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**EVALUATION OF THE 'CONTACT-  
CHALLENGE METHOD' IN SOCIAL WORK  
PRACTICE EDUCATION**

**Ksenija Napan, M.Sc.**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

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*To my students - past, present and future.*

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance of integrating theory, practice and experience which is considered to be essential for effective social work education. We live in a globally interconnected world and a holistic and ecological worldview has been utilised to explore relevant theories as well as research in order to develop a method of teaching and learning which attempts to continually improve social work education.

Two studies were conducted in order to evaluate and further improve the Contact-Challenge Method. The main aim of the method is to utilise the personal experiences of students, their communication with social work clients, skills training and field work experience in order to help them better integrate theories learnt during social work education. Action research has been used as a research method for evaluation and further development of the Contact-Challenge Method because of its participatory and empowering nature.

It is argued that education, social work and research are inevitably value laden and that social work students need to examine their own value base in order to develop a value base for effective social work. It is also argued that social work education has to reflect those values, which are prescribed by the Code of Ethics of the profession. Learning theory, skills training and the student's personal experience are equal elements of social work education. Values and principles that permeate social work practice should be utilised in the teaching-learning process of social work.

The Contact-Challenge Method evaluated in this thesis is focused on modelling social work values and on maximising student-student learning as well as learning from clients and their families. Three theories have been used in the development of evaluation of this method: Experiential Learning Theory, Choice Theory and Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy). The principles and ideas of these three theories have been incorporated in the Contact-Challenge Method and have been carried through in practice in both studies, in Croatia and in Aotearoa-

New Zealand. Research into student learning and motivation as well as on the transfer of skills learned in laboratory settings to practice, provided valuable findings that helped in the development and evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method.

Throughout the thesis learning is understood to be a holistic process. In both studies students learned on many levels using cognition, emotions, prior experiences and their theoretical knowledge. Social work education has the advantage that students may learn simultaneously about content and process. Students were expected to take responsibility for their own learning and for creating quality time with their clients. This contributed to the effective integration of theory, practice and experience and to the utilisation of problem solving processes in order to attain learning outcomes set at the beginning of the course.

The basic assumptions of this thesis are that:

- \* Social work clients and social work practitioners are irreplaceable source of knowledge and practice wisdom for social work students.

- \* Setting individual outcomes in the process of learning encourages students to take charge of their own learning.

- \* Focusing only on intellectual work in social work schools and only on practical work in social work practice placements cannot produce competent social workers.

This thesis proposes an integrative approach to teaching and learning social work where theory, practice and experience are integrated in order to produce change in knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. At the same time it provides a context where students' individual learning outcomes can be achieved and the quality of life of social work clients can be improved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I created the Contact-Challenge Method and when its evaluation became an essential part of my PhD thesis I did not think of it as my life-work, but now after eight years of continuous work *on* and *with* the method it has become an essential part of my life. This work will not end when I complete the requirements for a PhD. My constant goal is to continue to improve the method and to apply it in a variety of settings.

The development of the method was influenced by a number of people to mention only a few of them. My theoretical thinking was influenced by Fritjof Capra, Gregory Bateson, Jan Fook and my teachers Graham Barnes and William Glasser. My psychotherapy trainers helped me to grow personally and showed me how experiential techniques are useful for integrative learning. Special thanks to George Kohlreiser, Lynn Sumida, Barnes Boffey, Peter Appel and Perry Good. But most important of all were my students, clients and field instructors involved in the Contact-Challenge Method who kept the method alive and who gave me strength and guidelines when we were on the right track and reminded me when I became too fast to follow.

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# **PART ONE**

## **INITIAL REFLECTION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Learning is finding out what you already know.  
Doing is demonstrating that you know it.  
Teaching is reminding others that they know it just as well as you.  
You are all learners, doers, teachers.  
Richard Bach*

The starting point for this thesis is that quality education for social workers is a prerequisite for providing effective services to social work clients. It is argued that the relationship between theory, practice and personal experience is essential for the education of all helping professions and especially social workers. Effective teachers teach their students how to utilise theoretical knowledge in practice and how to utilise their personal qualities in providing effective services. It is argued that theory and practice in social work are constantly intertwined and the most effective theory ensues from practice and further develops this practice. Continuous permeation of theory, practice and experience as well as mutual learning of all participants in the teaching-learning process in social work was central for the development of the Contact-Challenge Method – a method of teaching and learning social work which is evaluated in this thesis.

As a life-long learner of social work theory and practice, a former practitioner, and a social work educator both in academic and in staff development settings, I have a passionate desire to advance a form of professional education, which integrates theory, practice and experience. I have learned that theoretical

knowledge, as typically offered in tertiary education, is not always sufficient to ensure the provision of effective service to clients. After the completion of academic degrees, practitioners often seek opportunities for skills training in order to fill the gap between theory and practice. Often students label themselves either as “heart workers” or as “head workers” without being aware that effective social work practice lies in the integration of theory, practice and experience. It is argued that theory without “heart” cannot be a theory for effective social work practice, and practitioners who deny the significance of theory are simply technicians without an effective foundation for practice. Teaching social work skills to students without providing a contextual theoretical framework could result in unethical practice. Moreover, neglecting the importance of personal growth and development in becoming an effective professional may minimise the value of knowledge and skills learned during professional education. Unfortunately, courses that emphasise personal growth and development are not normally included in academic programmes but found more often in skills training courses post graduation or in Certificate courses.

It was this experience and an insatiable desire to advance professional education in social work that motivated me to search the literature in andragogy as well as research on student learning. Given my commitment to ‘practice’ I involved both practitioners and social work clients in the development of the Contact-Challenge Method. The purpose of this thesis is to present this method and to evaluate its effectiveness in two different cultural settings that of Croatia and Aotearoa - New Zealand. My involvement in academic settings and with continuing education for practitioners reinforced my commitment to a holistic or ecological form of education that continuously integrates theory, practice and experience. Experiential Learning Theory and Choice Theory, each of which arise from a holistic orientation, enabled me to understand the limitations of courses which focus exclusively on theoretical, or practical, or personal aspects of practice. In order to be more precise I have focused my research on exploring ways to teach student beginners social work skills in academic settings. The method I subsequently developed can be applied (with some modifications) in any

field of human endeavour that requires integration of theory, practice and experience.

My commitment to continuous improvement led to the application of the Contact-Challenge Method developed initially in Croatia to be applied in a different setting, Aotearoa - New Zealand.

The name, “Contact - Challenge Method”, reflects its essence, that is, students are encouraged to learn from direct contact with persons with special needs<sup>1</sup> and that contact becomes a challenge for students and for persons with special needs. Such an interactive programme of mutual learning is a challenge for involved faculty staff and social work practitioners because they together with students and persons with special needs continuously create and re-create the programme. Learning from persons with special needs is only a part of the Contact-Challenge Programme, which integrates theoretical, practical and experiential aspects of learning. The theoretical aspect is not underestimated, on the contrary it is continuously tested in real life situations. Students are responsible for their personal and professional growth gained through integration of the theory they learn in the classroom and reading literature, the experience they gain during socialising with clients and through practising problem solving processes with each other.

The Contact-Challenge Method was created out of a need to find effective ways of teaching and learning social work skills in an integrated manner. It focuses on students’ first contact with social work practice and it prepares students for placements later in the course. When I started to apply the method, and when I became aware how it was useful in practice I began to search for an adequate research methodology to further improve the method and to continuously advance it. Action research seemed to be the most appropriate. Before I developed the first programme based on the Contact-Challenge Method I had completed my Masters thesis in Social Psychiatry on the quality of life of the families of the intellectually

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<sup>1</sup>I am using this term in its broadest sense, encompassing every person who needs help or support in any area of his or her life (physically and intellectually disabled persons, elderly, children with behavioural problems, children without adequate parental care, chronically ill persons suffering from mental or physical diseases).

disabled. This research took a traditional positivistic approach, which was based on a sample of 100 families. My research was accepted, marked as excellent, hypotheses were confirmed, but at the end of the study I was aware that all that work had achieved little if I was not able to contribute to an improvement in the quality of life of these families. The academic enterprise did not demonstrate any concern or interest for possible actions that might be undertaken as a result of my research. The academic enterprise was satisfied only that the research was valid, reliable, ethical and scientific in a positivistic sense. "Real life" appeared to be outside their area of interest. The gap between theory, research and practice did not make sense to me. Why was so much time and resources spent on carrying out complex research, if clients were not able to benefit from it? One of the main findings from the research was that families with members with special needs needed some kind of non-institutional support and that feelings of isolation were one of the main problems they faced. At the same time, I have had similar experience of absurdity at the University in Croatia, where I was teaching. Students expressed the desire to be more involved in practical work and to practice skills in skills training workshops. During lectures and through reading, students learned about ecological systems theory, action research, various models of practice, and the importance of social work values in practice, but in their fieldwork placements they were left to their own devices, without the necessary skills to cope with the difficult issues confronted in practice. Field instructors were negative about taking students on board, whom they experienced as being an extra burden to their heavy workloads. Clients complained about the involvement of students, claiming that they deserved professional treatment and that they were not "guinea pigs" for social work students' experiments. Under this type of system only the very motivated and most skilful of students met their learning goals during placement and it became more and more difficult to find fieldwork placements. Out of my dissatisfaction with the way in which courses were organised and because of my involvement in the theoretical (lectures), practical (placements) and experiential (skills training) domains of education the Contact-Challenge Method emerged and was developed.

In developing the method I began with the following premises:

1. Persons with special needs and their families may benefit from contacts with students but not when students practice social work skills *on* them. My Masters thesis established that families providing care for intellectually disabled children and adults needed help and support in everyday activities. They needed various forms of non-institutional support, with the nature of that support being unique to each individual case. Discussions with social workers and persons with special needs, suggested that they might benefit from encounters with students.

2. Persons with special needs are an irreplaceable source of knowledge for students because they are often very experienced in “handling social workers”, that is, by being in contact with social services they have developed the skills to cope and are clear about how they should be treated by social workers.

3. Students need to be in contact with social work clients in order to learn about conditions and situations that bring people into contact with the social services. It is also important that students are confronted with their own values and prejudices. A period of at least six months of contact can provide enough variety of situations to offer that challenge. Through longer-term contact, students have the opportunity to develop a relationship where mutual learning can occur.

4. Students need to practice social work skills, but as it is unethical to practice those skills *on* clients, skills training workshops can provide more than mere role-playing. These sessions have the potential to encourage students to practice problem-solving skills with each other, on learning goals and real life issues.

5. Field instructors are an irreplaceable source of practice-wisdom for students. Being a field instructor is a responsible and professional job and it cannot be treated merely as an extra voluntary activity. When field instructors are recognised and their role acknowledged as important, it is more likely that the focus of the fieldwork placement will be on learning and not simply on having an extra pair of hands in the agency.

6. Integration of theory, practice and experience is essential for social work education. Organising the course in such a way that the theoretical, practical and

experiential components of education are occurring simultaneously increases the chance for students to reflect on theory and to ask practical questions during lectures, and theoretical questions during skills training. It also offers the opportunity to reflect on their contact with clients and integrate all aspects of knowledge gained during their professional education.

Guided by these six premises, I developed the Contact-Challenge Method, and its evaluation then became the focus of my PhD research. My first goal was to evaluate the first Contact-Challenge Programme in Croatia and given my commitment to the integration of theory, practice and experience, action research seemed to be the most appropriate methodology. I also wanted all participants to be involved in the further development of the method, and to continuously reflect on its advantages and disadvantages.

I introduced the Contact-Challenge Method in the academic year 1990/91 with 75 students, 75 clients at the Department of Social Work, University of Zagreb, Croatia. It continued in 1991/92 with 120 students and 120 clients, in 1992/93 with 125 students and 125 clients and in 1993/94 with 89 students and 89 clients. In the first two years I worked with six field instructors, and later three more were employed, one for each setting where students were involved. The opportunity to test the method in the new environment was offered to me by a New Zealand academic and in February 1995 I immigrated to New Zealand and continued with my PhD studies as a doctoral student at Massey University.

This thesis is structured according to the action research spiral and its four components of *initial reflection, planning, action and reflection*. Throughout this thesis I shall use the voice of the first person singular for myself and first person plural when referring to the whole group of participants in the process. I do this because I believe that the voice of the third person singular or passive voice often used in scientific reports and theses, sounds too distant and is incompatible with the methodology of action research and the process of the Contact-Challenge Method which is collaborative and interactive. It seemed to me to be inappropriate to write from a distant or neutral position about such interactive and involving processes. The names of participants and participating agencies have been altered

to protect confidentiality.

The key research question is to examine whether or not the Contact-Challenge Method works in practice, and if so, how it can be applied in social work education and how it might be continuously improved with the application of the action research methodology.

In order to establish the purpose of the Contact-Challenge Method and its viability as a method of experiential learning the format of the thesis is as follows. The thesis begins with an exposition of education and learning before going on to examine the nature of social work education and experiential learning. Research on student learning from various parts of the world was utilised when the Contact-Challenge Method was created and significant international research is presented in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Three it is argued that social work education has to be integrative and that fieldwork has to be integrated in the course, not separated by time and schedule. It also focuses on possible ways of achieving change in understanding, attitudes, values and skills during the process of learning social work practice. Chapter Three sets the stage for development of the Contact-Challenge Method.

The Contact-Challenge Method is presented in Chapter Four as a response to problems that social work practice teaching is facing.

Action research seemed to be the most suitable methodology and the reasons why it was used is explained in Chapter Five.

Chapters Six and Seven are “action chapters” where two studies are presented and critically examined. Chapter Six focuses on a mainly quantitative Croatian study where the method was tested on a large sample, whereas the Aotearoa - New Zealand study is qualitative and it focuses on a small sample of five clients, five students and two field instructors involved in the Programme.

