

## Curriculum, Culture, Supervision and Research

### Social work incompatibilities and possibilities

#### 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 Curriculum 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). Course (the past participle "cursus", a running) has the same Latin currere derivative. Robert Graves<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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 Curse.<sup>3</sup> My experience in many places has been that students profoundly feel that correlation. Even more enlightening at the time<sup>4</sup> 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 climate, the living social institutional context and critically the culture in which the learning is specifically to take place.

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<sup>1</sup> Graves, Robert (1961) "The White Goddess" Faber & Faber, pg.445

<sup>2</sup> 'Widdershins' in a direction opposite to the usual; contrary to the direction of the sun; considered as unlucky or causing disaster.

<sup>3</sup> 'Curse' an utterance consigning a person or thing to evil; a thing which blights or blasts.

<sup>4</sup> 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

This was well put by Ralph W. Tyler at a curriculum workshop in 1960 and David French ...<sup>5</sup>

*".....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<sup>6</sup>

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

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<sup>5</sup> This approach derives much from the views of Ralph W. Tyler.<sup>5</sup> and David French.

Tyler, Ralph W "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."

<sup>6</sup> "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."

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

where practice properly fits into university programmes and curricula have a long and painful history that continues today.<sup>7</sup>

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, researched, nor can it 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 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

<sup>7</sup> 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 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. The 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.

<sup>8</sup> Atherton, Charles in a 27 May 1998 [intsocwork@nsw.org.uk](mailto:intsocwork@nsw.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 "verstehen" 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."

universities and the students tolerated as a sub-culture, with the accent on sub, which they often feel keenly. Where the social work 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 to 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, 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,

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<sup>9</sup> From the students 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 than for sitting passively in a lecture hall along with maybe a couple of hundred students.

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sensing, examining, 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 learning exercises. 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 art 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.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 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"

. 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

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 unpredictable *development*.

#### SOCIAL WORK and 'DEVELOPMENT' (a condensed historical recap)

Star → 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)<sup>11</sup>

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)<sup>12</sup>

At the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) conference<sup>13</sup> 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".<sup>14</sup> Leaving aside the hubris, the leaders of social work then congregated in Asia had authoritatively had its attention drawn to the widening nature of social work once more as a cause.<sup>15</sup> 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 70's.

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*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).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, 1968 Proceedings of the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare. New York.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations (1970) Recommendations of the First Asian Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare. Manila.

<sup>13</sup> Along with the International Congress of Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

<sup>14</sup> "Corridors of Power" was the title of a book by C.P. Snow (1964)

<sup>15</sup> Social work as a cause and/or function has exercised debate at least since Alexander Flexner pre WW1 and on through the Milford Conference in 1929

However, at that time, almost exclusively current western affluent focussed social work influences had been widely exported and enthusiastically embraced. Nevertheless, 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.<sup>16</sup> Slowly there was a growing appreciation that social problems at all levels were of such a 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.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 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:

(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.<sup>4</sup>

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)

<sup>16</sup> "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 Education and Field Work Supervisors, part 2, Asian Records for Teaching Social Work. Bangkok.

Visiting five predominantly rural developing countries in Asia, Brigham in 1984 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.

<sup>17</sup> It is salutary (and depressing thirty years on) that it was then that POVERTY then appeared as a priority issue on the international agenda. Plus ça change ...

<sup>18</sup> Drucker, D.

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 our diversion to past events and intentions. To return to this paper's earlier 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"<sup>19</sup>. 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 tend to be seen as maintainers of a status-quo rather than agents of change and are frequently located in the established agencies which respond less quickly to change.<sup>20</sup> The supervisor conveniently becomes a 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. The gap between theory and practice, school and agency, is obviously too wide to be bridged by a supervisor.

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. It may be that at start-up of the profession the supervisor role was an innovation but a more rewarding structure might now be attempted.

<sup>19</sup> One with vision which is super?

<sup>20</sup> 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 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.



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*This was seen in 1970's*  
*proposed*  
It was seen 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 implication for the profession and the effective positioning of supervision was designated as:

### The see-saw approach

*objectives of the school and agency supervision based on the*  
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 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.

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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.

### Research

Center: 1 - is that today.

continuing

Research, is an area, which can be seen to, illustrates well a divergence and incompatibility of academia and social work as the relationship now stands. It seems that academia demands of social work students research, which, however, inadvertently, currently diverts attention from critical social work concerns and the particular nature of social work learning and knowledge.

Prof. Richard Cloward <sup>21</sup>(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."*

In any case, social workers themselves need not be researchers in the formal academic sense, unless this is to become their professional speciality.<sup>22</sup> Primarily social workers should be eager consumers 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.<sup>23</sup>

The implications are that professional practitioners must have a very strong life-long commitment to initiating research and the schools a 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.

### **Social Worker Research - An Approach**

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

<sup>21</sup> Cloward, R. (1998) 'The Decline of Education for Professional Practice' Letters, 43 (6) *Social Work NASW. Inc.*

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> I was told recently quite bluntly at one distinguished American school of social work that what gets researched is determined by the funding source.

