, (such as where relevant the teacher's added carefully selected material produced by other researchers along with relevant public documents etc.,). Experts and consultants would be invited to talk on specific matters as they arose in the process of formulating policy and programme related to the problem under review, which the research had focused upon. Much theory could be elaborated upon as the seminar proceeded with its practical focus and provide opportunity for illustration and illumination.

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[28] Small groups might well collaborate where appropriate with a check to see that each student was contributing a fair share. (Professionally, it is likely that social workers would - and should - work together in such endeavours and this collaborative skill is as important, if not more useful, than the more romanticised lonely academic effort to which we often subscribe).

[29] It has been observed that recommendations in student research frequently seem to be unsophisticated in content and insufficiently thought out in relation to the way in which things might actually work, happen, or can be brought about.

[30] Laying the foundation for them becoming active <u>consumers</u> of research.

Should it be found that supplementary information or testing of some assumptions is required, such matters would be referred back to the current research list and in time both sets of material would be returned to a SP and PP seminar.

6. Implementation strategies seminar

This seminar would be provided with the research material and the SP&PP policy and programme formulation produced by the preceding seminar groups and would have the function of working out implementation "strategies".

The seminar would need to collect information and find out about the actual decision-making processes at the various levels of action relevant to implementation of the specific matter under discussion. In this way the working of power groups and individuals, and techniques in exposition, in gaining support from others and in selling ideas would have to be explored.

The seminar would analyse the various courses of possible action and ways of proceeding, examine arguments for and against, the implications of one strategy as differentiated from another and make judgements in regard to the effectiveness of different approaches and techniques. It would be the task of the seminar to spell out in detail what would need to be done with whom, when and how, and what materials in what format would be needed and be appropriately delivered etc. in order to have specific programmes initiated or altered. A realistic social action programme would then be formulated,

The Implementation Strategies Seminar should begin to make it professionally habitual to carefully think out and think through co-ordination and properly supported persistent multi-faceted and well-timed approaches.[31] The profession needs to draw upon an increasingly sophisticated practice constantly refined by experience and informed by growing theory devised from social analysis, diagnosis and outcome of planned action.

7. Implementation and field assignments

As in the normal course of events the research topic had been proposed by a practitioner, the relevant agency (agencies) would of course have a role in working through this phase with the students.

The research material and the implementation strategy seminar formulation documents would be handed over, if appropriate for a student worker or group, as a subsequent year's fieldwork assignment. Under appropriate supervision and support, one or more students, depending on the situation, would be involved with the agency in following through, documenting their progress, their success and failure. In this process they would be evaluating operationally, by the outcome of their efforts, all the stages of the research work that had preceded. It would provide very substantial hard information of what was done and achieved or otherwise i.e. "case material".

Amongst many other purposes, the overall experience could be used as a basis for the development of theoretical constructs leading to an indigenous-based action theory and against which broader derived theory could be illustrated and examined, providing a growing armamentarium of understanding and techniques.

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[31] It happens too often that results are expected from isolated efforts such as writing letters, demonstrations or similar activities which are not thought through, co-ordinated or widely supported.

8. Evaluation seminars

Finally, all this material and experience gained from the research project would become available in teaching skills and in <u>evaluating</u> projects right through from topic proposal to completed action.

A summary of the approach

In the course of adopting the curriculum changes discussed in this paper the schools would have been involving the students, practitioners, and the teaching staff in practice and in theory-building at the same time.

Students would immediately see the relevance of the steps of identification of problems, and have experienced a hands-on role in how questions from the field are taken through all the stages and specific focus of research and progression into action and final evaluation. They would no longer think of these processes as "subjects" to be inflicted by academics, with research as a major hurdle in which their efforts only merely culminate in academic accreditation. Although they would not have had to take responsibility for any one topic from start to finish, they would have begun to appreciate the practical pay-off of research, savor the excitement of having contributed to knowledge and change and precipitated organised action. They would understand the importance of providing research topics from the field when they become practitioners and where they belong in contributing to an overall professional identity. In the controlled learning situation the student would be fulfilling the role and trying out procedures that he might be expected to continue for the rest of his professional life, one in which continuing learning (for which the school programme was only the prototype) would become a built-in professional habit rather than - as is often the case - an isolated episode for students and an unfulfilling burden for academics.

It is also anticipated that the professional practitioners and the schools would be drawn together in identifying need, pursuing research, creating and contributing knowledge, enhancing professional skills, and translating them into action.

Change

A curriculum which included the chain of activities outlined above obviously would have implications for teaching institutions, current curricula, and students and teachers alike. It would be time-consuming, and would demand profound changes in the relationships between the institution, associations, the community, and the staff and students. It would hardly be possible to add it to what we presently have, for it requires a "cafeteria" [32]style curriculum rather than the more familiar "set-course banquet", and would require much from teachers and the practitioners.

However, if the many obvious (and probably many not so obvious) difficulties could be ironed out, such changes would present advantages. It offers an integrating mechanism for both practise and theory and, if done imaginatively, could begin to deal with the problem of what our selection should be from the enormous range of content and theory related to social problems and human behaviour. We could perhaps minimise core content in exchange for core activity and alert the student to the immense possibilities of what remains, placing emphasis on the learning skills of how, where, when and through whom to find out the content when it is needed. Such an approach will serve them best in the long run as more and more data and more and more theory mount up and as conditions rapidly change. This seems more rewarding than trying to decide upon a semi-permanent curriculum content when so little of the future direction of the student's professional life can be known to us.

What we would be attempting is to impart a professional method of learning, in the few years at our institutions, which will start students on the path of finding out and doing things methodically for the rest of their lives. This kind of knowledge cannot grow obsolete and "irrelevant" so quickly as so much of our teaching has in the past. Hopefully then the essential value of theory and the need to know what is happening elsewhere will follow from a firm base of seeing, doing and knowing what is happening directly in one's own domain. This then becomes accessible to the student out of his growing self-confidence, whereas currently he is inadvertently undermined by the emphasis on academic alien ways of doing things in alien situations, which tends to leave theory rattling around unconnected in the head, an abstraction from alien experience rather than an integrating conceptualisation of much that is hands-on familiar.

After thinking through the full implications of such an approach, perhaps schools would be interested to try out some of the suggestions made in this paper. More fundamentally, it might be an instructive exercise to begin to construct (at least for theoretical purposes in the first case) not a model curriculum (an activity about which we have much misgivings) but a model teaching-learning institution. The aim would be to discover ideally what kind of structure, relationships and ambience might best serve to impart the nature of social work and its practice[33]. Then we would be able to plan for each phase of moving towards such an ideal. Perhaps it might become apparent that our present embodiment within current university structures and their cultures really makes it impossible to manage a satisfactory transition or to negotiate a positive compromise between what we have and what we essentially need. If so, after the "Hundred Years" of entering universities professional social work might have to contemplate creating institutes of excellence outside of present university structures.

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[32] As in a cafeteria (ingredients, prepared dishes (modules) available from simple to complex but as far as sequence goes determined on a when-you-need-to-know basis.

[33] A most penetrating discussion of institutions, and their relationships to the nature of knowledge, to which we owe a great deal in this area of concern, is to be found in Werner Stark (1958), "The Sociology of Knowledge", Routledge Keegan Paul.