Chapter Eight is a concluding chapter, which suggests possibilities for further improvements and integrates the findings from both studies. It identifies the central themes and focuses on the strengths and limitations of the research.

The evolutionary process of the Contact-Challenge has challenged me as

much as those who have participated and it also changed us. What is most important is that these changes were our choices and that we all made them willingly, in order to improve our professional and personal performance.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

*Theory is just human activity bending back upon itself, constrained into a new kind of self-reflexivity. And, in absorbing this self-reflexivity, the activity itself will be transformed*

*Eagleton*

### 1.1. Introduction

Although the development of the human race is based on learning, the theory and practice of learning still needs to be explored. I was always interested in the processes of acquiring knowledge and I always wanted to know what qualities make effective teachers, and which circumstances encourage students to be receptive to learning. I was also aware of the mutuality of the process and the similarity between social work values and values that permeate education. Although very interested in theories, I learned that rigid theoretical assumptions may not be appropriate to help me understand teaching and learning processes in social work education. These processes are too complex to be fully explained by one theory, but a number of useful generalisations can be made about the conditions that produce effective and integrative social work education. This chapter is focused on finding a valid theoretical background to teach social work skills effectively, and it does so by reflecting on three theories and applying some of the generalisations derived from these theories, to social work education. It also addresses the common principles and values that permeate educational research, social work and social work education and it examines the worldview from which this thesis arises.

The propositions that follow are distilled out of my experience as an educator, practitioner and a life-long student. These propositions are going to be

examined during the course of this thesis and compared with relevant research in the field.

It is argued that every theory requires probing and experiencing its effects in practice. Experiencing in the sense of asking questions, finding new understandings and new possibilities. These new understandings then build upon old understandings. Without reflecting critically on established theories, we are unable to create new ones. *Probing, experiencing* and *developing* new understandings in this sense means constructing and creating not only explaining. Experiential learning involves discovering about how we learn, which is in the field of epistemology; a science focused on how humans know, think and decide. It also explores characteristics of the process of knowing, thinking and deciding (Bateson, 1987). It is argued that every person's epistemology is that person's way of understanding the world. Social workers' actions are based on their epistemology, and their actions influence the lives of people who are often disempowered. Therefore, one of the basic premises of this thesis is that during the process of learning social work theory and practice, students have to learn about their own unique and personal ways of understanding the world in terms of knowing, thinking and deciding. Understanding is understood here as a dynamic process. The research that follows explores how can context for effective education be constructed in order to encourage the change in understanding in such a way that student's prior knowledge is utilised. It also focuses on practical ways of assisting students to develop new skills and examine their values. The aim is to organise learning in such a way that it becomes challenging and exciting and that it produces changes in knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It is argued that by developing better understanding of the world around them and their attitudes about it, by improving their skills and actions and by learning how to reflect on their value base, students became reflective practitioners able to face challenges of the 21st century.

In the field of education, various ways of understanding may be found, and they are expressed through different theories. It can be argued that theories, that are merely descriptive, do not support processes of discovering. Theories ought to

enhance understanding without imposing limitations and restrictions and they ought to be part of one's understanding (Barnes, 1993). The use of theories is to bring forth a world; and while social work practitioners shape their theories, they are shaped by them as well. The basic premise of this thesis is that theories are for *reflection* and for *probing*. When practitioners stop *probing* their theories, they become rigid beliefs. Useful theories are practical; they motivate action and mental activity and they allow scientific inquiry. If the theory proves not to be effective in practice, practitioners should not reframe people according to the theory, nor fit their practice to the framework of their theory. Theory should rather be modified in the light of the experience and according to the unique client in the unique situation.

My strong position is that in the framework of social work education, theory cannot be separated from practice, because it originates in practice, and it requires continuous testing in practice. Theory is not opposed to experience as experience is contained in every theory. The world is dynamic and changeable, and theories should be just useful maps for scientific endeavours; they also have to be dynamic, viable and reflective. Theorists are necessarily part of their theories; and the theories presented in this chapter reflect the contexts from which they originate. These theories are imbued with the values, conscious and unconscious minds of their propounders, and they reflect and are reflected in policies that are framing them. The world is constantly changing, and in order to understand these changes, and to be able to manage social work practice and education, theories should be open for reflections and adaptations, because the use of theory is to enhance the practice and this is a two-way and circular process. Theories which are going to be utilised in this thesis, together with my personal experience in the field of social work education, helped me to develop a method of teaching and learning, which is grounded in humanistic, andragogic and experiential learning theories. This discussion has served to highlight the basic premises upon which this thesis is based.

## 1.2. Vision of an Effective Social Work Education

Learning is a multidimensional process and a challenge both for the one who is teaching and for the one who is learning. Learning theory, skills training and student's personal experience are equal elements of social work education. None is more or less important than the other.

This thesis supports the view that effective social work education focuses on learning about theories, developing skills and attitudes that will enable students to act as reflective practitioners, and utilising students' prior knowledge and experiences. Being a reflective practitioner involves: developing abilities to work as part of a team; communicating and exchanging ideas openly and assertively; developing critical and active attitude, open-mindedness, responsibility, whole-heartedness, ability to self-evaluate own practice and to reflect on own practice by using relevant research methods. Teaching methods that are accepted as being the most appropriate for fostering skills and attitudes necessary for effective practice are group work, exposure to the wider social context, self-assessment, peer-assessment, peer-teaching, and learning from first hand experience (Ashcroft and Griffiths, 1991). All mentioned methods are experiential in the sense that they involve whole learners, expecting them to take responsibility for their learning; a key feature of adult learning.

Since social work education takes place in the tertiary education environment, the value of experiential learning may be often underestimated, and the personal growth and development of students taken for granted. Fieldwork is commonly treated as "less scientific", and therefore "less important" than learning various theories of human behaviour in social work (Mesbur and Glassman, 1988). It is a common practice that students complete their academic education with broad theoretical knowledge but without real comprehension of issues in social work practice. Fortunately, in the last decade, the importance of integrating theoretical and practical knowledge and of utilising the cognitive and affective potential of learners has become accepted with experiential learning methods becoming part of academic programmes. Since social work deals with

human problems and how humans relate to their environment, social work education inevitably touches students on a personal level. Personal growth and development happens simultaneously with the process of education.

During the process of education, students have to combine knowledge with values they hold dear in order to become effective practitioners. Shifts that happen at the value level of students' existence and the consequent changes in attitudes influence personal growth and development. At the same time, personal growth and development encourages changes in values and attitudes. The social work profession is not value free, but value laden. Values and principles, which are leading social work practice, should be utilised in the teaching-learning process of social work.

In terms of my reading and experiences the following premises became central for development of this thesis. Students learn as integral beings, and the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process depends on the competence of the teacher to transmit knowledge, on the readiness of the student to accept that knowledge, and on the quality of the relationship between the two. From that relationship, which is unique in every case, both parties can learn. When fieldwork is an integral part of the education the situation is even more complex. Students should be encouraged to learn from one another as well, and two more parties are involved in the whole process: the field instructors and the clients whom students encounter during fieldwork. The complexity of relationships involved in social work practice education can be utilised in creating an ecological and integrative programme that comprises theory, practice and personal experience and encourages students to learn by using their heads, hearts, previous experiences, skills and abilities in order to develop new skills and abilities necessary for competent social work practice.

The position of this thesis is that effective social work education is one which integrates theory, practice and personal experience; which encourages students to learn from social work theorists, practitioners, clients, and one another; which models social work values, challenges and discusses them in order to encourage students to develop critical and open minded ways of thinking, acting

and understanding. That kind of education can encourage change in understanding, skills, values and attitudes.

### 1.3. Definition of the Term Learning

Learning is considered:

a change in human disposition or capability, which can be retained, and which is not simply ascribable to the process of growth (Gagne, 1965 : 5).

A change in disposition requires a change in attitude, so learning is not mere accumulation of data or skill improvement; it requires a change in the way humans perceive the world. Changes in skills, values, understanding and attitudes are equally important, and are essential for becoming an effective practitioner.

Learning has been defined as having the following elements:

It has a quality of personal involvement.

It is self-initiated.

It is evaluated by the learner.

Its essence is meaning.

When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience (Rogers, 1969 :78-79).

Rogers focuses on personal involvement, suggesting that without the conscious participation of the learner, little can be achieved. The learner is in charge and the learner's reflection on the material is essential for this process.

Inevitably, some change occurs during the process of intentional interaction between individuals and their environment. This change is the result of experience, but not every experience produces change. The learner has to explore the significance of the new material and *choose* to utilise it in the future.

Definitions of learning reflect the theories underpinning them. As theories move towards more holistic approaches, definitions of learning cover more aspects of human functioning. Learning produces change in the learner's way of perceiving the world; and in order to be effective it has to involve the whole learner on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level. Effective learning utilises past knowledge as well as the environmental potentials which surround the

learner and which are connected with the matter that is taught. Learners are active participants in their learning and are considered to be responsible for that learning. In the widest sense, learning is a process of finding new ways of bringing forth the world.

#### **1.4. Values – the Importance of Values in Educational Research, Social Work and Social Work Education**

It is as difficult to define the term '*value*' as it is to define the term '*quality*'. For the purpose of the argument that values inevitably permeate social work education, educational research and social work practice, a definition used in the CCETSW<sup>1</sup> discussion paper on Values in social work will be used as a starting point:

A value determines what a person thinks he [sic] *ought* to do, which may or may not be the same as what he wants to do, or what it is in his interest to do, or what in fact he actually does. Values in this sense give rise to general standards and ideals by which we judge our own and others' conduct; they also give rise to specific obligations (CCETSW, 1976: 8).

While my intention is to explore the notion of values from a different viewpoint, this description is a useful starting point for the discussion that follows. The aim of experiential learning in social work is not to "convince students to behave in accordance with social work values" because they "think they ought to"; rather, to encourage students to find out if these values are useful for them in order to become effective practitioners. Their professional behaviour should be inspired by values, not constrained by them. Values are not used to judge practitioners' behaviour, but to enrich their behaviour and increase effectiveness. Values are seen as an internally accepted framework for action, not as an external set of rules imposed by society. Although values may be proposed by a code of professional ethics, without internal acceptance of these values and without attaching personal meanings to the proposed values it is highly unlikely that practitioners will act in accordance with them. The multiplicity of relationships

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<sup>1</sup>Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. London.

and situations that social work practice confronts, cannot be fully predicted within a set of rules as listed within the code of professional ethics.

Values permeate educational research, social work and social work education even though many researchers try to avoid them, hoping that by doing so, their research will be more objective. This conundrum is foregrounded as follows:

What I am going to suggest is that metaphysical and moral beliefs cannot be expelled from educational research in this way and that educational research requires much more in the way of a relationship to 'practical philosophy' than most educational researchers are prepared to recognise and admit. The reason why this is so is that educational research, though it may have the appearance of a disinterested and impersonal pursuit always involves a commitment to some educational philosophy and hence to the educational values that such a commitment unavoidably entails. Thus, although educational researchers may, and usually do, study education without articulating any philosophical beliefs or educational values, this should not be taken to indicate that philosophy and values do not permeate their work. All that it indicates is the success of educational research in concealing the moral and philosophical commitment to which it always implicitly subscribes (Carr, 1995: 88).

Even though positivist research attempts to be value-free, in the fields of educational research and social work it is impossible to ignore the existence of values. The foundations of educational research and social work lie in philosophy and in social sciences. Both fields have always been permeated with values therefore, social research cannot be value free, neither can social work practice. To expel values from the social professions and research would deny its quality, as quality arises from values. Although quality may be difficult to define, its existence can be seen in practice.

Quality is the continuing stimulus, which our environment puts upon us to create the world in which we live. All of it. Every last bit of it (Pirsig, 1974: 224-225).

Pirsig (1974) states that quality cannot be independently related to either the subject or the object, but can only be found in the relationship between the

two. Quality is an attribute, which describes a process. It cannot be added to the product at the end of its creation, it can be only in-built in the process. If we agree with the proposition that effective education creates effective social workers, quality needs to be inherent in all social work and educational practices. In order to produce effectiveness, quality needs to be defined by all participants in the process of teaching and learning, not by outsiders.

The role of the teacher in modern social work schools is changing from being the omniscient transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator, colleague and discoverer involved in a mutual process of finding effective methods for human communication. Contemporary educational theorists (Chickering, 1977, Schon, 1983, Kemmis, 1984, Kolb, 1984, Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985, Weil and McGill, 1989, Knowles, 1990, Zuber-Skerritt, 1991, Carr, 1995) argue that by using experiential approaches derived from adult learning theories, students' creativity and responsibility is encouraged and their motivation increases.

Professional practice decisions are inevitably influenced by the professional and personal values to which practitioners subscribe. By the end of the period of professional education, students have to come to some decision not only regarding which theory of human behaviour to use in their practice, but also to understand the implications this theory has for a specific client in a specific situation. Since professional values provide ethical framework and influence practitioners' decisions, they need to be practised during the course of professional education so that they become a part of the students' behaviour thereby providing students with the opportunity to reflect upon their decisions.

If the method we use for evaluating a particular course does not match the values promoted in the course, the results obtained may not be relevant.

Therefore, for evaluation of the method of teaching and learning (in this case, the Contact Challenge Method) - that has its foundation in humanistic theories, and that is also emancipatory and promoting empowerment - empirical and analytic methods would not be appropriate. Action research, however, seems to offer a suitable framework for evaluating a program that attempts to integrate theory, practice and experience. It also adds the critical and transformational component,

which does not exist in traditional forms of educational research. These observations are very much in accordance with Carr's three conclusions developed after his analysis of educational research:

First, if I am correct in supposing values to be an inescapable category in educational research, then, once again, the old positivist segregation of facts and values breaks down. Educational researchers are committed to values simply by virtue of engaging in their work.

