Introducing a School Social Worker into Schools

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A DES-sponsored school-based social work programme is described, in which six social workers collaborated with teachers in attempts to optimise the school and home environments of 'at risk' and 'maladjusted' junior and senior pupils. The principal components of the scheme included teacher-social work consultation, attempts to increase parent-teacher understanding, and a casework approach with the families.

Introduction

This paper provides an introductory account of a school-based social work research project which took place in six junior and six comprehensive schools in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead in 1973 and 1974, constituting one of the major components of an action research programme (Kolvin et al., 1975). The object of the project was to redeploy mental health personnel in schools in such a way as to provide maximum help to the large number of children in the community who were either demonstrably disturbed or at high risk for disturbance. One aspect of the project was an investigation of the introduction of school-based social work. In defining the role of the social worker in the school it was decided not to attempt to introduce the traditional child guidance model of psychiatrist, psychologist and social worker, largely because of doubts about its effectiveness (Shepherd et al., 1966) and the problems of its high cost; furthermore, Rehin (1972) has raised the question of whether the child guidance 'team' is either desirable or even workable in practice. Several alternative models of school social work presented themselves as possibilities. For example, Rose and Marshall (1975) used the social worker as a counsellor (therapist) working directly with the child: we felt however that direct work with the child should remain the task of teaching staff, constituting part of their pastoral work.

The approach we eventually chose was to define the social worker's task as being three-fold: firstly, to act as a consultant, helping teaching staff to expand and develop their pastoral roles; secondly, to link home and school; and thirdly, to undertake casework with parents. Thus it needs to be emphasised that this evaluation refers only to one type of social work in the school, and we appreciate fully that there are other varieties or patterns which could have been used. Our therapeutic model was based on the development of a positive plan of action with the specification of short-term realistic objectives, and, occasionally, longer-term goals. We considered this approach preferable, under the circumstances, to intensive and long-term casework or consultation. We envisaged that it might be therapeutically effective in some disorders, and might prevent others from becoming chronic or intractable; we also anticipated that on occasions it

might make a contribution even to the modification of severe or acute disorders, especially where the family was reluctant or unwilling to visit the child guidance clinic. On the whole, though, we aimed to provide a first-line service which could cope with lesser degrees of disturbance, while severe disorders could continue to be referred to the clinic for more intensive diagnosis and treatment. The work of clinic and school social worker could thus become complementary.

The home and the school

Current child psychiatric practice is based on the belief that the child's behaviour is a function not only of *internal factors* within the child but also of his *interaction* with his environment in its broadest sense — notably his *family*, his *local community* and his *school*. In the understanding of disturbed child behaviour we have to analyse the contribution both of intrinsic and of extrinsic factors (Long et al., 1971).

The title of a recent conference of educational counsellors was 'Neurotic Schools'. While the anthropomorphic analogy is somewhat dramatic and exaggerated, there can be little doubt that the social climate within the school 'exerts a directional influence' (Moos, 1973; Power et al., 1972) on the behaviour of its inhabitants, and that such influences are exerted for a very considerable part of the child's waking life. Thus in addition to the well-recognised influences of being educative, supportive or controlling, school environments can have behaviourally unsetting influences (Power et al., 1972). Such influences are particularly 'noxious' when the school is subject to a crisis: for example, staff mobility and turnover crises, staff shortage crises, leadership crises, management and organisational crises, and the raising of the school leaving age with its attendant curriculum and discipline problems and the apparent escalation of disturbing and disturbed behaviour.

Moreover, the school may have to bear the brunt of home or community crises. The former are more likely to be sporadic events, but the latter may be related to local social disorganisation, decay, apathy, or loss of confidence in the school. In addition the school itself may share the deprivation of the neighbourhood in which it is sited. Such factors lead us to believe that social workers can make an invaluable contribution, especially to those schools located in social crisis areas of cities.