## An Approach for Discussion

What would be the effect of building into the curriculum a process along the following lines? All students would be expected to be competent "consumers" of research and from this perspective, of course, would need to understand social research methods. Students would need to be taught the more general skills of coherently collecting and connecting information and ideas, to present these cogently and consistently and to argue a case intelligently. This should be a major teaching objective and could be met by requiring seminar papers and presentations.

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.

Whether students were engaged in research or theses, they should not have a totally free choice of subject matter. It would be the responsibility of the practitioners and the educators to select priority questions and subject matter - priority, that is, according to social and professional priorities and needs, and the possibility of effective use of the material researched.

<sup>15</sup> Few entering 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.

<sup>16</sup> Some thirty-five years back the focus for social workers was well stated by

\*(1) See Virginia A. Paraiso "Social Service in Latin America: Functions and Relationships to Development."

Economic Bulletin for Latin America Vol. XI, No.1. April, 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 are suggested for priority, because they would provide important basic information for programme planning and implementation:

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.



active and effective S.W.

collaboration between practitioners and teachers in this matter of judgement of priorities and needs requires specific machinery within the Associations. (The nature and operation of this machinery might well be the subject for a workshop leading to assignment of specific responsibility.)

Force

D. It is likely that students will not be too experienced in the overall state and cutting edge of the profession to make this judgement. Especially given the study time available to them, along with all the other demands of the overall programme, the questions to be researched are the responsibility of the professionals through their professional associations. The social work questions to be researched are not seeking eternal verities but arise out of social worker's role and daily practice.

E. The primary responsibility for identifying research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. Associations of social workers would need to 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 and certainly to play a major role in the matter of research.

F. It is the practitioners in their daily work who are faced with questions that require answers. These answers are required not as fundamental truths but for practical application.

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

method  
with student  
stage two

and select  
It would be then be the responsibility of the academic social work research group to examine these subjects and sketch in the broad lines of method best fitted to the matter under consideration and judge whether it is appropriate for a student to undertake.

The range of topics thus identified 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 which would also demonstrate the specific need for information and the practical value of obtaining it. The element of choice for the student could take the form of a selection from a short list of such subjects, or in an exceptional case he might be allowed his "own" subject if he can make it his own by arguing as effective a case as is presented in support of the "official" list and becomes part of it.

" There are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with...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 <sup>17</sup>

## 10. Effects of local authority or its weakness on the development and administration of programmes.

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.

<sup>17</sup> "(Drucker 1977a)



In beginning to define the social work role in the widening development role the familiar basis of social work was of course where one had to start from. Research was very much part and parcel of the way this was framed -

#### 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.<sup>4</sup>

Here clearly re stated<sup>18</sup> was the integral unity of practice and research:

A detailed research sequence was recommended to the schools, and remains still critical now in the year 2001.

#### Teaching social work research - a recommendation

Professional "consumers" of research would need to be familiar with a range and the limitations of social research methods. Students would not be expected to initiate and complete their "own" research. Each research project would be divided into a sequence in which succeeding intakes of students would complete one stage. However, they would be shown and taught all 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 carried out with the initiating agency. They would be actively contributing one of these steps to a range of work-in-progress at each stage. Each stage would be taught as a mini-course in its own right.

It was 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 it into action. From the students' perspective, they will have experienced how questions from the field are taken through all the stages to action and final evaluation. The students themselves will have had a role to play, having been taken through each stage with its specific focus. 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.

"Explorations" argued that:

" There are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with...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". (Drucker, 1977b)

A detailed research sequence was recommended to the schools:

Students should be seen as needing to become primarily professional "consumers" of research. (Few will want to go on to become full-time researchers.) For this they would need to be familiar with the range and limitations of social research methods.

Within the limited time available to students they would not be expected to initiate and complete their "own" research, but would be expected to be taken through all the stages of research, adding a step to work in progress. They would start from examining the need and purposes of a

<sup>18</sup> 'Exploration' in 1972 p



practitioner's identification of research, through to action and implementation of findings and recommendations.

Each stage would be taught as a course in its own right. These courses would be:

1 appreciation of the objectives of the proposed research on the list compiled by the professionals:

2 Identifying the appropriate research method for a selected topic and devising work plans and schedules; (these selected topics would become the task of students (or where appropriate a group of students) the following year. Small groups might collaborate in a research project or a thesis with an appropriate 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).

3 The collecting of data on a research topic for which the method and work plan had been devised by a previous intake of students; (devising the method and schedules takes up much time and most student theses seemed to rush through the collecting stage because there was so little time left to them as their courses proceeded.);

Analysis of data collected by earlier students;

4 A Social Policy and Programming Planning Seminar; (this analysis would determine what had been learned from the research and its implication for social work.)

Currently, recommendations to be found in the average student's work tend to be insufficiently thought out and somewhat unsophisticated in content and in relation to the way in which things actually work, happen, or can be brought about.

Furthermore, interpretation of research and recommendations for action should be seen and differentiated as skills in their own right and quite distinct from research skills. This being the case, it might be of value to acknowledge it for curriculum purposes. Research and theses produced in this first phase (and carefully selected material produced by other researchers along with public documents such as census material, etc.) would then systematically become the material presented for the second phase - a "Social Policy and Programme Planning Seminar". (SP and PP).