Second, since educational researchers cannot evade the task of deciding the educational values appropriate to their work, they cannot evade the responsibility for critically examining and justifying the educational values that their inquiries seek to foster and promote. But since to do this is to engage in philosophy, it follows that philosophical reflection and argumentation are central features of the methods and procedures of research. The expulsion of educational philosophy from educational research - or at least its confinement to the task of analysing research concepts and methodologies - turns out to be yet another positivist mistake.

Third, philosophy and values are not just a necessary but inconvenient feature of educational research; they are an indispensable requirement for the development of any genuinely educational science. Indeed it is only by virtue of a self-conscious desire to be guided and informed by philosophical beliefs about the value of the education that the educational character of any phenomena can be recognised and the educational qualities of any research sustained. It is somewhat ironical that the educational values which positivism construes as a major weakness in the case for an educational science turn out to be its major source of strength (Carr, 1995: 98-99).

It follows that social work education should reflect the same values and principles, which permeate social work practice. Also, when researchers conduct methodological evaluation, the research methods employed should be in accordance with the values used in practice and education.

### **1.5. Implications for Social work Education**

Social work is a humanistic profession, and it may be assumed that humanistic principles embedded in education should be effective in helping students to accept the humanistic values necessary for competent practice.

Humanistic principles that are embedded in adult education are the same as those interwoven in social work practice. The same values permeate contemporary forms of educational action research. If the idea of empowerment, so often used in contemporary social work, is to be transmitted to students, then it should permeate pedagogy (or andragogy) of social work education.

Humanism, which comprises universal values embedded in every helping profession, is a starting point for social work theory and education. The humanistic approach in education emphasises the importance of subjective experience in the learning process (Mesbur and Glassman, 1988). Carl Rogers (1961) promoted the idea that in organising education for the helping professions, teachers should be led by the same principles and values that permeate the field of practice they are studying. This approach is integrative, and it emphasises the importance of creating a supportive climate where students will be able to express their needs and take responsibility for satisfying them. It is assumed that if students learn to understand themselves, they will be better able to understand their clients. Rogers' approach is in accordance with Knowles' (1966) idea of practice of andragogic methods at the university; namely, they both emphasise the need for interaction between the student and the experience of learning.

Humanistic andragogy believes that in the process of growth and development, the learner's personal perception changes from the position of a person who is dependent on others to the position of a self-directing, autonomous person, responsible for his or her own behaviour. In the process of natural growth and development, which comprises learning, experience is accumulated and becomes increasingly useful as a resource for learning. As a person grows, learning becomes more focused on the performance of tasks and social roles. There are advantages therefore in ensuring that education is life oriented with knowledge used as means of problem solving.

Goldberg Wood and Middleman (1991) elicited five principles to guide teaching in social work:

1. Mutual Accountability
2. Teaching for Use
3. Maximising Student-Student Learning

4. Providing Experience
5. Modelling Social Work Ethics and Values

These five basic principles, or guidelines for social work education, will be discussed and supplemented with six principles from social work practice. The aim of this discussion will be to clarify the common value base for social work practice, education and educational research.

These five basic principles are very much in accordance with principles of social work practice, but at the same time it is important to distinguish differences between these settings.

These principles will be examined in relation to their application in student - teacher, student - field instructor and student - client relationships together with reflections on the value base of action research in education. Exploration of these various relationships was essential for the development of the Contact-Challenge Method as briefly defined in the Introduction and in more detail in Chapter Four.

### ***1.5.1. Mutual Accountability***

In contemporary social work, client and social worker are partners working on a specific task. In this relationship both have responsibilities and goals that they want to achieve. In the contract, agreed upon at the beginning of the problem solving process, social worker and client express their expectations and negotiate their respective roles. The basis of this relationship is trust and accountability.

Mutual accountability stresses the importance of the relationship between the client and the social worker, the teacher and the student, the field instructor and the student, and the researcher and the participants in the research.

Student and professor are partners in the educational enterprise, each with rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis the other (Goldberg Wood and Middleman, 1991: 113).

Contract-learning (Tough, 1979, Knowles, 1986), based on andragogic principles, suggests that students create their own learning contracts. The learning

contract covers diagnosing learning needs, specifying learning objectives, resources and strategies, evidence of accomplishment and how it can be validated. The contract is then reviewed along with teachers and supervisors and finally it is put to action. The evaluation of learning consists of self-evaluation, peer-evaluation and supervisor/teacher evaluation (Knowles, 1990).

The principle of mutual accountability relates to the importance of being present at the time agreed upon, keeping deadlines and performing required tasks. Responsibility has to be mutually agreed and executed. In the client-social worker situation, a social worker encourages client's responsibility by not protecting them from the consequences of irresponsible behaviour. In the teaching-learning situation, the process is similar. In fact, humanistic education supports the idea that students should not be criticised by their teachers, but should experience the consequences of their behaviour. As in the client-social worker situation where self-evaluation is more effective than confrontation or criticism, in educational settings student self-evaluation should be fully supported, as should the students' evaluation of the teaching staff. In the framework of humanistic education, if evaluation other than self-evaluation exists at all, it should be mutual.

In social work practice teaching, mutual accountability underpins the student-field instructor relationship as well as the student-client relationship. To achieve this principle in fieldwork, a relationship between the student and the client has to be established. In order to do this, students need to be given sufficient quality time with their field instructors and their clients.

In educational action research, this principle is clearly reflected in defining the roles in the research process and in the mutual acceptance of the research principles and practices by participants. Each participant is responsible for his or her role and is respected regardless of his or her position in the research project. Data from all participants are relevant and are available to them. There is no 'hidden agenda' or 'tricky questions' aimed at revealing something participants do not want to share. All conclusions from the research are discussed with participants, and their interpretations are as important as the researcher's observations. The research findings are available to all participants. The

evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method is carried out according to this principle.

### ***1.5.2. Teaching for Use/Working for Use/Researching for Use***

Under this principle the role of the social worker is to inform and educate the client when needed. This is best expressed in the metaphor of the social worker's role, which is not to give a fish to the client but to teach him or her how to catch it. The social worker engages with his or her client in considering how a change in the client's behaviour would reflect on his or her total environment and how it would improve the quality of the client's life. Therefore, all plans and changes in the problem solving processes should be performed as a mutual agreement between the client and the social worker.

The principle of teaching for practice stresses the importance of the teacher's consideration as to how the student will use learned knowledge. Knowing the steps and the principles of effective social work practice is not sufficient to be an effective practitioner. Therefore, the integration of cognitive and experiential knowledge is an issue of great importance for effective teaching. A key question passed by Goldberg Wood and Middleman (1991) is:

.... how will understanding of each piece of my content be reflected in student's practice? (Goldberg Wood and Middleman, 1991:114)

Finding an answer to this question is possible only if good relationships are established and free expression of ideas is encouraged. Continuous contact with social work practice is necessary to realise this principle in educational practice.

The main task of the fieldwork experience is to challenge and test this principle. The use of knowledge in practice requires the integration of theory, attitudes and skills in the student's total behaviour. This is a lengthy and individual process with integration dependent upon the opportunity to experience what it takes to be an effective social worker and to reflect on that experience in

supervision.

In action research this principle is reflected in the immediate usefulness of educational practice. Research has to be practice oriented and should influence the current practice in the field. Action research is depicted as a spiral, because every completed cycle opens up new possibilities for further exploration and development. If practice was not engaged and if the research did not open possibilities for further engagement, then the research would not be consistent with the methodology of action research. The aim of the evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method is not only to find about its effectiveness but also to further improve it based on theory, research and experience of all participants.

### ***1.5.3. Maximising Student-Student Learning***

The principle of maximising student-student learning is derived from the same principle in social work, which encourages clients to find ways of satisfying needs through their environment. A social worker encourages clients to restore or develop a supportive social network in order to overcome or solve their problems.

The principle of maximising student-student learning encourages peer learning and is drawn again from theories of adult and experiential learning. Students' past experiences are appreciated, valued and utilised in education. Students, as well as clients can be more powerful by acting collectively. Clients cannot be seen as separate from their environments because 'the whole always being more than a sum of its parts'. People who lack power can gain it through working together in groups (Everitt, et al. 1992).

In teaching social work practice, this principle is reflected in group co-operative learning where students have the opportunity to learn from one another and to share their experiences. This kind of interactive learning can provoke further challenges in the teaching learning process and can support mutual appreciation and acceptance of individual differences.

In action research, this principle is reflected in the continuous involvement of all participants. Communication between participants is encouraged and it is

assumed that the responsibility for the effectiveness of the project lies equally with all participants. In the evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method, all participants: clients, students, field instructors and the researcher herself, are seen as experts who may learn from one another. Collegiality and learning from one another are the main features of the Contact-Challenge Method.

#### ***1.5.4. Providing Experience***

In social work practice, this principle corresponds to the importance of testing new behaviours in real life situations while being engaged in problem solving processes with the social worker.

The principle of providing experience in education is essential for every profession, and especially for a practical profession such as social work. It may be assumed that if teachers have continuous contact with social work practice, it is more likely that they would encourage their students to link theory with experience thereby providing situations where integration of theory, practice and experience may occur.

In designing each class session, professors should primarily provide situations for experiential learning and practice, using the lecture as a supportive content vehicle (Goldberg Wood and Middleman, 1991: 114).

Even though this principle is essential for effective social work education, it is not easy to realise it in practice because of the complexity of fieldwork. Experiences for students since they involve live subjects (clients), have to be carefully chosen and organised so that professional ethics will not be jeopardised.

The purpose of fieldwork is to provide experience; although those involved need to be aware that fieldwork is an experience for the client as well as for the student. This is an experience that may be either useful or harmful for both parties. Careful consideration can maximise these potentially useful processes for all participants.

In action research, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five,

theories are not validated separately and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice (Elliott, 1982). Action research is inseparable from practice. It arises from practice and its goal is the continuous improvement of that practice. Therefore, the only way to evaluate the Contact-Challenge Method is to engage in practice and further develop the method according to the feed-back from participants.

#### ***1.5.5. Modelling Social Work Values and Ethics***

The ethics principle, according to Goldberg Wood and Middleman (1991), recognises the importance of teaching values by example. In social work and in education no situation is ethically neutral and teachers and field instructors are role models for ethical or unethical behaviour. This principle is enriched, for the purpose of this thesis, by six basic values that permeate social work education and practice. These values are respecting uniqueness of each individual, holistic approach, confidentiality, self-determination, acceptance and evaluation. These values were the cornerstones for developing the Contact-Challenge Method.

#### ***Respecting Uniqueness of Each Individual***

Since one of the main values in social work is *respecting uniqueness and individuality of each social work client*, effective education in social work has to be concerned with the needs and interests of every particular student. Ellias and Merriam (1980) studied the philosophical foundation of adult education and discovered that by using humanistic principles and values in the process of education students develop into:

...persons who are open to change and continued learning, persons who strive for self-actualisation, and persons who can live together as fully-functioning individuals. As such the whole focus of humanistic education is upon the individual learner rather than a body of information (Ellias and Merriam, 1980: 122).

One of the main ideas of the humanistic approach is that every individual is a proactive being, and as such he or she has the ability to relate actively in his or her environment. Humans change their environment in accordance with their needs, wishes and interests, and the environment influences them according to the wider focus and conditions operating in society. Humans are primarily responsible for their choices and for the world they create. According to the humanistic approach, humans are in essence good and positive. Their behaviour may be unacceptable, but they use it because they do not know any other way of satisfying their needs. Therefore, the role of the helper is to encourage human beings to find ways of satisfying those needs in the long term. The focus is on human potential, not on shortcomings.

Humans perceive the world selectively and students are willing to learn what they consider important. Every individual selectively perceives contents learned during education. Personal goals and attitudes influence perception, and the level of personal development encourages or prevents acceptance of the contents of education. Values, worldviews, personal needs and human relations have an impact on education and learning, with learning occurring only if personally intended.

When a humanistic approach in social work education is used, the affective component of learning has to be considered as well as the cognitive. Educational psychology teaches that by overemphasising the cognitive aspect of the learning process, the value of the real, deep and true contact between human beings is lost. Since human contact is essential in social work practice and social work education, it cannot be omitted or set aside. The quality of relationships is the main catalyst of change in all settings where humans are concerned. On the other hand, by overemphasising the affective component and by neglecting the cognitive, the relationship is in danger of becoming superficial. While it is essential to establish empathy, it also requires a professional code and set of practices, which are needed for competent service in education as in social work practice.

Respecting uniqueness of each individual can be best exercised in the

social work education by providing students with an opportunity to be in contact with one social work client for a considerable length of time. Therefore, fieldwork has to provide possibilities for exercising this value on a one-to-one basis. Students can exercise this value by being in contact and meeting one client for the considerable length of time, so that the relationship can develop.

### *Holistic Approach*

The idea of the holistic approach is essential for effective social work practice and it is best explained in the following statement: *every client is part of his or her environment and should be understood in his or her environment with its boundaries, rules, abilities, problems and unique ways of solving them.*

In 1969 Gordon Hearn edited a book "*The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward and Holistic Conception of Social Work*" and applied Ludwig von Bertalanffy's (1968) General Systems Theory to social work and social work education. Compton and Galaway (1989) based their problem solving methods on Systems Theory using the systemic and holistic framework to explain social work processes. Today the Systems Theory has become the foundation for many problem-solving methods and approaches. Every client is an integral part of his or her environment, and the social worker can help only if the whole system of where a client acts and lives is explored. This also includes a holistic perspective of understanding client's total behaviour: emotions, cognition, verbal and non verbal messages and mental and physical abilities.