Developing the social work programme

In introducing social workers into such a new and relatively complex setting it seemed sensible to plan a programme of professional help with a reasonably sound theoretical basis and to operate it within a loose framework. We offer the main themes of our model as a preliminary framework only, or as issues for consideration by those who are at an early stage of developing a school social work practice.

Selection of children. As this was a research project the maladjusted children were selected using defined criteria which were applied to an entire year group (Kolvin et al., 1975). This differs from the referral process that is used

ordinarily in schools, in that the children were not necessarily recognised by the school staff as being disturbed (Rutter *et al.*, 1970).

School base and case-loads. Each social worker had two case-loads — one in a senior and one in a junior school. They thus spent about two days a week consulting in each school and visiting parents in the neighbourhood. Part of the fifth day was used for administrative work, consultation and discussion. The case-loads of the six social workers ranged from 20 to 30, and these cases were carried for a period just short of an academic year.

It was hoped that the social workers would be based in the schools, but shortage of accommodation and of secretarial staff, and the fact that each social worker had to cover two schools, prevented this intention from being implemented adequately. They therefore tended to use the university research centre as their base at the end of the school day. This allowed some further opportunities for discussion and consultation.

Introducing the social worker into the school. The idea of a specific social work service had first been introduced through meetings with LEA officials and with head teachers at the various schools involved. The majority of teachers, however, had only heard of the scheme indirectly. We felt that an essential step, before the scheme started, was for the social workers to visit the schools involved, meet teachers, and generally 'pave the way'. Of special importance was the involvement of the senior managerial staff — lack of support from these key members of the school community could have seriously restricted the potential of any plans. In meetings with staff, the social workers focussed particularly on those teachers who were likely to be participating in the project.

Recruitment and training of the social workers. A prerequisite of action research of this kind is that the quality of work should be high. A group of professionally qualified social workers was recruited and given three to four months' preparatory training. Weekly seminars were arranged in the local university's Child Psychiatry Department on casework and other psycho-therapeutic topics, with particular attention to school-based psychodynamic interventive techniques; special attempts were made to anticipate problems likely to confront the school social worker. Additional seminars geared to school-based work were provided by psychologists, a head teacher of a maladjusted school, and a school-based social worker. The social workers also attended weekly seminars and consultations with a senior caseworker (M.M.) and psychiatrists (A.R.N. and I.K.); and attended sensitivity groups organised by the university-based psychoanalyst (Dr W. Brough).

During the initial training period we explored jointly some aspects of the school as a social institution, with its own philosophy, organisation and management. Clearly, in the early stages of introducing a social worker into a school, it would have been foolhardy and presumptuous to have expected them to make anything more than a small but hopefully useful contribution. In other words, the task had to be approached not with reforming missionary zeal, but rather in terms of the cautious redeployment within the educational system of a skilled professional caseworker.

In our view the most constructive approach was for the school social worker to consult with and respect the views of teachers without criticism, so that the teachers could maintain not only positions they considered right and valid, but also their confidence and self-respect. Similarly it was felt that a belief in the work and dignity of the teacher would lead to mutual respect and co-operation. Moreover, the aim was not to turn the teacher into an amateur psychiatric worker, but to encourage him to use superficial yet therapeutically sound ideas, helpful to the individual child: in other words, to define more effectively the teacher's pastoral role. The social work consultant's task was essentially that of problem solving, aimed at redirecting the teachers' attention to the basis of the problem (Stark and Bentzen, 1958). Thereafter the task was to help the teacher locate the various resources they had which might be helpful to the child.

Establishing a foothold in the school. Once in the school our initial aims were two-fold: to develop a relationship with the staff, and to achieve their confidence, trust and respect for our professional competence. At first the notion that social workers could be useful in a school setting was met with some scepticism, but as trust was established the teachers became able to discuss child behaviour and teacher-child interactions more freely. Another issue was fear about intrusion on the teachers' professional domain, and conversely a feeling that psychotherapeutic skills were being demanded from staff whose roles and functions were essentially educational. These were dealt with in discussion, which at the same time demonstrated the value of consultation.