This might well be at a time when the producer of the material had graduated, but the students in these seminars would themselves be concurrently involved with preparing in turn their research or thesis contribution.

The function of the SP and PP Seminar would be to identify the new knowledge which the material 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. 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 the SP and PP seminar.

5 In discussing this possibility, one respondent mentioned problems that had arisen in gaining access to public documents and figures in the course of pursuing a research project. This situation might well be one placed directly in the "Implementation Strategies Seminar." There is every reason why problems of this nature should be carefully examined in analysing the various courses of action, their strengths and weaknesses and the carefully weighed arguments centering



on ways of proceeding to obtain what is wanted. It happens too often that results are expected from isolated efforts such as writing letters, supporting demonstrations or similar activities which are not thought through, co-ordinated or supported. 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. The profession needs to draw upon an increasingly sophisticated practise constantly refined by experience and informed by growing theory devised from social analysis, diagnosis and planned action, using the growing armamentarium of techniques. (carefull observation and documentation should lead empirically to an understanding of what action is indicated or contra-indicated, given the nature of the situation.

Teachers would provide the seminar with resources as discussion developed in relation to each research project, and 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 would be elaborated upon as the seminar proceeded with its practical focus and provided opportunity for illustration and illumination.

Subsequently a third phase would be undertaken in a regular Implementation Seminar. This seminar would be provided with the research and the 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 and in selling ideas would have to be explored. It would be the task of the seminar to spell out what would probably have 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, including arguments for and against, the implications of one strategy as differentiated from another; and judgements in regard to the effectiveness of approaches and techniques would be documented in the formulation.

Implementation seminars to devise strategies and specific work plans to follow upon what emerged from the research; (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;

A fourth stage would then be reached, when under appropriate supervision and support, the research programme and strategy documents would be handed over as a field work assignment if appropriate for a student worker or group. The activity would become the subject of a subsequent year's fieldwork assignment in which one or more students, depending on the situation, would be involved in following through, documenting their progress, their success and failure; in this process they would be evaluating by the outcome of their efforts -the work that had preceded. At the least this would provide very substantial "case material" which, amongst many other purposes, could be used as both hard information of what was done and as a basis for the development of theoretical constructs leading to an indigenous-based action theory and against which broader derived theory could be illustratively examined.

Finally, learning the skills in evaluating such projects right through from topic proposal to completed action.



In the course of these seminar processes the school would be involving the students, 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, research, progression through the various stages into action and 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 culminated in academic accreditation. 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 and in which continuing learning (for which the school programme was only the prototype) would become a professional habit rather than - as is often the case - an isolated episode for students, and a struggle for academics.

In this way it was 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 it into action. From the students' perspective, they have experienced how questions from the field are taken through all the stages to action and final evaluation. The students themselves have had a role to play, having been taken through each stage with its specific focus. Although they 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, savour 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.

A curriculum which included the chain of seminars outlined above obviously would have implications for teaching institutions, current curricula, students and teachers alike. It would be time-consuming, and would demand profound changes in the relationships between the institution and 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" <sup>19</sup> 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, this approach would present advantages. It offers an integrating mechanism for both practice 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; emphasis on the learning skills of how, where, when and through whom to find out the content when he needs it will serve them better 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 with so few of the future direction facts of the student's professional life currently 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 him on the path of finding out the facts and doing things methodically with them for the rest of his life. This kind of knowledge cannot grow obsolete and "irrelevant" so quickly as so much of our teaching has in the past. Hopefully then the meaning 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

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<sup>19</sup> 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.



alien ways of doing things in alien situations, which tends to make theory an abstraction from alien experience rather than an integrating conceptualisation of much that is familiar.

It is recommended that an attempt be made to interest a school in the region in thinking through the full implications of such an approach with a view to testing out such a teaching procedure. Full documentation of the preparatory thinking, organisation and on-going comments, should be a built-in part of such a project - along with an evaluation. A full account of such a project should be written up and a manual or guide lines be produced for other schools who might wish to undertake such a restructuring of their programme and teaching.

A curriculum embodying such an approach as advocated here raises questions about the level and abilities of students recruited into our teaching programmes. A high level of self-reliance, initiative and motivation is obviously required. some of these matters will be discussed in the chapter on "Ways of Learning.'

*"Of course it was realised that there were dozens of problems inherent in these wide-ranging sets of proposals career-wise and within university and agency structures. Clearly, here again the profession would need to do a lot of "institution building." However, if we were to take seriously the roles of institution-building, social justice, participation, social policy and planning, (which had been identified as fundamental elements of the development and social work role), like the adage "charity begins at home", we would need to build effective institutions for professional social work. Before we could speak with some authority about what society should be doing to bring about change we would need to demonstrate our ability to manage change ourselves, particularly within and between our own professional organisations and those academic and social service institutions and structures of which the profession has some measure of control and already, to some degree, participates in decision-making." (Drucker, 1993).*