In social work education, teachers should act in accordance with the same holistic principle to achieve effectiveness. Every student should be understood as an integral part of his or her environment with boundaries, rules, abilities, problems and unique ways of solving them. Education has to address the student's total behaviour without overemphasising or neglecting any part of it.

A student in fieldwork needs time to see clients in their environment. To consider and understand a client's total behaviour and to reflect on a student's own total behaviour, a student needs time. The holistic approach cannot be

exercised only by seeing clients a few times or by reading their files. Getting to know clients in their context takes a considerable length of time. Therefore students require the opportunity to see their clients in their total environment, using their total behaviour, otherwise, the holistic approach cannot be practised. With all the time constraints that fieldwork imposes I was challenged to find a way of exercising the holistic approach through the Contact-Challenge Method.

### *Confidentiality*

The importance of confidentiality for social work practice is often discussed in the literature, emphasised in codes of ethics, and sometimes taken for granted. In educational settings when laboratory work and supervision are part of education the same procedures for protection should be used. Confidentiality contracts are essential in educational groups when personal problems are discussed and in supervision groups where mutual trust is essential.

By practising confidentiality in a skill training group students can learn through their own experience what may happen when confidentiality is broken; how to make confidentiality contracts; which information and in what form can be taken outside the group; and other important issues connected with confidentiality. By being in contact with persons with special needs students can discuss the importance of confidentiality and the meaning of confidentiality to them.

### *Self-determination*

Self-determination implies that there ought to be strong compatibility between the basic personal values and biases of the client and the biases embedded in the ideas selected by the practitioner for use in the helping encounter (Chambers and Spano, 1982). Social work clients are masters of their problems, and students are mastering their learning. Student involvement in the process of education is essential and a teacher's job is to encourage them to be involved as much as possible in that process.

Student's self-determination during the course has the same value as client self-determination in the social work process. Adult learning theories support this notion, putting responsibility for learning on the student and encouraging self-directed learning. In spite of the importance of the student's learning needs, the teacher has to be aware that there are some issues that students may not want to learn, but which are nevertheless important for competent practice. These issues should be discussed as well. Everitt et al. (1992) expressed this value in the following way:

People have rights, including the right to be heard and the right to control their own lives. It follows that people also have rights to choose what kinds of intervention to accept in their lives, to define their own issues, and to take action on them (Everitt et al., 1992: 37).

When students have the power to create their learning programmes they inevitably take responsibility for their learning. Furthermore, when the creation of programmes is followed with self-evaluation procedures students are able to reflect on their learning plans and to set learning goals for the future. The Contact-Challenge Method heavily relies on this principle, using learning contracts and self-evaluation.

Fieldwork experience offers an opportunity to challenge this value in real life. In a one-to-one relationship, the students may find this value challenged many times, especially, when they want to act on behalf of their clients. Quality supervision is essential when these challenges occur. Without the possibility of challenging this value, it is not likely that it will ever be fully incorporated into the modus operandi of the social work practitioner.

### *Unconditional Acceptance*

In social work practice, every client has the right to be accepted the way he or she is, and the social worker should start from the 'place where the client is'. Social work has to accept a client as a person, but this does not mean that every behaviour has to be accepted. The job of the social worker is not to judge whether

the client deserves his or her help, but to help clients utilise their potential to solve problems encountered in life. The idea of unconditional acceptance is presented in Eric Berne's opus, in colloquial terminology *I am OK, You are OK* as being the only existential position that may lead to positive change.

The humanistic value of unconditional acceptance should be embedded in social work education as well. This value is connected with a non-judgmental attitude, that is the essence of the social worker's relationship with a client. In the field of education, a non-judgmental attitude has to be mutual. This attitude does not mean being uncritical; on the contrary, it requires a relationship without the fear of being judged, but being able and free to express positive and negative opinions. A non-judgmental attitude may reflect itself in the teacher's relationship with the student, and in the way examinations and assignments are performed. It may sound demagogic that teachers are not there to judge their students, because every assignment and examination is a kind of judgement. It is expected that teachers assess students' knowledge, but it is certainly not expected that they criticise them on the basis of their personal qualities. It could be argued that by accepting students as adults, and andragogic methods as effective in social work education, the whole examination process should be re-examined as well. It should be in accordance with the theory and philosophy that is promoted in the course. When students set standards and outcomes for a specific course that is taught, they are able to self-evaluate their performance at the end of the course.

#### *Evaluation and Constant Improvement*

Social work is a profession that provides services to people in need; therefore, clients' evaluation is invaluable. The usefulness of the clients' evaluation is in providing feedback to the practitioners, reflecting on their performance and effectiveness. When clients are involved in the process of education, evaluation by them is even more important for students because they can immediately reflect on their practice. Client's feedback is useful for the tertiary institution as well because it keeps teaching methods in tune with practice

needs. Clients' engagement in evaluation promotes empowerment. Most clients will give feedback to the students without criticism. Clients' evaluation may be discussed and commented on by the student group, and in that sense it is a resource for further learning. The opinions of field instructors should be integrated into the student assessment as well. Negative labels should be exchanged for an approach that recognises that people have skills, abilities and potentials and some skills that need to be improved.

O'Hagan (1974) stressed the point of assessment in the following way:

Social work more than most fields of work is directly concerned with values and value judgements. In any situation there are no absolute rights and wrongs; the situation can only be analysed in terms of individual's or group's values. Values are the question of perspective, thus two workers' methods may be diametrically opposed and both, for their frame of reference, be acting logically. Any form of assessment must use a system or series of systems of values, which may be unacceptable or alien to the particular worker, social workers or society as a whole. The only valid objective for a social work course would seem to be to attempt to broaden a worker's worldview by making data available and creating an environment, which might facilitate its absorption. It would seem that all that can be offered in support of assessment procedures, apart from reproducing in essay form someone else's opinion, is a highly personalised guess at a worker's abilities. This is no measure of competence. The concept of failure on a social work course must therefore be meaningless (O'Hagan, 1974:84).

Self-evaluation methods may help in solving the problems mentioned by O'Hagan. Fieldwork is the place where a longer term contact with one client may provide an opportunity to practise self-evaluation skills. At the same time, self-evaluation is very important in social work practice, because the need for supervision starts with self-evaluation. When the student is obliged to be in contact with a client for a longer period, their contact cannot be only superficial. That student has the opportunity to exercise patience, acceptance, boundaries and assertiveness, as well as re-examining his or her own values. Students themselves are then in the position to develop the skill of evaluating their work, and to discuss the skills or abilities they may need to develop later in the course.

When a teacher's assessment is necessary (as it is in most social work

schools), standards can be set together with students. Then students are in control of their learning, setting their learning goals according to mutually agreed standards and evaluating their achievements. As in social work practice, so in the field of social work education - continuous evaluation is essential for improvement. Effective feedback should be mutual, in order to promote empowerment, dialogue and communication. Teachers provide services to students, and therefore, students should evaluate teacher's work. If students learn how to evaluate the work of their teachers, and if they learn during their education that evaluation is used for improvement, not for criticising, they will be more ready to accept evaluation from their clients and use it for their own continuous improvement.

It can be argued that a supportive and open atmosphere is essential to achieve quality in social work education. Clear presentation of the aims and purposes of every particular experience in the field, an individual approach to every student and the giving of relevant information about resources in the field and in the literature will improve the quality of education. Continuous evaluation of the educational programmes and the levels of co-operation between students, clients, social workers and faculty staff adds to the viability and relevance of the programmes.

In order to be able to evaluate their work, students have to develop the skill of self-evaluation, which encourages continuous improvement of practice. A long term relationship with one client provides the student the chance to see his or her effectiveness and gives the client the opportunity to say how he or she sees the student in action. Evaluation is not meant to be a linear process of assessment from the teacher or field instructor but rather a multi-level interactive process that involves all parties included in the performance of the task. The aim of the evaluation is improvement, education and motivation, not mere assessment.

The above-presented principles inherent in adult education and social work practice seem to be commonly acknowledged in theory and proven in research. However, they are rarely built into the curriculum. It seems as if social work practice teachers theoretically accept most of these ideas but when it comes to

practice, they generally adhere to traditional ways of teaching. The Contact-Challenge Method was developed in order to respond to demands from practice and to help students become effective and self-directed practitioners, responsive to clients needs, taking into account the identified principles.

### 1.6. The Worldview that Matches Humanistic Values

The worldview from which the Contact-Challenge Method arises is a holistic and ecological one, which matches humanistic values. The distinction between two major worldviews that colour and determine practices in social sciences is advanced in Capra's (1982) work. He classified teaching and learning theories into those that originate from a *mechanistic* worldview and those that originate from a *holistic* worldview. His classification offers a valuable framework for this thesis. These two worldviews, or orientations do not only demonstrate basic differences in learning theories but are also relevant to other fields like management, physics, agriculture and medicine. In his later work Capra (1996) changed the term *holistic* worldview to *ecological* stating that the two terms slightly differ in their meanings. He distinguished the two terms using the following metaphor:

A holistic view of, say, a bicycle, means to see the bicycle as a functional whole and to understand the interdependence of its parts accordingly. An ecological view of the bicycle includes that, but it adds to it the perception of how the bicycle is embedded in its natural and social environment – where the raw materials that went into it came from, how it was manufactured, how it use affects the natural environment and the community by which it is used, etc. This distinction between 'holistic' and 'ecological' is even more important when we talk about living systems, for which the connections with the environment are much more vital (Capra, 1996: 6-7).

The term 'holistic' is used in this thesis to describe the approach in social work and education where clients, students, social workers and teachers could not be seen as separated from contexts where they live (more under the subheading *Holistic Approach on page 27*). The term 'ecological' is used in a broader sense;

to name the worldview from which this thesis arises. It relates to the worldview, which sees the world as a network of phenomena that are interconnected and interdependent. It encompasses universal spiritual awareness as well as cultural diversity. It also recognises the value of all living (humans, animals and plants) and so-called non living beings (like rocks and planets) connected in the universal web of life.

### *1.6.1. Mechanistic Worldview*

In the mechanistic worldview the universe is like a machine that operates in space and time according to laws of physics. It is assumed that when an action is applied it causes events. The mechanistic worldview has permeated Western philosophy, physics, medicine, psychology, and education from Cartesian times, with Western science constructed according to laws of cause and effect. The mechanistic worldview is the foundation for Newtonian physics. It is assumed that if scientists are able to control their inputs then outputs are predictable. In the field of education the mechanistic worldview promotes the idea that teachers are able to change their students, and so when they apply certain methods students are changed. The teacher is responsible for using the “right” methods and if these do not work, the teacher, the student or the system is to blame. The main premise is that students come as empty organisms, which have to be filled with knowledge. In the mechanistic model subjective data is irrelevant, outcomes in terms of behaviour and performance are important, teachers evaluate students and motivation is extrinsic. The learner’s own perception of what he or she wants to learn is irrelevant because it is subjective. While the stimulus-response (mechanistic) approach may work for simple kinds of learning, when learning is more complex many difficulties are encountered for the simple reason that as human beings we can produce more varieties in our responses than the mechanistic way of thinking can predict. Human beings, by their nature, are too complex to be controlled with simple stimuli in complex situations. If one hits a rock it may be predictable, according to the angle, strength and laws of Newtonian

physics, where the rock will end; but if it hits a person how many various responses may we get? Even if we know that person very well, we may only presume, how he or she is going to react in this specific situation. The mechanistic worldview assumes that we only react on external stimuli, neglecting the internal motivation and the variety of possible reactions. The mechanistic approach focuses on external control and it assumes that people can control other people and it goes even further assuming that some people have the right to control others and coerce them in doing what they do not want to do (Glasser, 1998). Applying mechanistic worldview in education, social work, management and all disciplines where humans are involved is not only ineffective, but also dangerous and harmful.

In the field of physics Newtonian scientists saw energy as being mechanical, a stable source of power in an absolutely controllable, orderly universe (Knowles, 1990). In the Newtonian conception, human potential is fixed. The pedagogical approach (as opposed to andragogical) arises from the Newtonian concept. Organisations, which work on Newtonian (mechanistic) concepts, have a strong hierarchical structure. Continuous training of employees is focused on gaining specific skills or desirable behaviours and the methods employed are mostly behaviourist. The motivation is extrinsic, and the creativity of employees is not encouraged or valued because this may create too much complexity and become unmanageable for a system organised in a mechanistic way. The function of supervision and management is control over employees. Mechanistic systems are symmetric. The authorities are the ones who know and decide - employees are the ones who listen and perform in the way that the manager decrees. The educational method used in such organisations is training<sup>2</sup>. Training may be very useful for learning specific skills, which do not request creative thinking. A certain amount of uniformity and very clear goals are required which are not

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<sup>2</sup>Note that the difference between training and education, according to Nadler and Nadler is:

“...(training) is those activities which are designed to improve performance on the job the employee is presently doing or is being hired to do.....The purpose of training is to either introduce a new behaviour or modify existing behaviours so that a particular and specified kind of behaviour results.” (Nadler and Nadler, 1970 : 40-41).

“..... education is designed to improve the overall competence of the employees in a specified direction and beyond the job now held.” (Nadler and Nadler, 1970 : 60)

difficult to evaluate. Training is best performed from the mechanistic worldview and the use of pedagogical methods is very effective. An extreme case of a mechanistic way of organising people is apparent in the structure and process employed by the armed forces.