Once a relationship and some degree of trust had been established, the social worker appeared able to move from giving support to teachers, to talking with them about difficulties with the children. In essence, an attempt was made to share ideas about handling problematic behaviour or ways of helping the child. One factor that limited our success in the senior schools was the number of teachers (up to 15 or even more) the children were exposed to in any one week. Thus even with a relatively small caseload, the social worker had a large number of teachers to consult with, if she was to cover the children's school life comprehensively. Moreover, the number of teachers with whom the child had contact was found to accentuate his sense of anonymity in the large secondary school: the caring for each child was split between many different people who tended to react to him in different ways; conversely, each teacher had between 200 and 300 children a week to teach in large classes, and this was likely to preclude him from getting to know anything of a child beyond his surface behaviour. Our solution was to concentrate in the main on teachers who taught a child for more than three lessons per week. Occasionally, however, it proved useful to talk to a particular subject teacher who only took one or two lessons — notably art, music or games.

The official pastoral staff proved key figures, since other teachers usually referred the child to his house or year tutor if he was emotionally upset or in trouble. Where possible, therefore, we tailored the programme for an individual child around the work of the pastoral staff, or at least encouraged them to be involved. Some of these staff proved enthusiastic about developing their pastoral

skills, and the social workers devoted much time to this. There was also some concentration on teachers who had a 'knack' of handling a particular child: this often became evident from talking to a selection of teachers about the child, or from hearing from the parents about his affection for a particular teacher. Such teachers were encouraged to take a more active pastoral role with the child.

The discussions with the teachers were organised both on an individual basis and in groups, and varied from formal to informal. Group discussions proved a more economical way of utilising the social workers' time in large schools. They were also an efficient way of obtaining multiple views of the child's problems and strengths, and of allowing a consensus view to emerge for collaborative action within the limits of the school's resources. For the most part, however, such group discussions proved difficult to arrange because of the large numbers of teachers involved and the complexities of arranging the school timetable so that several teachers could be available simultaneously. Less tight timetabling would have been helpful in terms of allowing more formal and informal meetings to discuss teachers' problems.

Not surprisingly, some of the issues faced referred to the personality and adjustment problems not of the pupils but of the teachers themselves. These had to be handled with diplomacy and sensitivity. Direct requests for help were channelled normally to appropriate agencies outside the school. For the rest, we considered it wise to focus directly and mainly on child problems, and only indirectly and superficially on teacher problems (Caplan, 1964).

Formulation of family problems. As well as making contact with teachers, in the way described above, the social workers paid up to ten visits to each family. They thus had considerable knowledge of the home situation. The process of parent contact will be more fully described in a subsequent paper.

Treatment

Teacher consultation on individual children. Our aim was to help teachers to see beyond superficial explanations of seriously disturbed behaviour (Long *et al.,* 1971) and thus to move towards an appreciation of the inner feelings of the child, whatever their origin. In this way, seemingly irrational, unpredictable or irritable behaviour, or even hostile silences, could be perceived as serving the dual function of being a psychological message — i.e. a cry for help, or a communication of distress — and also a symptom of the child's mechanisms for coping with anxiety too poignant to be faced. Such behaviour could thus become explicable, and ways sought of dealing with it. In practice this translation of behaviour and discussion of methods of intervention proved one of the social workers' main tasks, and tended to generate sympathy and a positive attitude to helping the child.

Once the problem had been identified, defined, and some ideas as to its causation worked out, we sought to help the teachers use psychological methods of management. The main task here was helping the teacher to see that the child's behaviour had a meaning in terms of the child's conflicts and pre-occupations. The basic techniques stemmed from the teaching of Redl (1959)

and are well summarised in the appropriate sections of Long *et al.* (1971). They were as follows:

(a) Listening and allowing ventilation — allowing the child to drain off unhappy or angry feelings through the use of words. This has been termed 'emotional first aid'.

