

Social Workers in Schools – the Teachers' Response

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73 teachers who had participated in a school-based social work scheme completed a questionnaire which recorded their attitudes to the programme. All the teachers had been directly involved in consultations about pupil management with six specially trained social workers. The response of the teachers suggest that even with a limited amount of contact, social workers can make a positive contribution to teacher practice. The personal characteristics of the teachers did not appear to affect their responses.

The notion of introducing social workers into ordinary schools in the United Kingdom has received support from a number of sources (Plowden Committee, 1967; Seeborn Committee, 1968; Salmarsch, 1973; Morrison, 1974), yet there have been relatively few attempts to monitor or evaluate those schemes which have been implemented (Lyons, 1973; Rose and Marshall, 1974). In the most recent of these studies, Kolvin *et al.* (1976) describes a DES-sponsored research project designed to examine the effectiveness of school-based approaches in helping pupils with emotional or behavioural problems. Part of the project involved introducing six specially trained social workers into 12 schools in the cities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead, each worker being allocated to one junior (7-11 years age-range) and one comprehensive school (11-16 years age-range). Their task was to collaborate with teachers in an attempt to help children with adjustment problems. In this exercise the social workers had a dual role – consulting with teaching staff about the psychological management of identified pupils, and planned short-term casework with the parents of these children. Attempts were also made to facilitate links between school and home. The foci of the social workers' efforts were thus the important adults with whom the child had daily contact – his parents and teachers. In other words, the strategy of the Newcastle Social Work Programme fell into the category of *indirect treatment*. By concentrating on the teachers, we hoped that any improvements in the child management skills would ultimately be generalised to other pupils.

The social work programme lasted for almost one academic year, although teacher consultation only became established on a regular basis after the social workers had been attached to their schools for three months. During this early period the social workers were making initial

contact with teaching staff and becoming familiar with the particular organisational structure of their schools. The following two terms (Autumn 1973 and Spring 1974) saw the most active consultation period. Thereafter the social workers remained in the schools for a final term, but worked in a different capacity from that of teacher consultation. Further descriptions of the social work service are provided elsewhere (Harvey *et al.*, 1977; Wolstenholme *et al.*, 1980).

As a consequence of the indirect nature of social work intervention in this scheme, it was vital that we obtained the impressions of the consumers of the service. The parental response is described in another paper (Wolstenholme *et al.*, 1980). The rest of the present paper is devoted to the views of those teachers who took part in the consultation exercise. There is a lack of objective information in this particular area of interdisciplinary co-operation, largely because so few schemes have been implemented. Even when material has been available, however, its usefulness has been limited, first by a failure to collect information systematically, and second by not distinguishing the views of teachers who had worked with social workers from those who had not. In this investigation it was possible to ask the opinion of teachers who had first-hand experience of working with a school social worker, and accordingly to study their attitudes to a specific social work service.

Aims of the study

While objectives in mental health are notoriously difficult to define, the aims of the consultations were as follows:

- (a) To increase teacher awareness of psychological aspects of child behaviour.
- (b) To discuss with teachers some basic principles of psychological management of child behaviour.
- (c) To provide the teaching staff with relevant family and social information to assist them in formulating a management plan.

Within this broader framework, more specific objects were defined for individual children (Wolstenholme and Kolvin, 1979). It was accepted as fundamental that in any attempt to achieve such objectives the attitude and manner in which consultation is offered is likely to be crucial (Schild *et al.*, 1976). Furthermore, it is important, when working within the existing framework of the school, to draw a realistic set of objectives which can be implemented within the time constraints and without substantial re-organisation of the school routine.

There were five broad areas in which we considered feedback from school staff would be valuable. Some of the areas were entirely concerned with aspects of consultation, the others with wider themes (the figures in brackets refer to the individual items to be found in table 1):

1. Teachers' views about consultation and its impact on practice:
 - (a) Did it appear to lead to an improvement of the teachers' ability to handle the children? (3, 5, 9)
 - (b) Did it lead to a better understanding of child and family problems? (1, 2)
 - (c) Did it help to foster links between families and the school? (14)
 - (d) Did it provide opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of problems? (8, 15)
 - (e) Did it lead to a better understanding of emotional development? (6)
 - (f) Did it lead to a greater awareness of personal reactions? (4)
2. What were the teachers' views on alternative approaches to management of pupils with behaviour problems? (17, 19, 21)
3. What were teachers' reactions to the feedback they received from social workers? (7, 16, 24), and to the availability and appropriateness of social work consultation? (10, 11, 12)
4. How much were teachers able to understand social work concepts? (13)
5. What were teachers' views on the actual and potential duties of social workers in schools? (18, 20, 22, 23)