In the field of psychology and education the main proponents of the mechanistic worldview built their theories from experiments on animals. Thorndike (1928) for example saw humans born as empty organisms that responded exclusively to stimuli coming from the external world. The teacher is in control of the stimuli and of student responses. His work is called connectionism because he believed that the job of the teacher was to *connect* the particular response of the learner, to the particular stimulus of the teacher and reward the student when he or she behaved in the way the teacher wanted him or her to behave. During later years Thorndike's system was refined and became the foundation for behaviourist theories of learning, behaviour psychology and counselling. Ivan Pavlov introduced the concepts of reinforcement, extinction, generalisation and differentiation into behaviourist theory at the end of the 18th century. John B. Watson, Edwin R. Guthrie, Clark L. Hull and many others further developed behaviourist ideas and stayed within the framework of the mechanistic worldview.

In the early sixties, Bandura and Walters (1963) introduced the term *social learning and* although in their learning model reinforcement determined behaviour, cognition was seen to be central to how the individual functions. Social Learning Theory bridges the gap between the mechanistic and ecological approaches to learning. It is assumed that the learner stores data from past reinforcements, which might be experienced or only seen; therefore, it is not necessary to experience; in many cases it is enough to observe. The idea was that the teacher was supposed to behave in ways that he or she wanted the students to behave and thus the basic technique in the process of education was role modelling. There is no doubt that every teacher uses some role modelling but it cannot be the only method in the process of teaching-learning. Social Learning Theory was the foundation for a whole range of theories, which proposed self-

control and self-directing processes as the basic method of learning. Concepts of self-control and self-directing in learning were very useful in later developments which sought to give control and responsibility for learning to the learners themselves.

Philosophy, psychology and learning theories have always been connected. The behaviourist model reflected the stance of art of philosophy and psychology in the first half of the twentieth century. Psychology at that time was struggling to be seen as a science, which meant that the laws of Newtonian physics had to be applied in psychological research. Since the mechanistic model was considered scientific in physics and biology, quantitative methods and the study of observable changes were considered to be acceptable in scientific studies of humans as well. Research on humans involved observable changes were physical reactions to stimuli, muscular movements, glandular secretions and, for the observer, visible changes in behaviour. This worldview was reflected in the field of medicine too, where specialities started to develop rapidly and both, the human body and human mind were considered as machines - when something did not work anymore, it was replaced or fixed. Dealing with body and mind as separate entities enabled scientists to explore body parts in detail and seek ways to cure them. Specialists became experts for particular parts of the body, but their knowledge was very rarely connected with the whole person in his or her environment. A patient with a liver cancer was seen as a "sick liver", rather than a person in an environment which may have had considerable influence on the development of a certain disease. In psychiatry the result of the mechanistic worldview was the development and uncritical use of drugs for every psychological problem, (usually without supporting psychotherapy, socio-therapy or family therapy), accompanied by the option of lobotomy and electro-convulsive therapy in treatment and a distant approach to patients often labelled by their behaviour.

On the other hand, the mechanistic worldview did encourage the development of modern scientific thought and assisted in the development of many specialities. Furthermore by its analytic preciseness many practically useful methods were developed. The main disadvantages of this way of approaching

people and science were that individual differences and the uniqueness of every human being were not taken into account and the importance of self-observation was set aside.

For these reasons in the field of social sciences the mechanistic worldview does not offer an useful framework. The main criticism focuses on the idea where human beings are not seen to be a part of their natural and that humans who are in the power position (e.g. employers, parents, teachers, priests, social workers) should and are even obliged (or have a moral right) to control the ones with less power (e.g. children, women, employees, students, patients, persons with special needs). It was such shortcomings, which led to the search for a more effective worldview, which will bring human potentials more in focus. With development of the ideas of equality and along with the strong feminist and radical movements that started to permeate all sciences, the ecological worldview started to appear. It utilised findings from mechanistic research and developed a more comprehensive approach that integrated analysis and synthesis, two seemingly opposed methods.

### *1.6.2. Ecological Worldview*

The shift from the mechanistic towards the ecological approach in Western society came about through field theory, systems theory and ecological psychology. System theorists from the fields of organisational development like Seiler (1967), Celand (1969) and Kast and Rozenzweig (1970) represented a major shift in thinking during the late sixties and early seventies. This major shift in thinking occurred simultaneously in various fields. Parsons (1951), Von Bertalanffy (1968) and Zadeh (1969) linked systems theory with the social sciences. Hearn (1969), Germain and Gitterman (1980), Compton and Galaway (1989) applied systems and ecological systems theory in the field of social work.

Systems theory had a great impact on education as well. Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) expressed the major shift as follows:

In one way or another, we are forced to deal with complexities, with “wholes” or “systems”, in all fields of knowledge. This implies a basic re-orientation in scientific thinking (Bertalanffy, 1968 : 5).

Fritjof Capra (1982), a physicist and a philosopher integrated Eastern and Western thought as well as physics and psychology. He expressed the basic idea of the holistic or ecological approach to education in the following way:

We are trying to apply the concepts of an outdated worldview - the mechanistic worldview of Cartesian-Newtonian science - to a reality that can no longer be understood in these terms.

We live in a globally interconnected world, in which biological, physiological, social, and environmental phenomena are all interdependent. To describe this world appropriately we need an ecological perspective that the Cartesian worldview cannot offer.

What we need, then, is a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values. The beginnings of this change are already visible in all fields, and the shift from a mechanistic to a holistic conception of reality is likely to dominate the entire decade. The gravity and global extent of our crisis indicate that the current changes are likely to result in a transformation of unprecedented dimensions, a turning point for our planet as a whole (Capra, 1982a : 19).

In the ecological worldview ecology is understood as a study of the delicate balance that exists between living things and their environments and the ways in which this mutuality may be enhanced and maintained (Compton , Galaway, 1989). A scientist coming from the ecological worldview (sometimes referred to as organic, systems or holistic worldview) sees humans and their environments in a constant interrelationship where they influence one another. The ecological environment does not comprise only air, water, food and nature; it includes also family, social networks, past, present and future relationships, spirituality, policy and economic conditions. The ecological worldview emerged as an attempt to overcome the dualistic and mechanistic viewpoint of the nineteenth century in Western societies. On the other hand, for Eastern and Pacific cultures the notion that persons and their environments are an indivisible unit is not new at all. Processes of life are interwoven, mutually influencing, and

endlessly moving in a dynamic flow. There is no concept of simple causes leading to simple effects in Eastern and Pacific philosophies.

While humans are part of their environment, they are also shaping it, enhancing it and destroying it. The ecological worldview perspective offers a suitable framework for social work practice because it sees a client in his or her environment and not as an isolated individual. The social worker has to understand the client and his or her environment as a unique system, which has its boundaries, rules, abilities, problems, and specific and unique ways of solving them. There is no pattern, which can help us in this process, because the situation is always new and unique. While there is a framework imbued with values and there are steps and guidelines in professional practice, the *person in the situation* is always seen to be unique. In the field of education, effective education is that which responds to the needs of the student and the environment and which sees students as respected individuals who are shaping and are shaped by their environments.

Learning is viewed as a lifelong process. Ecological thinking is process thinking, and according to Capra:

... form becomes associated with process, interrelation with interaction, and opposites are unified through oscillation... (Capra, 1982a : 23).

The ecological worldview is therefore consistent with an interactive and integrative approach because humans cannot survive disconnected from their natural environment. Destroying the environment destroys us; destroying the human mind by autocratic politics or any kind of psychological oppression destroys the natural environment as much as it destroys human potentials to develop freely and without coercion. The ecological worldview promotes the idea that humans are an indivisible part of their environment - they are responsible for their behaviours and every behaviour is purposive.

In the field of management the ecological worldview is reflected in such a way that when organisations are operating from ecological concepts, the release of every employee's energy develops a new value for the organisation. In such

organisations employees are educated, not just trained, and their creativity is welcomed. Intrinsic motivation is encouraged, even though extrinsic motivation exists as well. The training of employees is carried out within the framework of education using andragogic principles. Every specific task or skill that has to be developed has its place in the function of the whole organisation. Profit is not considered as more important than relationships, work atmosphere and environmental issues.

In the field of humanistic sciences, the ecological worldview employs mainly qualitative research methods to explore in more depth issues of concern. Humans are considered responsible for their behaviour, which is purposive; they are connected with their environment, and the human personality is seen as a totality of behaviour, cognition, emotions, spirituality and sociability in the specific ecological environment where the particular, unique person exists.

The science of andragogy emerges from the ecological worldview and focuses on development of educational settings where conditions for learning are improved.

### **1.7. Andragogy and the Application of the Andragogical Ideas in Teaching and Learning Social Work**

At the end of this century andragogic ideas started to permeate tertiary education practice, especially in the teaching of the humanities. These seemed to match well with a ecological approach to learning and the whole movement away from traditional and paternalistic ways of teaching.

Ger van Enckevort (1971) a Dutch adult educator carried out a study of the origins of the term andragogy and found that the term was first used in 1833 by Alexander Kapp. Kapp used it to describe the educational theory of Plato although the term andragogy was never used in ancient Greece. Adult learning draws its roots from ancient times and the method, which was most commonly used, was based on dialogues. Plato and Aristotle talked with their students and through conversation sought the truth (Sergejev, 1977). Truth was not something fixed

and rigid, but something to be discovered through the medium of dialogue. Socrates taught through dialogue as well. Dialogue presumes the involvement of the two equal parties, which may or may not agree. Teachers in ancient times did not talk *to* their students; rather they talked *with* them. Ancient Greek teachers sought to find out through conversations with their students, what their students knew and then, used this as the starting point for further learning. The Romans, on the other hand, used confrontation and developed a rhetorical style, which sought to convince an audience by the strength of the argument. Jesus Christ used parables and what we may call in modern times role modelling, and Lao-Tse used metaphors to elicit the knowledge, which he believed was already present and available to his students. Einstein took the following position:

I can never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn (in Walter and Marks, 1981: 1).

Galileo Galilei had a similar attitude believing that it was impossible to teach a person anything and that the only thing that a teacher could do was to support a student to find the knowledge in himself. Zen Masters used paradox, prolonged practice of a skill, and the notion of experience of unpredictability, to shift the state of consciousness of the student. One of the methods they used was teaching through the koans<sup>3</sup>. The following example best describes the nature of the learning process in the “Zen-sense”:

Joshu asked the teacher, Nansen, ”What is the true Way?”  
 Nansen answered, “Everyday way is the true Way.”  
 Joshu asked, “Can I study it?”  
 Nansen answered, “The more you study, the further from the Way.”  
 Joshu asked, ”If I don’t study it, how can I know it?”  
 Nansen answered, “The Way does not belong to things seen: Nor to things unseen. It does not belong to things known: Nor to things unknown. Do not seek it, study it, or name it. To find yourself and it, open yourself wide as the sky.” (Zen Buddhism, 1959 : 22 in Kolb, 1984:158).

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<sup>3</sup>Koan or in literature find as Zen koan is a nonsensical or paradoxical question posed to a Zen student as a subject for meditation, intended to help the student break free of reason and develop intuition in order to achieve enlightenment (Webster’s Electronic Dictionary, 1992).

All the various methods of educating adults in history have had one thing in common - learning was considered to be a process where students were responsible for self discovery from a vast field of knowledge or from a form of learning which was inherent in their own experience. The process of learning involved full contact with the teacher. This contact encouraged learning and change. Human contact accompanied by knowledge and skill was the basic agent of change in any problem solving process. This remains true for practitioners in the helping professions, such as social work and education.

Even though the idea of lifelong learning is as old as the history of the human race, adult learning theories only started to emerge in this century. Knowles (1990), a learning theorist engaged in adult learning, wrote that he had been exposed to the term andragogy as late as in the middle sixties by an adult educator, Dusan Savicevic, who used the term for the art and science of helping adults learn. Pedagogy was always concerned with adults teaching children. Knowles presented his thoughts about pedagogy in the following way:

The pedagogical model of education is a set of beliefs - indeed, as viewed by many traditional teachers, an ideology - based on assumptions about teaching and learning that evolved between the seventh and twelfth centuries in the monastic and cathedral schools of Europe out of their experience in teaching basic skills to young boys. As secular schools started being organised in later centuries and public schools in the nineteenth century, this was the only model of existence. And so, our entire educational enterprise, including higher education, was frozen into the pedagogical model ... adults have by and large been taught as if they were children until fairly recently (Knowles, 1990 : 54).

Even though today in most modern universities students' involvement is encouraged, the traditional approach where students are required to sit and listen is still so pervasive that it is quite difficult for teachers to engender mutual communication and interaction during lectures. Further it appears that students expect to be taught and take responsibility only for reproducing what they have been taught in order to pass examinations.

The goal of tertiary education should be quite different. It should provide a context for creative thinking. Students in tertiary education are adults able and

capable of using their prior knowledge and experience in a process of learning which aims to enable them to become effective professionals. The science of andragogy therefore offers a better theoretical framework for tertiary education than does pedagogy.

In order to be able to make distinctions between the two ways of educating adults, both terms need to be defined.

The term pedagogy is derived from Greek words *paid* - child, and *agogus*, which means leader. Pedagogy is, therefore, literally, the science of leading children. It is defined in the Random House's Webster Electronic Dictionary (1992) as:

1. the function or work of a teacher; teaching.
2. the art or science of teaching; education; instructional methods.

The term andragogy is derived from the Greek word *aner, andros* that means a male - an adult man. Literally, it means the science of leading adults. But, adults usually do not need leading; they may only need some support or help in their learning process. Andragogy is defined differently. According to Knowles, andragogy is the:

...art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1990 : 55).

The distinction between the two sciences is not only in the fact that pedagogy is the science of teaching children, and andragogy is the science of teaching adults. Andragogy can be further defined as the art and science of supporting persons in their professional growth and development. The word *adult* is replaced with the broader term, *persons*, because it is not necessary to be an adult to benefit from andragogic methods. The application of andragogic methods can help teaching-learning processes in all age groups.