(b) Defining and naming of feelings. The child often has to be taught the vocabulary which will enable discussion of his feelings. This has to be done tactfully while helping him or her to disentangle feelings which are often strong and conflicting.

(c) Helping the child to identify realistic and attainable objectives. This is particularly helpful and motivating in those children who have expectations of failure, especially if they can be helped to uncover activities in which they can succeed.

(d) Promoting skill development and redirection of behaviour. This consists of finding skills or more appropriate activities through which the child can sublimate or express his feelings — e.g. stories, role play, art.

(e) Using other psychological catalysts — e.g. other students, other professional staff.

These techniques form components of what Redl (1959) has labelled the 'life-space interview'. This consists of an interview which is carried out by staff who have responsibility for the child's daily living, rather than by a specialised psychotherapist. It can therefore be built around the child's direct life experience, which becomes the focus of the interview. In a typical case, the caring staff may observe a particular way in which a child recurrently gets into difficulties in his daily living or interpersonal relationships. After appropriate planning, use is made of an incident in the ongoing interaction of daily living which clearly illustrates the child's problem. The staff member moves in at a carefully chosen moment and, having given support aimed at getting the child into an equitable and receptive mood, tries to heighten the child's awareness of how the difficulty started. Usually the disturbed child in this situation is quite unaware of what leads him into difficulties.

When used successfully, these techniques should have the double advantage of realising much latent therapeutic talent in the school and of using the child's daily living as a therapeutic medium. In practice, we found the underlying notions of life-space interviewing were more difficult to implement in senior than in junior schools. In senior schools, the exercise was hampered by teachers seeing too many children for too little time, and by parallel difficulties in giving teachers access to the social worker. Hence the type of intervention practised in senior schools tended to be emotional first aid rather than a fuller clinical exploitation of life events.

Guidelines for dealing with classroom disturbance. While teachers have much practical experience in dealing with classroom disturbance, they do not necessarily have at their fingertips a set of alternative techniques which they can utilise when those traditionally used are failing. It is helpful in this situation to

have available someone like a social worker or consultant who is reasonably skilled in psychological techniques, but is not immediately involved in the crisis, and can therefore act as a sounding board about which techniques to apply and how to apply them. Provided the emphasis is on consultation and on acting largely as a catalyst to the teachers' exploration of their own ideas and skills, it is unlikely that the social worker will be seen as invading the teachers' domain. In our experience, sensible suggestions were seldom rejected, and most were gratefully received. Such suggestions usually related to one or more of five main areas:

(a) *Classroom rules.* The experienced teacher will realise that rules need to be minimal and consistently applied. Such rules need to be defined in concrete terms, so that the child is not tempted to test their limits. On the other hand, rigidity has to be avoided, as rules may occasionally need to be 'bent' for the benefit of certain children (Catterall, 1970). Consistency of rules is difficult to achieve in those schools where children are exposed to a large number of teachers with varying classroom management styles and views about discipline, and this can be a source of confusion and frustration for children. Consultation, under the right conditions, can increase consistency of management.

(b) *Classroom activities and structure.* Schools and teachers vary widely in the degree to which they structure classroom activities. Whatever structuring philosophy prevails, this may have to be adjusted to meet the needs of certain children or situations. Such techniques may consist of sometimes allowing free and exploratory classroom activities, or choice of project or projects, or other activities interspersed with academic work. The social worker here again acts simply as a catalyst to the teachers' ingenuity. The structuring may be physical as well as curricular: for instance, an aggressive child may have to be seated near the teacher or distant from peers who catalyse or provoke aggression.