Method

Procedure: A self-rating questionnaire was used to ascertain the views of teachers who had been involved in the project. All those teachers with whom the social workers had at least one detailed pupil-orientated discussion were contacted by senior members of the research team who had not been personally involved in providing a social work service to the schools. A detailed pupil-orientated discussion was defined as at least 10 minutes' discussion during which significant information relating to a pupil was exchanged between teacher and social worker. In all, 117 teachers were contacted, and 73 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 62%. As far as we can ascertain, there were four main reasons for this moderate response:

- (a) *Mobility* – a small percentage of teachers had left the schools during the course of the project.
- (b) *Exposure* – several others indicated that they had had insufficient contact with the social worker in their school to complete the questionnaire with any degree of confidence. In view of the very broad inclusion criterion of surveying all teachers, including those who may have had only one discussion with a social worker during the year, this latter reaction was not entirely unexpected. In fact, an analysis of the amount of time spent in consultation with social workers revealed that those teachers who did not respond were usually those who had spent the least time in consultation.
- (c) *Questionnaire resistance* – a number of the teachers contacted felt that they were already overloaded with research questionnaires and therefore were reluctant to complete yet another.

(d) *Resistance to social work* – we cannot rule out the possibility that part of the relatively low response rate may constitute a reflection of resistance in some teachers to aspects of the social work scheme or the programme in general. Our subsequent contacts with teaching staff, however, suggests that this latter explanation is likely to be true in only a small number of instances.

It should be emphasised that there have been similar difficulties in maintaining contact in other studies (e.g. Rose and Marshall, 1974).

Teacher sample. The sample consisted of 30 men and 43 women, and all but five of these were in full-time posts. Head teachers or deputy heads made up 8% of the sample, and a further 53% had head of department status or special departmental responsibilities. Approximately two-thirds of the teachers (69%) were under 40 years of age, and 20% were less than 25 years of age. Two-thirds (67%) of the teachers were married, and 40% had children of their own. In terms of training and experience, 33% had a degree plus teacher training, 60% had teacher training only, and 7% had a degree but no teacher training. Most (67%) had more than five years' teaching experience. The teachers who replied thus represented a cross-section of teachers fairly typical of the profession in terms of training and experience, though with a slight over-representation of teachers with senior posts.

Findings

The responses to individual items are shown in table 1. These responses constitute one index, albeit crude, of the helpfulness or usefulness of a social work programme aimed at aiding teachers both to cope with and to help pupils with psychological problems. As can be seen, all the items in part 1, and items 14 and 15 in part 2, refer specifically to the impact that working with a special worker had on teacher practice as reported by the teachers, whereas the remainder refer to overall aspects of the social work scheme or are statements of a more general nature relating to the management of pupils.

1. *Views about what was achieved.* A third to half of the teachers did not see consultation as being very useful in providing them with practical techniques for coping with pupils (3, 5, 9). A primary task for the social workers was to help teachers maximise their practical management skills in dealing with pupils with difficulties. Thus the response to these particular items is, at first sight, disappointing. On the other hand, between 51% and 65% of teachers did consider consultation to be of at least some use in (a) improving handling ability, (b) increasing their knowledge about psychological methods of handling children, and (c) thinking out alternative ways of coping with disturbed behaviour.

The social workers appear to have made a greater impression when it comes to providing support for the class teacher, with 84% of teachers

Table 1: Teacher questionnaire — response to individual items

Part 1	Response		
	Nil %	Slightly %	Moderately/ markedly %
1. Has enhanced my understanding of the children identified	14	38	48
2. Increased my understanding of the children's families	13	30	57
3. Improved my ability to handle the children's behaviour	46	36	18
4. Led to an increase of my understanding of my own reactions to children	45	39	16
5. Enhanced my knowledge about the psychological techniques of handling children	49	44	7
6. Enhanced my knowledge about emotional development in general	62	28	10
7. Provided me with more useful information from psychological tests	64	22	14
8. It helped me to have someone to talk to about the children's problems	16	39	45
9. It helped me to think out alternative ways of coping with disturbed behaviour	35	33	32

Part 2	Response		
	Not really %	Possibly %	Definitely %
10. I would have liked more advice	36	39	25
11. There were sufficient opportunities of discussing everything I wanted to discuss	40	24	36
12. I would have liked to be told more about how to handle children	57	32	11
13. I could usually see what the social worker was getting at	4	29	67
14. It helped to foster links with the families of disturbed children	43	37	20
15. It led to a sharing of responsibility for individual children	42	45	13
16. I was told enough of what was found out in interviews with parents	36	33	31
17. I would have preferred it if the very disturbed children had been removed to special classes or schools than to help them to be maintained in our school with the help of a social worker	58	17	25
18. I think the social workers should have spent more time visiting the home	48	49	3
19. I would have preferred it if the social worker had undertaken direct treatment of the children	53	34	13
20. The social worker should encourage unco-operative parents to come into (contact with) the school	4	16	80
21. I would have preferred to contact the parents myself	42	54	4