### ***1.7.1. The Difference between Andragogical and Pedagogical Models of Education***

The main difference between the pedagogical and andragogical models of education is that pedagogical models put responsibility for the teaching-learning process on teachers. Teachers are there to create the programme, to present knowledge, which has to be retained, and then to check if it has been retained. The only responsibility of the learner is to follow the teacher's instructions and memorise already digested data. Research on learning in various developmental stages show that as humans grow older their need to be self-directed and to utilise experience in learning increases rapidly, especially during adolescence [Erikson,(1950), Iscoe and Stevenson, (1960), Bruner (1961), Cross (1981)]. Utilisation of prior experiences increases motivation as well. Making practical sense of the learned material improves the quality of learning, and this does not only count for adults. When children see the practical use of their schoolwork, they became more motivated to accomplish it.

Being aware of the necessity to develop a different approach from that which pedagogy proposes, andragogists and practitioners in adult teaching have developed a wide range of methods and principles to support teaching-learning processes.

Knowles (1990) sees pedagogy as an ideology being a:

....systematic body of beliefs that requires loyalty and conformity by its adherents (Knowles, 1990: 63).

Further he makes distinctions between the two sciences and describes andragogy as a system of alternative assumptions:

The pedagogical model is an ideological model, which excludes the andragogical assumptions. The andragogical model is a system of assumptions, which includes pedagogical assumptions (Knowles, 1990: 64).

In the area of tertiary education, the responsibility of the teacher is to choose which content and methods are going to be effective for a particular course. For example, when students have very little experience in a particular field about which they want to learn, a pedagogical strategy may be appropriate. Pedagogical methods can be very useful when there is a need to accumulate knowledge about a specific matter in order to understand it and to receive the necessary information about it.

Andragogical methods however are appropriate and indispensable as students move along a course when they have enough information to improvise and to create new ideas from the information they have gathered. As students reach the point when they have gathered enough information that they can discuss the matter presented in the course, they are ready to integrate it into their previous experience. By adding their personal experience to the information gathered during the course they are not only enriching their knowledge but are also enriching the body of knowledge of the matter discussed. If university education is understood as the exchange and enrichment of knowledge, theories can be probed and improved. Reflection is encouraged and our theories become self-corrective<sup>4</sup>. As Bateson (1979) indicates, theories remain comprehensive, coherent and to some degree consistent systems of ideas, because, by probing them through experience we are improving them. Paradoxically, consistency reflects itself in constant change. Using this approach, theories become viable and reflect the ever-changing world in which we live.

Students are responsible for their own learning and the way they achieve this is unique for each of them. If we apply pedagogical ideas the body of knowledge is the same for every student. Therefore it is easy to give students a written test which shows how they memorised the content of the course. The andragogical model, however, goes beyond memorisation. When necessary information is memorised, students are encouraged to improvise with this

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<sup>4</sup>Self-correction is a term introduced by Bateson (1979). He used it when writing about human and organisational viable systems and thoughts. "The thought that enters into its creation generally involves multiple cycles of self-correction, repeated testing and listening, correcting and editing" (Bateson, 1987: 199).

information and to come to a new perspective, which is based on their experiences and the new information gained during the course. Students share responsibility for their learning and for evaluating their work. They are respected and trusted in this process. Students perceive the goals of education as their goals and they accept shared responsibility for planning and constructing the course according to their learning needs and outcomes. Their full participation in the learning experience is essential.

Eduard Lindeman (1926), one of the pioneers in the field of adult education, identified some key assumptions about adult learners which are the foundation for modern adult learning theories:

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting points for organising adult learning activities.
2. Adult's orientation to learning is life-centred: therefore, the appropriate units for organising adult learning are life situations, not subjects.
3. Experience is the richest resource for adult's learning: therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.
4. Adults have deep need to be self-directing: therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time place, and pace of learning (Lindeman, 1926: 68).

Lindeman did not consider adult education as the antithesis of youth education. He believed that principles from adult education could be applied to youth education as well. He thought that youth might accept new knowledge better if their needs and interests were satisfied in the process of education. Many years later these ideas became a foundation for educational programmes for youth with behavioural problems (Glasser, 1984.), where the focus was placed on changing the educational system, by making it more useful and interesting to the students, and not on “fixing” the disobedient student. Lindeman understood adult education as a process through which learners become aware of significant experiences. When adults become aware of these learning experiences they may evaluate them, and by doing this, give them a specific meaning, and this meaning produces change.

While an ecological worldview and andragogy as an empowering approach to education offered a valuable framework for the development of the Contact-Challenge Method, more specific theories were needed to explain how and why the method is effective and how could it be further developed. Choice Theory and Experiential Learning Theory also made their particular contributions to the development of the Contact-Challenge Method.

### **1.8. Choice Theory**

Inspired by Systems Theory, by William Powers' Control Theory in the field of physics, by the Quality Management ideas of W.E. Deming, and by his own experience as a psychiatrist and educator, William Glasser introduced Choice Theory (previously called Control Theory) as a theory of human motivation and behaviour which asserts that people are internally motivated and that every behaviour is purposeful. Every behaviour regardless of how ineffective it may look, is the best attempt by that person to control his or her world and to satisfy basic needs. In the framework of Choice Theory, humans do not respond to the things and people around them, but are motivated internally. Choice Theory is directly opposed to the external control psychology where humans are motivated by stimuli coming from outside. Glasser stated that humans behave in order to satisfy their basic needs, which he defined as: the need for *survival* (living, eating, reproducing), the need for *belonging* (love, co-operating), the need for *power* (strength, competing, achieving, giving importance), the need for *fun* (learning, playing), and the need for *freedom* (moving, choosing). All behaviours are seen to be total, in that they comprise physiology, cognition, emotions and actions. When one component of the behaviour changes it influences other components, which means that humans can control their behaviour willingly and they are responsible for their actions. Research on neuropeptides (Pert, 1992) proves that these molecular messengers facilitate the conversation between the nervous system and the immune system. Peptides actually interconnect the nervous system, the

immune system and the endocrine system which proves that every behaviour is total. This discovery opposes to the traditional view where these three systems are separate and serve different functions (Capra, 1996).

Peptides are the biochemical manifestation of emotions; they play a crucial role in the co-ordinating activities of the immune system; they interlink and integrate emotional, mental and biological activities (Capra, 1996).

According to Glasser, humans can willingly change their actions and thoughts, whereas emotions and physiology are not under the direct control of human mind, but they are impacted upon indirectly. Certain lifestyles lead to certain diseases. People who are healthy and whose behaviour is not destructive to themselves or others are generally in effective control of their lives which leads inevitably to satisfaction (Glasser, 1986). Basic needs are genetic instructions to the brain and are the same for every human being, although the way of satisfying these needs is unique to each individual. Each individual has unique ways and capacities for satisfying these needs. It is significant that Glasser put learning as the way of satisfying the need for fun, which emphasises the importance of intrinsic motivation, which he believes to be the only existing motivation. In order to be effective, education has to be need - fulfilling for the participants. From the standpoint of choice theory, all outcomes, including educational outcomes, are in the quality *world*<sup>5</sup> of participants in education. Glasser (1997) defined the quality world as a small, simulated world that we build into our memory. It is the core of our lives and we modify it continually. Glasser stated that if the outcome we want is not within the students' quality world, it does not matter what we ask them to do, they would not do it. In his own words:

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<sup>5</sup>According to Dr William Glasser, the quality world is the resource of the motivation and creativity necessary for problem solving. The quality world is unique for every individual and it consists of values, spirituality, images of ideal relationships, activities and personal qualities. The quality world is reserved for what humans want the most, that which feels very good when satisfied and very bad when frustrated. The ideas in the quality world lead humans to do what they believe feels the best at the time. It is important to note that the contents of the quality world are not necessarily positive, good and useful. "Pictures" (or mental images) in the *quality world* are only labelled as good or pleasant by the person who holds them dear.

All outcomes we deem worth putting into our quality worlds are tied to time and pleasure. They may be:

1. Immediate in time and intense in pleasure, as in the case of an alcoholic
2. Moderate in time and intensity, as in the case of many of us who go to school for a diploma
3. Long term but minimally pleasurable as in the case of a man who plants an apple orchard
4. Long term but intensely pleasurable when we finally get there, as a man who runs for years for president and finally is elected.

It is apparent that all of these outcomes are in the quality world of the seeker...To achieve an "outcome" we must persuade students to put that outcome into their quality world. Students, however, will not put an outcome into their quality world unless they can see that the pleasure will come in some reasonable time for their age and experience (Glasser, 1995: 3).

Intelligence is a natural brain function, and according to Glasser is made up of three components: capacity, access and capability. Since capacity is innate and genetic, there is no way to control it at the level of contemporary science. Education takes place when there is the ability to access and then use capably the capacity of the brain. It is not possible to motivate someone, but it is possible to reach his or her quality world wherein his or her motivation resides. The strongest motivation originates from internal values. Rewards and manipulation may seem to be effective but are not effective in the long term. The way to provide effective education is to find ways to access the quality world of the students, and thereby help them to use their intelligence capably. Education should, therefore, be far more concerned with students' individual outcomes, wishes and values.

Choice Theory is the underlying theory for Reality Therapy, one of the humanistic methods of psychotherapy and for educational programs called "The Quality School". In the practice of Reality Therapy theory and therapy are so linked together that it is almost impossible to separate one from another. The same can be said for the Quality School Programmes where students are taught Choice Theory to help them in problem solving and enhancing their lives. Any form of coercion is not accepted in Quality Schools.

Choice Theory offers a useful framework for understanding why experiential programmes are effective. Experiential programmes satisfy the needs of both learner and teacher. By participating in an experiential programme students satisfy their need for *belonging* in learning co-operatively, not competitively, with their colleagues. They satisfy their need for *power and competence* by defining their learning goals and self-evaluating their achievements. Experiential and co-operative learning engenders a variety of relations and situations. Students involved are keen to learn because the material that is learned adds to the quality of their lives, therefore, they satisfy their need for *fun* (which encompasses the need to learn and discover). By being responsible for choosing their learning goals and possible ways to attain these goals, students satisfy their need for *freedom*. Experiential programmes involve student's total behaviour - emotions, cognition, actions and physiology and continuously encourage integration of theory, practice and experience.

Glasser also introduced the method of self-evaluation as a way of continuously improving one's work. When students self-evaluate their work and when they strive for quality, which is defined by themselves, their attitude towards learning changes in that they "own" the process of learning by setting their outcomes and working at their own pace.

### **1.9. Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential Learning Theory offers a useful theoretical framework for social work practice education. Enriched with ideas of Andragogy and Choice Theory it provides an integrative theoretical background for teaching and learning social work.

The term experience used so often in everyday language, has been a preoccupation of many philosophers and thinkers in various fields. Although nobody denies its value for teaching-learning processes in higher education it is very often understood only in opposition to theory. In social work education, theory and practice are indivisible, and experiential learning in the field of social

work education is unavoidable. The question is only which experiential methods are effective and which experiential methods best integrate the theoretical and experiential part of education.

The term *experience* is defined in the Random House Webster's Electronic Dictionary (1992) as:

1. something personally lived through or encountered: a frightening experience.
2. the observing, encountering, or undergoing of things generally as they occur in the course of time: to learn from experience.
3. knowledge or practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, encountered, or undergone: a person of experience.  
v.t.
4. to have experience of; feel: to experience pleasure.

This definition gives rise to a number of issues. Experience is personally coloured. It is always unique and subjective. "Observing" suggests a somewhat detached role, "undergoing" a passive role and "encountering" a more interactive one. "As things occur in the course of time" implies a *laissez faire* approach that suggests that something may be learned, but not necessarily. The third definition focuses on knowledge or practical wisdom gained from experience. While all of these may be part of experience, the question of how experience is to be seen as a whole stays unanswered. Experience cannot be separated from what is experienced, and the person who experiences cannot be separated from the content of his or her experience. We may talk about "objective" observers (although the idea of objective observers is questionable), but it is even more questionable to talk about "objective" persons who experience.

This statement leads us to the basic premises of education and to the main reason why a framework different from the mechanistic or positivistic approach is necessary to research and write scientifically about experiential education. The basic premise of the traditional way of teaching is that there are certain truths that should be transmitted to the new generation. Undoubtedly, there is a vast amount

of knowledge that every student has to know before he or she will be ready to work as a competent professional, but absorbing this knowledge will not “make” a student a competent professional. Ethical conduct, for example, is something that may be read in the code of ethics of every profession, but acting professionally and in accordance with the code of ethics is something that requires an internal change that cannot happen just by listening to lectures and reading books. This statement does not imply that lectures and readings are not useful; it simply means that these methods should be supported by other methods (preferably experiential ones) which ask for more involvement from students, especially in the education of professions which help humans in maintaining or improving their quality of life.

### ***1.9.1. Foundations***

The Experiential Learning Theory has its roots in functionalism, field theory and humanistic psychology. John Dewey (1938) introduced four basic concepts in education: experience, democracy, continuity and interaction. For Dewey experience *per se* is only a potential to be utilised. The role of the teacher is to create an environment and a climate where experiences may happen and so encourage the student to make sense of these experiences. According to Dewey this happens only in democratic arrangements. Fear and oppression block the ability to reflect on experience. His idea is that democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience and that interaction is necessary for interpreting the educational function and the force of experience. The democratic approach is the antithesis of the autocratic approach with Dewey’s basic theoretical concept operationalised in humanistic and integrative approaches to education. The concept of democracy is reflected in all settings where learning is involved: educational, organisational, therapeutic, social and political. Autocratic leadership does not encourage individuals to be open, to accept knowledge, to reflect upon it and to enrich it with personal creativity. It is for these reasons that non-democratic societies develop much more slowly than democratic ones.