(c) *The curriculum and psychological disturbance.* More and more it is being realised that concentrating on the academic aspects of the curriculum is not enough. The teacher also has to check whether certain aspects of the curriculum are giving rise to stress in a sensitive child. In addition, some thought has to be given to the impact of the curriculum on peer relationships and teacher-child relationships, the two main school components of children's social adjustment. The teacher can be helped to seek ways of individualising the curriculum to meet the unique needs of disturbed children. This may consist of providing special or remedial help for underachieving children, of stimulating the gifted child, or of appreciating the academic needs of a dull child (who is more likely to be motivated and to respond appropriately to praise for effort than for achievement).

(d) *Extracurricular activities.* The child's functioning and adjustment outside academic activities may merit attention. The child may be helped to relate better to peers or adults through hobbies or sporting activities, especially when these occur in informal settings. Their willingness or unwillingness to participate in such activities should be explored. A friendly private discussion may for example

help a child to appreciate why he is failing in social relationships and help him to move towards a grasp of how to modify this pattern.

(e) *Helping the child to succeed.* The crucial importance of helping the child to succeed *somewhere* cannot be over-emphasised. The success may be in a limited academic area, in art, in stories, in hobbies, or in games. It is likely to give the child some feeling of self-confidence, and may help him identify with a group in the school. This is particularly important for the dull child or for one who lacks self-confidence.

A further technique used here was the classroom moratorium. This, in essence, consists of stopping certain activities for a while, to allow the child a breathing space. The components are:

(a) The *academic* moratorium (reduction of educational pressures).
(b) The *experimental* moratorium, in which the teacher explores the child's reaction to differing aspects of the school environment and tries to determine which factors are leading to stress. This is probably the most useful of the moratoria.
(c) The medical or *therapeutic* moratorium (stopping treatment).

When undertaking a moratorium one is advancing the hypothesis that the immediate situation of the child constitutes stress which strengthens his or her maladaptive response. A moratorium does not preclude a careful monitoring of the child's functioning, as this may provide valuable clues to the nature of disturbing environmental influences. Some authorities consider that the moratorium can only be applied in special classes or in special schools. Our experience has led us to the conclusion that academic and experimental moratoria are also useful in the ordinary school setting.

Linking home and school. Perhaps the most important contribution of the social worker was to find ways of linking home and school. This was achieved by lessening, where it existed, mutual distrust and prejudice, by seeking ways of reducing any evident parental apathy towards the child's education and general progress, and by helping the parents to develop an interest in school activities. Initially, the work consisted of carrying the teacher's ideas to the parent and presenting them in palatable form so that, hopefully, they would lead to constructive discussion; and of seeking ways of subsequently facilitating parent-school contact. Occasionally, it was necessary to reassure teachers that parents were concerned and interested, or to help teachers understand and tolerate certain parental idiosyncrasies for the sake of improving the link.

Complementary to this was the far more difficult operation of helping certain teachers towards an appreciation of their own personal idiosyncrasies and the impact of these on parents. This was perhaps the most sensitive area with which we had to deal, and when it constituted 'an important issue it had to be broached with great diplomacy and caution. Teachers confronted with such problems often were only too grateful for opportunities to discuss them. Where this did not prove to be the case, an alternative formula had to be sought, which

on occasions included by-passing that particular teacher.

Sometimes parents or teachers proposed angry confrontations with each other prior to meeting, but once together their reactions usually proved quite different. Teachers often were anxious about meeting parents of disturbed children, and sometimes did not know what to say. At times, too, a culture gap had to be breached. In general, both contact with parents and linking home and school proved more difficult in the senior than the junior schools. This was probably due to a number of factors, including the relative extent of their catchment areas, the size and organisation of the comprehensive schools (which parents and children often found daunting), and the projection of parents' unhappy personal experiences as secondary school children on to their child's school.

The role of the social worker here was not an easy one. Sometimes the school over-identified the social worker with the parents, while the parents over-identified her with the school. Considerable skills were necessary to establish productive links between the two sides. It was not unusual, for instance, for teachers to feel that a child's classroom behaviour was unalterable in view of adverse features in his environment. It was important in such cases to return the focus to classroom activities.