Part 2	Response		
	Not really %	Possibly %	Definitely %
22. The social workers should confine themselves to social problem families	61	26	13
23. Social workers should concern themselves with staff tensions which might arise in the school	74	23	3
24. Social workers should be more informative about the psychological information they elicit from families	29	49	25

reporting that collaboration helped at least slightly in this way, and 45% considering that it helped moderately or markedly (8). More than half of the teachers endorsed at least slightly the notion that consultation led to a sharing of responsibility (15), although only 13% of teachers felt that this was 'definitely' the case.

A number of items covered the topics of increased teacher awareness of child and family problems, and home-based relations. It appears that the social workers had their greatest success in increasing teachers' understanding of child behaviour and the family background. Social workers were especially successful in facilitating teacher understanding about the families (2), with 57% of teachers indicating that consultation had a moderate or marked influence, in the case of improved understanding of children (1), 48% responded in a similar fashion. On the other hand, two-fifths of the teachers indicated that consultation had not been successful in fostering links between parents and school (14).

The success in increasing teacher awareness of the children and their families was not accompanied by similar improvement in teachers' understanding of emotional development in general (6). Consultation was seen by 55% of the respondents as increasing their awareness of their own reactions to pupils (4), although most of the increase was at a marginal level.

2. *Views on alternative methods of management.* The teachers had the opportunity to indicate their preferences for other helpful techniques (17, 19, 21). To the first of these statements, teachers had clear though opposing views, with few respondents opting for the mid-point on the scale. A clear majority (58%) were against disturbed children moving into special classes or schools. In addition, there were very few teachers (13%) who would definitely have preferred to see the social worker undertake direct treatment of children (19), and even fewer (4%) who would definitely have preferred to contact parents themselves (21), although more than 50% indicated that this was a possibility.

3. *Reactions to (i) feedback and (ii) content of consultation.* A third of teachers were dissatisfied with the actual feedback of information about

families (16), despite an agreement among the research team that information would not be lightly withheld. More than two-thirds considered that there was a lack of information from the psychological testing of children (7), and a similar proportion felt that the social workers should have been more informative about the psychological information they elicited from families (24).

In addition to items covering the content of consultation, a number of items were intended to discover teachers' reactions to the amount of time actually spent on the consultation process. Opportunities for discussion with teachers had to be fitted around existing timetable demands, which proved a difficult task in senior schools. Two-fifths of teachers clearly indicated that the opportunities for discussion were insufficient (11). Three-quarters of the teachers would have liked more advice, but the nature of this advice is uncertain as only 43% wanted to be told more about handling children (12).

4. *Ability to understand social work concepts.* There did not appear to be any major difficulties in understanding social work intentions and suggestions, as only 4% of teachers responded to the 'not really' category (13). Technical jargon is often reported as being a hindrance to inter-professional co-operation, but the response to this item suggests that this did not constitute a major problem here (13). Almost 30% of teachers, however, had sufficient reservations to mark the 'possibly' column, which emphasises the need for greater clarity in communication with other professionals.

5. *Views on the actual and potential duties of social workers.* Several statements reflected the teachers' preferences with respect to the various roles of social workers. First, it was clear that three-quarters of the teachers were unwilling to have social workers concern themselves with staff tensions (23). Second, the notion that social workers should confine themselves to social problem families obtains a strong negative endorsement by nearly two-thirds of the teachers, which suggests that other aspects of the social workers' contributions were perceived as valuable (22). Finally, the philosophy of the social worker contacting unco-operative parents was highly acceptable to teachers (20): indeed, the greatest agreement amongst teachers was reported in this area, 80% 'definitely' seeing this as an important role for the social worker. This 'potential' for working with parents also receives some support from the response to item 21, in which a considerable proportion of teachers indicated that they were prepared to contact parents themselves, although few felt this strongly.

Two further aspects of the scheme were singled out for comment. First, more than three-quarters of teachers endorsed the notion of the social worker having a base (or office) in the school as opposed to a base outside the school. Second, teachers were asked whether the consultation pattern

(which involved organising discussions to fit the teachers' timetable) was 'inconvenient', 'slightly inconvenient' or 'convenient'. The majority (66%) considered it slightly inconvenient. It is not clear how the pattern of consultation could be improved to make it easier for teachers, especially in view of the part-time status of the social workers. An analysis of social work activities for one term in the senior schools, however, revealed that over half (57%) of contacts between teachers and social workers were pre-arranged. Therefore, while it is feasible to work within the existing timetabling arrangements, it would evidently be preferable to allow for consultation time when drawing up the timetable.