Dewey states that every experience is interplay of two factors of experience - objective and internal conditions. He objects to traditional education because it does not pay enough attention to the internal factors, which influence the meaning of every experience during the process of learning. Interaction is the most important tool in the process of learning and an effective teacher will teach through interaction, daring to openly share his or her personal and professional self. By interaction, Dewey means the interaction between objective and internal conditions, which he called a situation. In 1938 Dewey wrote “Experience and Education” which became a cornerstone for experiential learning theories. He countered the “traditional” education with the “progressive” approach:

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity: to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience: to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world (Dewey, 1938 : 5-6).

Now, sixty years after Dewey’s book was published we can see a change in the way in which knowledge is transmitted to students. Life experience can be assessed and certified for college credits and at the same time, experiential methods like field placements, laboratories, role plays and gaming simulations are playing an increasingly important role in tertiary education especially in the teaching of humanities. However, experiential learning is often criticised in academic environments for being too pragmatic and overly concerned with techniques and processes rather than content and essence. It can be argued that thorough reflection on experience and integration of theory, practice and experience nonetheless can only improve the quality of academic education, not diminish it.

From Kurt Lewin (1951) came the concept known as *field theory* motivated in part by his opposition to the then prevailing mechanistic worldview. Lewin emerged from the tradition of Gestalt psychology (Kofka, Kohler, and

Wertheimer) and his work provided a foundation for Gestalt Personality Theory (Perls). He had a major influence in developing both the theory and methodology of experiential learning. Lewin's basic insight was to perceive learning as a process situated in the *here and now* (the starting point of the various humanistic psychotherapy approaches that developed during the sixties and seventies). In order to produce change, the learner is required to reflect upon his or her experience of the here and now, with the purpose being to change this behaviour in order to produce a different experience. Learning is experienced as a circle in which the person at the centre of the learning process is ultimately responsible for any outcomes. In Lewin's model (see Figure 1. 1.) personal experience in the here and now is the locus of learning. The learning process is subjective and has unique personal meaning. Hypotheses gained through experience are shared among students and abstract concepts and generalisations are created. New knowledge is tested in new situations, and then it becomes a new experience on which learners reflect. Lewin introduced the term *feed-back*, which provided the basis for a continuous process of learning. He believed that much of the ineffectiveness in humanistic professions occurred because of the lack of feed-back processes.

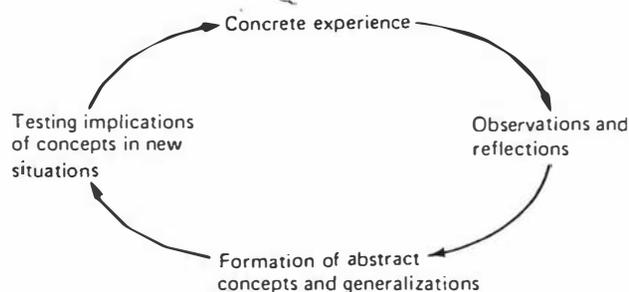


Fig.1.1. The Lewinian Experiential Learning Model, (from Kolb, 1984: 21).

Lewin called his theory *Field Theory* because the basic idea is that every individual exists in a life space in which many forces operate. A life space is the sum of all the facts that determine the person's behaviour at any given time. It refers to objects, persons, thoughts, emotions, fantasies and goals located within the space in which a person exists. Behaviour cannot be explained and predicted by simple cause and effect relations because behaviour results from a multiplicity of all these forces. For Lewin, behaviour is a function of the individual's psychological field rather than a function of physical realities,

.... the dynamics of the process is always derived from the relation of the concrete individual to the concrete situation (Lewin, 1935: 41).

Lewin stressed the importance of interaction, which was subsequently used extensively in systems theory. According to field theory, a personality has two regions: the outer - motoric region and the inner, personal region. Perception, cognition and physical action take place in the outer region, and needs and tensions reside in the inner region. Knowles applied Lewin's basic principles in the field of education, stating that:

Learning occurs as a result of change in cognitive structures produced by changes in two types of forces: change in the structure of the cognitive field itself, or change in the internal needs or motivation of the individual (Knowles, 1990: 23).

In 1946, Lewin and his colleagues, Ronald Lippitt, Leland Bradford and Kenneth Benne, developed a new approach to leadership and group-dynamics training for the Connecticut State Inter-racial Commission. The training lasted for two weeks and encouraged group discussion and decision-making in an atmosphere where leaders and participants were treated as peers. The leaders observed the behaviour of the participants and the group dynamics, which developed, and following these sessions analysed the data obtained during the day. Although the group leaders were reluctant to allow participants to join these

sessions, Lewin favoured their participation. This was the first time in the field of social research that participants became subjects with researchers considered as a part of the experiment. The learning, which occurred, was mutual. Researchers reported that they learned as much as the participants. Their results demonstrated that:

... learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment. By bringing together the immediate experiences of the trainees and the conceptual models of the staff in an open atmosphere where inputs from each perspective could challenge and stimulate the other, a learning environment occurred with remarkable vitality and creativity (Kolb, 1984: 9-10).

In opposition to behaviourists Lewin believed that success was more significant than rewards in encouraging motivation and thus he gave attention to the importance of group dynamics in the learning process. He introduced action research as a methodology and the laboratory method for group and institutional dynamics. As distinct from Freud and psychodynamics in the area of problem solving processes and conflict resolution Lewin was not interested in the past. Past events were relevant only if they were directly connected to the life space of the here and now. Systemic causes, relevant to the behaviour were sufficient to explain the behaviour. According to Lewin, life space included two important subdivisions, the first being the person and the second the environment. Lewin believed that the best way to move people forward was to engage them in investigating their own lives. He and his followers offered a simple framework for contemporary psychology, sociology, social work and education, and although he died in 1947, his colleagues continued to shape his ideas in the development of T-group theory, action research and the laboratory method, where the focus was centred on the subjective personal experience of the learning process, personal involvement, responsibility, humanistic values and acceptance of feelings as facts.

### *1.9.2. Further Developments – Humanistic Psychology*

Along with Dewey and Lewin a group of humanistic psychologists and educators also influenced the development of experiential learning theory. In the 1950's and 1960's, clinical psychologists C. Rogers and A. Maslow identified themselves as humanistic psychologists in opposition to the behaviourists who tried to explain human behaviour on the basis of stimulus-response. Behaviourists studied human behaviour in the way experimental psychologists explored animal behaviour. Rogers and Maslow, following Lewin's ideas, realised that behaviourists in their attempt to be scientific were neglecting a very important component of the research process. They were neglecting the fact that the researcher was also part of the experiment. Humanistic psychologists focused on the personality of the therapist and believed that the therapist's personality was the most important tool in therapy. Until then therapists had been trying to involve their personality in the therapeutic encounters as little as possible by trying to be "objective". From his findings in the field of psychotherapy, where he developed a Client Centred Approach, Rogers derived a Student-Centred Theory of teaching and learning. Rogers' theory was supported with findings from other research on human behaviour and learning (Baldwin, Kalhorn and Breese, 1945, Fiedler, 1953, Betz and Witehorn, 1956 and Ends and Page, 1957).

We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning. A person learns significantly only those things, which he perceives as being involved in the maintenance of, or enhancement of, the structure of self.

Experience, which if assimilated, would involve a change in the organisation of self, tends to be resisted through denial or distortion of symbolisation, and the structure and organisation of self appear to become more rigid under threat; to relax its boundaries when completely free from threat. Experience is perceived as inconsistent with the self and can only be assimilated if the current organisation of self is relaxed and expanded to include it.

The educational situation which most effectively promotes significant learning is one in which (a) threat to the self of the learner is reduced to minimum, and (b) differentiated perception of the field is facilitated (Rogers, 1951: 144).

Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1969) followed Allport's ideas that growth is not a process of being shaped by someone, but a process of becoming. Their basic ideas were simply stated:

I have no wish to *make* anyone know something. 'To show, guide, direct.' As I see it, too many people have been shown, guided, directed. So I come to the conclusion that I *do* mean what I said. Teaching is, for me, a relatively unimportant and vastly overvalued activity (Rogers, 1969: 103).

The contributions from Paolo Freire (1972) and Ivan Illich (1971) urged for a world-wide change in the education system. Freire's critique on oppressive education as means of social control gained many followers and influenced the development of experiential learning theory.

Since Rogers first proposed facilitated learning instead of teaching, and encouraged the processes of growth and development in therapeutic settings instead of therapy, many humanistic and experiential approaches in psychotherapy have emerged. Rogers (1961) promoted the term "facilitator" instead of "teacher" or "professor" to emphasise his non-directive role and named the process of teaching as the facilitation of learning. The facilitator, according to Rogers, had to have the following attitudinal qualities:

...realness or genuineness and nonpossessive caring, prizing, trust and respect and emphatic understanding and sensitive and accurate listening (Rogers, 1969 : 106).

To every social worker these qualities are familiar. These are basic qualities necessary to form a helping relationship with a client. Rogers developed his method of teaching from his method of working with clients. Although there are some similarities in the teaching-learning processes and the processes of growth and development that occur during psychotherapy, these two processes differ both in terms of outcomes and in the methods employed. What is similar are the values which underline the helping relationship in psychotherapy, social work and education. Rogers and his followers stressed the importance of the

affective part of the personality of the helper and developed many experiential methods that encouraged affective learning. Sometimes the affective component was overemphasised on account of cognitive learning (for example Gestalt Therapy education where in some schools three thirds of the programme are focused on personal growth and development and only one third on development of skills and learning about theory). When the affective component in the process of education is overemphasised, the integration - which is so necessary for learning - is not likely to happen. Humanistic therapists stressed the importance of the personal growth and development of the professionals, which had been put aside in the mechanistic worldview of traditional education. George Brown (1971), one of Maslow and Rogers' followers, tried to integrate the cognitive and affective elements of education in the late sixties. Goodwin Watson (1961) and Tough (1979) emphasised the importance of the relationship between the learning facilitator and the student, criticising the autocratic atmosphere which, as shown in their research, was producing

...apathetic conformity, various-and frequently devious-kinds of defiance, scape-goating ... or escape ... An autocratic atmosphere also produces increasing dependence upon the authority, with consequent obsequiousness, anxiety, shyness, and acquiescence (Watson, 1961 : 257).

### *1.9.3. Traditional versus Experiential Education - Main Distinctions*

Facilitating teaching on the surface, seems to remove power and control from the teacher, and gives it to the learner. In actually recognises the student's need for power and control (in terms of Glasser's Choice Theory) where his or her learning is concerned and thereby puts the responsibility for learning on the student. By doing this, the learning process reaches the student's creativity and intrinsic motivation and becomes more powerful and effective. The main difference between the traditional way of teaching and the facilitating teaching-learning processes, is the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. Hitherto, stimulus-response, linear, cause-effect relationships are

transformed into dynamic, circular relationships of mutual impact, in which students and teachers impact on one another. Humanistic psychologists claim that teachers should encourage student creativity and freedom of choice and raise students' awareness about what has to be learnt in order to become effective professionals.

The major shift in understanding the processes of teaching and learning was evident in the transition from the traditional, ex-cathedra way of presenting knowledge to the more holistic and integrative approach that utilised findings from andragogy and educational psychology. Differences between traditional and experiential education were similar to differences between mechanistic and ecological conceptions. While traditional education tended to be linear, experiential education was perceived as circular; or to be more specific, in traditional education information flows in one direction - from teacher to students, whereas experiential education operates on the feedback from students; students and teachers are partners in the mutual process of discovering.

In traditional education, the teacher is perceived as having knowledge whereas the student does not; by contrast experiential education respects and utilises the student's previous knowledge and experiences. Teaching-learning processes are interactive, not static. Traditional education is based on the transmission of information and the memorising of that information; experiential education is based on mutual inquiry, discovery and information sharing. Experiential education accepts differences in learning styles; traditional education prefers "serialist approaches"<sup>6</sup> to learning. In traditional education motivation is extrinsic whereas experiential approaches encourage students to search for intrinsic motivation. The classroom setting appears different - in traditional education students sit in rows, facing the teacher and looking at one another's backs; in experiential education settings, students sit in a circle facing one another

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<sup>6</sup>'Serialist approach' in Pask's (1979) studies on student learning is an approach characterised by learning step by step with close examination of the details. 'Serialist approach' is linear, and serialist do not use analogies, illustrations and metaphors. Pask describes it as strategy useful for operational learning. In his research he distinguished the 'holist' and 'versatile' approach from the 'serialist' approach, and those two approaches are supported more in humanistic approaches to education. More on Pask's research in Chapter Two.

and the teacher. This way of organising the setting facilitates communication and interaction. Students' creativity is encouraged in the humanistic approach, but suppressed in the traditional approach. Assessment in the traditional approach is based on checking the quantity of data the student memorised during the course, and the teacher conducts the evaluation, whereas experiential approaches build the process of evaluation into the course with self-evaluation being a significant component. The focus is on the quality of experiencing, and understanding, with exploring possibilities of applying learned material in practice. Creative and critical thinking along with integration of theory and practice is required. Assessment is carried out in a form of creative collegial discussions, not interrogations, so it contributes to learning and does not serve for the mere marking. The experiential approach does not negate the value of lectures, but students are encouraged to interrupt lectures and ask questions, while in the traditional approach questions are asked at the end of the lectures.