Interviews with parents were also useful in revealing important and relevant information about the children's backgrounds. For example, it provided some idea of the parent's child-rearing patterns, such as their disciplinary methods. At one extreme this might consist of harsh and unpredictable discipline, at the other of no discipline whatsoever. Again, some parents almost exclusively used corporal punishment, whereas others used deprivation of privileges, and others a combination of these. Interviews also provided a good idea of the degree of stimulation, attention and affection the child was given. The social worker aimed to draw a picture of the total family and cultural milieu in which the child was being reared. Some of the families had multiproblems, especially in social crisis areas. Only a small proportion of the families, however, did not prove amenable to proposals for discussing their children. Indeed, a number of writers have now reported (e.g. Lyons, 1973) that it is rare for there to be a real lack of interest in the child's progress, though ways of helping may be ill-understood.

In general, it is unusual for schools not to have a rough idea of their pupils' home problems. An outline of these problems often acts as a catalyst to endeavours to help the child in the ways outlined above. This however raises the ethical issues related to the availability of records. Teachers interested in expanding their pastoral roles and functions have high professional ethical standards similar to those of any other of the 'helping' or 'caring' disciplines, and should not be denied relevant edited information. In our project there was no incident of information abuse. We do though believe that such information should not be incorporated in permanent school records, or even recorded at all, but be seen as related to transient or current 'here-and-now' problems with which the social worker or clinic is attempting to deal.

Casework. Another component of the social work task was to work with the 'identified' children's families. This involved short-term goal-oriented casework loosely following Reid and Shyne's casework model (1969). Specific areas of difficulty were identified at an early stage and discussed with the family, and agreed goals and objectives were set in an attempt to focus on the tasks necessary to promote improvement. The essential features of our variation of Reid and Shyne's model were:

(a) Helping the family to cope with any co-existent physical, mental or emotional illness.
(b) Helping the family to cope with any social problems such as housing and finance.
(c) Focussing on any interactional difficulties within the family.
(d) Mediating between the family and outside agencies, including the school.

Our other theoretical standpoint in casework was that the child's behaviour was a reflection of family difficulties. While it was child behaviour which drew our attention to the family, this component of our treatment regime was home-based, and wherever possible we attempted to work with both parents. As mentioned previously, these aspects are more fully discussed in companion papers.

Individual needs v. collective educational interests. It was envisaged that the schools would seek advice about children whose behaviour was beyond that which could be contained by the school, taking the view that collective emotional interest was more important than individual psychological needs (Saltmarsh, 1973). In those cases in which it was anticipated that this might occur, early involvement of the child guidance clinic or psychiatrist was sought, so that other agencies were consulted during the time the exclusion was being considered. While it was expected that the presence of the social worker might lead to more effective containment of difficult cases, the policy adopted was to see other agencies as often having a valuable contribution to make in the management of these children, whether in school or in alternative settings.

Some initial impressions

In our work, we attempted to implement the principles which have been outlined above. This next section contains those of our impressions which we thought might be of help to other workers embarking on such an exercise.

Co-operation with other agencies. Links and referral to other agencies (e.g. voluntary and statutory social services) appear to have increased during the course of our work. Perhaps of greater importance is the fact that the school-based social worker proved better placed to liaise with both the school and the social services than a social worker coming into the school from a community base. We found that where an unfavourable attitude to social work existed, it often appeared to be determined by the high rates of staff mobility in community social services, and their apparent impotence in dealing with complex cases. A school-based service is more likely to be judged by all-round

and continuous performance rather than performance in crisis only.

Initial defensiveness of teachers. The initial resistance or defensiveness of teachers was generally transient, but persisted for longer in some schools than in others. Some of it appeared to be based on anxiety lest the social worker was attempting to assess teaching skills and abilities. Again, some teachers saw their role purely in terms of academic achievement, and were clearly uncomfortable in handling emotional issues. In these cases it was felt that teachers should at least be helped to discern warning signals of distress, so that pastoral staff could be informed.