Reanalysis of data by school and teacher characteristics

Each of the 24 items in table 1 were reanalysed according to the type of school in which the teacher worked (junior or senior), and four teacher characteristics: age, sex, training, and parental status. No significant differences were found between the views of male and female teachers, nor between heads/deputy heads and other teachers. The following differences were however obtained:

School type. Teachers in junior schools more often reported that consultation had led to a sharing of responsibility for the children ($\chi^2 = 5.0$; $p < 0.05$; d.f. = 1; Yates correction).

Age. Young teachers, i.e. those under 40 years of age, wanted more advice than their older colleagues ($\chi^2 = 3.9$; $p < 0.05$; d.f. = 1), and in addition did not want the social worker's role to be restricted to work with social problem families ($\chi^2 = 7.5$; $p < 0.01$; d.f. = 1).

Parental status. Teachers who were not parents themselves were more favourable and held the view that consultation had improved both the ability to handle pupils' behaviour ($\chi^2 = 9.3$; $p < 0.01$; d.f. = 1), and to think of alternative ways of coping with disturbed behaviour ($\chi^2 = 9.0$; $p < 0.01$; d.f. = 1). As significantly fewer teachers under the age of 40 were parents, we did not know whether their response to these two items was determined by the youthfulness or the parental status of the teacher. Further analysis revealed that for both age groups (i.e. both under 40 and over 40) those teachers without children of their own were more favourable on both these items. It would appear, therefore, that it is parental status and not age which is the more important factor.

Training. The more highly qualified teachers, i.e. those with a degree plus teacher training (and irrespective of age), were less in agreement with item 22, i.e. that social workers should confine themselves to social problem families ($\chi^2 = 7.4$; $p < 0.01$; d.f. = 1).

Finally, in relation to teacher views of the consultation pattern and work base for social worker, only two differences were noted, both of which

related to the work base. Male teachers were more favourable to the idea of a social work base in the school ($\chi^2 = 5.1$; $p < 0.05$; d.f. = 1; Yates correction). We should add here that all the Newcastle social workers were women! Similarly, the most highly qualified teachers were more favourable towards a school base for social workers ($\chi^2 = 5.6$; $p < 0.05$; d.f. = 1; Yates correction).

Discussion

It is clear that only a minority of teachers strongly endorsed the view that, as a result of consultations with social workers, their own skills in managing pupils had improved. Nevertheless, about half to two-thirds considered that consultation had been of some help in this area. The moderate impression on this aspect of teacher practice could be a reflection of the limited exposure experienced by some of the teachers to social work practice: as has already been noted, the criterion for inclusion in the study was only one detailed pupil-orientated discussion. There is indeed some evidence in the literature to support the conclusion that intensive consultation is more effective than limited consultation. In particular, the study by Tyler (1971) suggests that improved understanding of the child is significantly related to higher rates of consultation with teachers, though it is not clear whether this result was a function of the intensity of attention rather than of the effectiveness of consultation. In the present study two questions remain unanswered: whether certain kinds of responses were influenced by the lower rates of consultation, and – a corollary of this – how intensive the rates of consultation should be for maximum effect.

In relation to alternative methods of management, the finding that a majority of teachers were against the 'most disturbed' pupils moving into special schools or classes is particularly interesting, especially when coupled with some recent research findings which described the relatively good progress made by maladjusted children in ordinary schools compared with other settings (Kolvin *et al.*, 1979). The level of acceptance by school personnel of school-based mental health schemes is likely to be highly influential in the implementation of such schemes.

The dissatisfaction over information exchange was not in keeping with a Lancashire survey of 69 teachers who had had varying exposure to a school social worker or counsellor over a three-year period (Rose and Marshall, 1974). The authors of the Lancashire study concluded: 'The great majority of teachers thought that the worker gave them sufficient information and discussed the child sufficiently with them'. But they monitored only two social workers, and hence their findings may be less representative. Moreover, the longer period of worker attachment may have done much to overcome any information exchange difficulties.

The third area under investigation concerned the availability of the consultation sessions and their content. It may well be that the request for

further advice is a request not only for more time (see the teachers' preference for the social worker to have an office in the school) but also for more in the way of discussion about specific techniques and allied information. Thus it seems likely from the teachers' response to items 16 and 24 that they were expecting more information about salient family problems. The implication of this finding is that teachers and social workers should be clear as to the nature of their reciprocal roles, obligations and expectations. The usefulness of a consultation contract is described elsewhere (Kadushin, 1977).