Expectations of social workers. We found that teachers did not appear to be very sure of the precise roles, functions, and skills of the social worker. For instance, social workers were perceived as having more authority in the family and a more directing role than they had in reality. On the other hand, in no case was the social worker expected to undertake the role of a school messenger, nor such non-social-work tasks as checking for lateness, etc., as described by Fitzherbert (1973). Some concern was felt about teachers becoming too involved with complex psycho-social and family problems, and undertaking home visits and other treatment procedures. It was felt that one of the important uses of a social worker in the school was to support and advise teachers if they become increasingly involved in this way.

Training. Our social workers felt that if school social work were to become standard practice, training should include greater exposure to a senior school-based social worker and to a senior tutor experienced in pastoral work. More preparatory seminars on school social work, and further seminars aimed at providing an understanding of the curriculum and school organisation, could also form part of the training programme. This would help them to derive more understanding of teachers' problems, and in particular to differentiate purely educational problems from pastoral problems. Some of the former imply skills which are not customarily part of the social worker's repertoire, and this suggests that a large comprehensive school might require the appointment of both a teacher-counsellor and a social worker. This would allow them to better define their roles in relation to other helping agencies within and without the school. In the meantime, these findings suggest that there is a need for a specific systematic training course in school social work.

Work base. Some views emerged about the agency base of the school social worker. All our workers expressed a preference for a dual base – namely the school for work intervention, and the community child guidance clinic for administrative work and study. The latter link would provide added prestige in the school because more rapid help would follow, and the social workers would avoid professional isolation, having a clear identity both within the school and in the clinic.

School organisation and the pastoral role. It became clear in the course of the project that a vast school, with tight timetabling and numerous daily classroom and teacher changes, does not lend itself easily to social work or to the philosophy or methods that social workers can bring to schools. For the

same reasons, the pastoral teacher will find it difficult or impossible to undertake such activities as life-space interviewing.

Discussion

The growing interest over the last decade in the establishment of welfare services within schools has been reviewed by Lyons (1973). The Plowden Report (1966) recommended the initial and innovatory concentration of social work development in educational priority area schools. The Seebohm Report (1968) took a broader view in recommending flexibility and experimentation in the organisation and content of such work. It was however left to an Inner London Education Authority report (Braide Committee, 1969) to pose the crucial question in relation to educational, social and welfare services: 'What kinds of children, with what kinds of difficulties, are being referred to the welfare services, and with what success?'. This question is broadly similar to those we are addressing in our current project, whose aim is the exploration of both intervention and prevention.

The school has its own distinctive philosophy and objectives, and the school social worker has a responsibility to conceptualise and define his role in this type of institution. This we have tried to do in our project. In the process we did not become involved in the controversy about whether this type of work should be undertaken by an educational counsellor, or indeed by any other teacher in his traditional pastoral roles and functions. On the contrary, we envisaged such staff having their pastoral roles expanded.

In retrospect, however, the question of whether a school social worker can make a unique contribution is a fundamental one which merits discussion. At the outset we must re-emphasise the need for the specialised training of the school social worker as mentioned above. In relation to this, education and training for school social work have not generally been an integral part of social work courses, and we hope that universities and colleges will attempt to remedy this.

The potential uniqueness of a social work contribution in schools stems from the social worker's differing orientation and perception of school as a result of his sociological and interactional training. In addition, specific technical knowledge of child development, child psychopathology and the effects of family interactions are central features of social work theory which have particular relevance to work in schools (Berlin, 1965). Of paramount importance is the contribution of school social workers in their work with parents. The specific casework skills needed for family work (and particularly for work with the most disorganised and disturbed families) are usually obtained through careful training and supervision offered on professional social work courses. Thus a social worker, by training and orientation, is well equipped to play a major part in helping parents become more informed and involved with the school and general functioning of their children. There are many accounts in the literature which strongly support the notion that, within the context of the school, parental involvement should be regarded as an essential ingredient in the

educational and emotional development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Wolstenholme et al., 1976; Little and Smith, 1971).

In the end, the success of a programme of this kind will depend on how sensitively and flexibly the social worker can inject these special skills into an established network of professional staff with overlapping roles and hierarchies of responsibility. In this respect, it is important to note the teachers in our project were not volunteers. There was therefore a cross-section of opinion and enthusiasm as to the merits of a social work approach. The open-mindedness with which the programme was eventually received by those teachers with pastoral interests augurs well for the future.

Planning is a *sine qua non* of such an exercise: how will liaison be achieved, arrangements about place and time of consultation and feedback of information obtained, and an agreed policy stated about professional confidences which can be modified in the light of practical experience? Like any other innovation in a large institution, the introduction of social work into schools will be met with degrees of enthusiasm, caution, or even expectations of failure. The experienced social worker will appreciate that reactional extremes are likely to prove misleading. Many of the problems are deep-seated and ingrained, and buttressed by serious and unmodifiable social circumstances, and thus are unlikely to respond quickly or dramatically to intervention. Initially, the social workers' goals are likely to be modest and the schools' expectations unrealistic. Eventually these should converge.

Clearly, the philosophy and goals of an educational institution, which is concerned with groups of children, differ from those of social work, which preoccupies itself with social climate (within and without the school), inter-relationships, and the individual needs of children. So far, our discussion of respect and understanding has been one-sided, in that we have expected the social worker to adapt to the school as an integral part of her role. Hopefully, the interaction will eventually become two-sided. Meanwhile, Saltmarsh (1973) points out that the differences can sometimes lead to a sense of isolation and insecurity in the school social worker. The solution offered by some authors, and partly implemented by ourselves, is for the social worker to be based outside the school, so that he or she can gather support from a cadre of like spirits.

Saltmarsh points out that the personal and professional qualities listed by Klein (1959) are as important to social workers in non-social-work settings as in social-work settings. These include the handling of anxiety and challenge in a professional manner, co-operation, respect, sincerity, a relaxed and open approach, and avoidance of defensive critical comments. He emphasises also jargon-free communication, and we would like to add — from our work in other settings — that other professionals appear to respond better to a low-key approach rather than high degrees of personal intensity.

As this was an experiment, we worked on the assumption that the social worker would have maximum freedom in personal organisation of time (Saltmarsh, 1973), in terms of balance between work in the school, home visiting, and liaison with psychologists, psychiatrists and other agencies and

workers. We discussed how to tackle differences of opinion between the social worker and head teacher, and concluded that if and when the social worker was in conflict with the Head or staff about school policy or about the management of an individual child, it was up to the social worker to exercise diplomacy in finding a solution to the problem. The social worker should strongly and personally support her case, but in the final analysis the firm decisions of the senior teaching staff would have to be supported publicly.

Allied to this issue are school practices which inhibit adjustment and discourage learning (Lyons, 1973; Costin, 1969). Costin recommends that social workers should assist staff to identify such factors. Costin however is an American, and we suspect that English teachers might perceive this as too threatening. Perhaps with the passage of time such an approach will be more favourably received in the United Kingdom.

Finally, a word must be said about evaluation. We are delighted with the enthusiasm of Fitzherbert (1967) about the Ealing Immigrant action research project, where she reports that for once every case turned out to some extent to be a success story — 'a limited amount of support, advice and practical help usually benefitted the child about whom one was first called in, the other children in the family and often the parents as well'. These are however subjective descriptions, and need to be buttressed by quantitative evaluations and adequate controls. Before we lobby for a major expansion of social work in the schools, we need to evaluate practice in applying different social work models and principles. Preliminary experiences lead us to to be optimistic, but we must be wary of excessive expectations. Many powerful social and other influences are inevitably beyond the control of the individual social worker. Objectives must be modest and attainable.

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