There is a clear indication from item 23 that teachers were unwilling for social workers to concern themselves with staff tensions. This may reflect the threat that the presence of any mental health workers in a school will create if their role is not clearly or adequately defined (Klein, 1959). It is in keeping with the findings of Rose and Marshall's single-school study of teacher attitudes, from which they concluded that teachers were worried most of all by the prospect of 'losing authority and control' if a social worker were appointed to the school (Rose and Marshall, 1974, p. 181).

With regard to parental contact, the findings are similar to those of a Schools Council investigation in which the great majority of school staff involved accepted that steps should be taken to encourage parents to visit schools more frequently (Schools Council, 1968). Rose and Marshall (1974) also found over half their teachers in agreement with this policy of contacting parents, and half of these said that contact should be through some sort of social worker. As the authors point out, however, 'this finding is of particular interest to us since none of our social workers has experienced any pressure from the schools to do this (visit parents) and it is not the kind of role in which the school saw them'. It would seem that, while teachers are in agreement with the idea of improving home-school links, few are in a position to undertake the practical steps to make this a reality. Specially trained social workers, by virtue of their knowledge of family dynamics, could be well equipped to undertake this difficult task, and there are many examples, particularly in the American literature, of such work being undertaken (Berlin, 1969; Costin, 1969; Anderson, 1974; Fox, 1974; Johnson, 1976).

Thus far it would appear that the teachers in the present study valued most of all the support of the social workers and the information about families which the social workers provided. They were less impressed by the social workers' skills in helping them to clarify problems and in assisting them to think of alternative pupil management procedures. One reason for this latter finding could be that the presence of a consultant is viewed by some consultees as reflecting on their own professional adequacy (Kadushin, 1977). Subsequently, for this or similar reasons, school staff may deny receiving help, or at least minimise the help they have received (Macarov, 1968).

A word of caution must be added about the differences which occurred when the data were reanalysed taking into account teacher characteristics. We had expected some differences of attitude between teachers in junior and senior schools, because of the differences between these schools in terms of contact rates between teachers and pupils, and the differences in the curriculum and organisation. This only proved to be the case, however, on one occasion – the teachers in junior schools saw one result of consultation as a sharing of responsibility for pupils. This finding may reflect fewer opportunities in junior schools to share impressions with colleagues about pupils. Teachers in junior schools are usually responsible for the same group of children and tend not to teach pupils their colleagues teach.

It was notable that younger teachers were more favourable towards social work in schools in terms of wanting more advice and being less inclined to see the social worker's role as working only with problem families. This may merely reflect the attitudes of a new generation of teachers, or may be a result of the greater exposure to social aspects of education introduced into many courses in recent years. In addition, the teachers who were not parents themselves seem to have derived greater benefit from consultation. It may be that the experience of having a child of one's own may help when it comes to dealing with other people's children.

In general, however, it would seem that the majority of teachers' responses are not particularly influenced by the personal characteristics studied. This finding is broadly in keeping with a similar survey of teachers' responses to school counsellors (Freeman, 1973). But if the personal factors examined in the present study and Freeman's do not influence teachers' responses, which factors do? Clearly in this study there is a long list of 'possibles': the social worker's skills; her personality; the personality and previous experiences of the teacher; the quality of the working relationship. Some or all of these factors could help to explain the considerable variation in responses to the items in table 1. Rose and Marshall (1974) may have provided a clue when they distinguish between an 'integrative' teaching approach where the primary aim is not just to convey information but a concern for the whole child, and 'instrumental' teaching where the emphasis appears to be entirely on imparting facts. They found that the teachers who were most favourable to their social work scheme were more likely to adhere to the 'integrative' model. We suspect that a teacher's style or approach to teaching is largely determined by personality factors, and that it is these same personality factors which in the first instance influence a teacher's attitude towards social work.

Conclusion

A considerable number of school children in the United Kingdom have adjustment problems (Garside *et al.*, 1973). Consequently there is ample

room for considering alternative school mental health roles' (Cowan and Lorion, 1976). The findings of this survey suggest that even with a limited amount of contact, social workers can make a positive contribution in schools. Only a few teachers reported that they gained no help from consultation.

Recently there have been further appeals for an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to build on the unique potential of the school for exerting a positive influence on pupils. In particular, closer links between the education and social services have been called for (DHSS, 1977). The findings of this survey lend some support to the idea that closer links are attainable at the shop-floor level.

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