All these changes in the understanding of the teaching and learning processes were influenced by the attempt to integrate knowledge from Eastern and Western cultures. Development of existentialism, postmodernism, feminism and poststructuralism, as well as the significant increased popularity of humanistic psychotherapies contributed to the universal paradigm shift in all sciences and fields of their practical applications. Humanistic psychotherapeutic approaches (Fritz Perls' Gestalt Psychotherapy, Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis, Glasser's Reality Therapy, Ericksonian Hypnotherapy, Lowen's Bioenergetics and many other approaches that blossomed in the '60s and '70s), which encouraged genuine contact and authenticity in the counselling situation. The therapist and the client were in an equal position of control and power; the client being responsible for his or her behaviour and feelings whereas the therapist was an expert in providing the context in which change might occur. The techniques used were experiential and often exaggerated suppressed feelings towards parents or significant others while encouraging expression of feelings, thoughts and body movements. Since this kind of work required the involvement and sometimes a

personal disclosure of the therapist, training of practitioners had to be different from traditional training. Even though humanistic therapists criticised Freud and psychoanalysis, they did accept Freud's idea that the personal growth of the therapist was essential for effective psychotherapy. For the first time, personal therapy for the therapist in training was required, as was personal analysis for the working therapist. Personal growth became a required part of the education of psychotherapists and together with supervision integrated the affective and cognitive aspects of learning. Students in humanistic psychotherapy education were required to test these ideas and methods from a specific therapeutic approach on themselves. Some facilitators organised their courses in such a way that students had to test ideas on their personal problems (Gestalt, Transactional Analysis, Bioenergetics) and some did it through role-plays (Reality Therapy, Psycho-drama and Socio-drama). Participants in these courses had to be ready to take on the role of the client, as well as the role of the therapist, and had to be ready to discuss personal issues. Experiential learning became part of the training for helping professionals and also in the field of management, organisation planning and marketing. The methods used included game simulation, video-recording, role play, and the use of creative media such as drawing, music and acting. The change in practice required the change in education.

These new approaches were criticised by traditional educators who condemned them as anti-intellectual and superficial, but with respect to Andragogy and Experiential Learning Theory as well as the research conducted in the field, it became clear that these approaches reached and occupied the learner as a complete human being rather than merely occupying his or her intellect<sup>7</sup>.

I would argue that experiential learning goes beyond cognitive learning, and what is learned in this way stays longer in the learner's body and mind. This change may occur only if the leader or facilitator is competent in such a way of presenting knowledge. The danger of the experiential educational programmes is the possibility that a facilitator may misuse experiments, which accompany experiential education. Misuse here means that exercises or experiments are just

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<sup>7</sup> Research in this field will be analysed in more detail in Chapter Two.

“dropped” into the group, and the facilitator does not encourage making sense of them. Integration and reflection upon experience is the most important part of experiential learning, so that if a leader fails to support participants in integrating their experiences with theoretical knowledge, experiential techniques will not be effective but superficial. To prevent possible misuse or incompetent use of experiential methods, education for experiential educators has to offer a holistic and integrative knowledge, stressing the importance of the cognitive, emotional, social, ecological and spiritual aspect of human knowledge. To clarify basic ideas of Experiential Learning Theory, its propositions are presented as follows.

#### ***1.9.4. Propositions for the Experiential Learning Theory***

While Dewey, Lewin, Piaget and humanistic psychologists laid foundations for Experiential Learning Theory, the Theory of Effective Learning also played a significant role. Cantor’s ideas on effective teaching-learning processes can be summarised in nine propositions:

1. The pupil learns only what he is interested in learning.
2. It is important that the pupil share in the development and management of the curriculum.
3. Learning is integral; genuine learning is not an additive experience but a remaking of the experience.
4. Learning depends on wanting to learn.
5. An individual learns the best when he is free to create his own responses in a situation.
6. Learning depends on not knowing the answers.
7. Every pupil learns on his own way.
8. Learning is largely an emotional experience.
9. To learn is to change (Cantor, 1953: 286-312).

These are in accordance with findings of humanistic psychologists and Glasser’s idea of the “quality world” and intrinsic motivation as the only existing motivation where learning is concerned.

Kolb (1984) put forward six propositions, which have become embedded in all theories, which led to experiential learning theory:

1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2. Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience.
3. The process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
5. Learning involves transaction between the person and the environment.
6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb's first proposition reflects the epistemological and philosophical base of experiential learning which differs from behaviourist theories. In the framework of experiential learning theory ideas are not fixed and unchangeable elements of thought but are formed and changed through experience. If outcomes are fixed and are the same for every learner, inquiry and the process of learning is underestimated, and learning becomes mere data memorising. Although in the Contact-Challenge Method students are encouraged to set their learning goals and outcomes, to achieve them and to evaluate them, the focus is more on the process than on the achievement of these outcomes. Students are empowered in the process of learning and encouraged to take responsibility for realising their learning outcomes. Sometimes not achieving the outcome may be a better learning experience than achieving it.

Experiential learning theory suggests that every learning is relearning. The teacher's role is not only in implanting new ideas but also in modifying and building upon old ones. In experiential learning the process begins by eliciting the learner's beliefs and theories, supporting the learning through examining and testing them, and then the learning process continues by integrating the new ideas or replacing the old ones. The third of Kolb's propositions is that the process of learning requires the resolution of conflict between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. In his own words:

Learning requires abilities that are polar opposites, and the learner as a result, must continually choose which set of learning abilities he or she will bring to bear in any specific learning situation. More specifically,

there are two primary dimensions. The first dimension represents the concrete experiencing of events at one end and abstract conceptualisation at the other. The other dimension has active experimentation at one extreme and reflective observation at the other. Thus, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment (Kolb, 1984: 30-31).

These dialectically opposed modes of adaptation analysed in Kolb's opus need to be integrated through creative synthesis. Experiential theorists plead for courses which are designed in such a way that learners have the chance to reflect and observe their experiences from many perspectives, to integrate new knowledge in the sound body of theories, and finally to be able to use these theories in new situations. To be able to do all that, the learner has to be open to new experiences and involved in the process with whole self, body and mind. Learning is perceived as a holistic process of adaptation to the world, which involves the integrated functioning of the total organism: thinking, feeling, acting, being aware of the physiology and giving meaning to the whole process. Learning is a lifelong process and from the experiential theory perspective, performance, learning, growth and development form a continuum of lifelong adaptations to life situations. These adaptations are unique for every individual and cannot be separated from the field (or environment) where the person lives.

Experiential learning theory focuses on the transaction between internal characteristics and external circumstances, between personal knowledge and social knowledge. Learning is understood to be a social process in which society is shaping individuals, and individuals are shaping society.

Since learning is happening everywhere and not only in the classroom, it is an active and self-directed process that requires integration between classroom and real life. Every experience is not learning, but it may become learning because according to Kolb's sixth proposition learning is the process of creating knowledge. The job of the teacher is therefore to encourage this creation.

Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) highlighted five propositions about learning from experience:

1. Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for learning.
2. Learners actively construct their experience.

3. Learning is a holistic process.
4. Learning is socially and culturally constructed.
5. Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs (Boud, Cohen, Walker, 1993: 36).

The idea of experiential learning is much deeper than the idea of exercising specific skills in the experiential way or learning from experience. Integration of theoretical knowledge with past and present experiences differentiates experiential learning. Learning from experience occurs without the learner's conscious intention; it is a continual process, and is rarely recognised as learning. Experiential learning, on the other hand is an intentional attempt to utilise all resources, internal and external to integrate theory, practice and experience. Experiential learning does not happen randomly without the control of the learner. During a course that employs experiential methods, that kind of learning may result in learners experiencing some sudden insights as in the everyday process of learning from experience, but Experiential Learning Theory proposes well considered and well planned courses where every experience has to be linked with theory and operationalised for further learning.

#### ***1.9.5. Definitions of the Experiential Teaching-Learning Processes***

Keeton and Tate describe experiential education as the process where:

...the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied...it involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it (Keeton and Tate, 1978: 2).

This definition reflects the essence of the Contact-Challenge Method. Students are in direct contact with clients, continuously reflecting on that experience. They are in charge of creating their learning plans, as well as activities with clients. At the same time, while participating in skills training sessions, they reflect on their personal experiences and attempt to make sense of theories addressed during lectures.

Walter and Marks define experiential learning as:

... a sequence of events with one or more identified learning objectives, requiring active involvement by participants at one or more points in the sequence. That is, lessons are presented, illustrated, highlighted, and supported through the involvement of the participants. The central tenet of the experiential learning is that one learns best by doing (Walter and Marks, 1981 : 1).

Active involvement and interactions between participants characterise this definition. In the Contact-Challenge Method, active involvement is a prerequisite with peer learning being encouraged. The focus is on co-operation, not competition.

For Kolb, experiential learning is:

... the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984 : 38).

Kolb focuses on the process not on outcomes or content. For him and other experiential learning theorists learning happens through transformation and is continuously created. Knowledge is not therefore something to be either acquired or transmitted. Information may be transmitted or acquired and each individual creates his or her knowledge from the information gained through that process.

Rogers' definition of experiential learning reflects his approach to education and the importance of personal involvement:

Let me define a bit more precisely the elements, which are involved in such significant or experiential learning. It has a quality of personal involvement-the whole person in both his feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event. It is self-initiated. Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within. It is pervasive. It makes a difference in the behaviour, attitudes, perhaps knows whether it is meeting his need, whether it leads toward what he wants to know, whether it illuminates the dark area of ignorance he is experiencing. The locus of evaluation, we might say, resides definitely in the learner. Its essence is meaning. When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience (Rogers, 1969: 5).

Here he expresses the main characteristics of experiential education and

stresses the basic difference from traditional approaches. Experiential approaches to learning arise from Rogers' basic premises and although he stated these ideas a quarter of a century ago, they have begun only recently as in the '80's to influence tertiary education practice. This time lapse was probably necessary for students who had the chance, in the late '60's and '70's to encounter some of the experiential methods to become teachers and to utilise their experience and knowledge and to transmit those ideas to their students.

#### ***1.9.6. Characteristics of Experiential Learning***

Walter and Marks (1981) identified four basic characteristics of experiential learning; relevance, involvement, responsibility and flexibility. Experiential learning is operational when participants are fully involved, when the content is clearly relevant to the participants, when individuals develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning, and when the learning environment is flexible and responsive to participants' learning needs.

Relevance of the material presented in the course for every particular student is of great importance in experiential learning. Relevance is demonstrated through constant linkage with life situations and relationships in everyday life. Personal and professional examples increase relevance, and if we incorporate Glasser's idea that intrinsic motivation is the only existing motivation, then experiential learning cannot exist without the personal and professional relevance of material presented for the student.

Involvement is expressed through engagement in activity. Involvement brings energy to the teaching learning process. Active learning is considered to be motivating and self-reinforcing.

Individuals have a need for some degree of mastery over their environment, and can satisfy that need to a greater degree when directly involved in their learning (Erikson, 1950: 63).

Involvement has an impact on attitude change and growth as well as on skill development. Students who are involved in the process of learning contribute

to the course by sharing their ideas and thereby making possible peer-learning. Through being involved students become responsible and their involvement improves group dynamics.

Learners are responsible for choosing the amount of energy they want to invest in their learning. When each individual participates in the process of setting outcomes for a particular learning experience it is very likely that he or she will become committed and gain a real sense of responsibility for the success of the learning experience. These outcomes then become personalised and relevant for the student's professional development. Students' responses to the learning situation are directly related to their learning goals and choices (as emphasised in Choice Theory); they are in charge of achieving their learning outcomes (as proposed by Andragogy); and personal experiences are seen to be relevant (as suggested by Experiential Learning theory).

All these characteristics of experiential learning make it especially valuable for social work education.

### **1.10. Applications to Social Work Education**

Experiential learning can be used in various settings with participants of various ages, and can achieve various educational or training goals. This thesis is focused on its use at two University settings where experiential learning was used with students who had no professional experience, though certainly with some valuable life experience, and with mature students with longer life and professional experience. The main connection made when experiential learning is employed at the University settings is linking of intellectually relevant experiences and personal development with theory and empirical research that in turn brings order and comprehension to previous life experiences that may then be utilised in future professional life.

In the process of experiential learning learners are involved in an active exploration of their experience. Practice has to be enhanced by reflection. Experience on its own is not sufficient; learners have to reflect on it in a critical

way. Experiential learning is not discovery learning; the learning experience has to be carefully structured and designed and the experience has then to be carefully reviewed and analysed, because without the integration of experience and the necessary linkage with theory, learning which could be incorporated later into professional practice will not occur.

The correspondence of the learning activity to the world outside the University is essential for experiential learning. Emphasis is on the quality of the experience, not on its location.

This thesis argues that experiential education offers at least five types of experiences during the process of social work education. First is *critical reflection* on theoretical knowledge or information gained during the course that happens mostly on the cognitive level. Second is *skill training*, which focuses on activity, involves action, emotional involvement and experimentation with social work skills in a small skills training group environment. Third is *development and exploration of values* that permeate practice and happens at the value and attitudinal level of existence. Fourth is *personal growth* that is of particular importance for those in the helping professions. It addresses the expansion of awareness of the self and promotes change of cognitive, affective, and behavioural patterns associated with coping (Walter and Marks, 1981). Fifth is *integration* of theory, skills, values and personal qualities, which helps the unique learner to develop his or her unique knowledge in accordance with his or her past and present experiences and the desired outcomes of his or her professional practice.

Social work education has the advantage that students may learn simultaneously about the content and the process. At the same time they may learn how to relate to one another and the basics of group work as education takes place in groups. They may learn how to develop helping relationships with one another and also acquire the communication skills essential for their future profession. In social work education content and process have the same relevance and the process of learning has to support the content and vice versa.

Educational objectives of experiential learning in social work education, particularly in social work skills training, could be defined as:

1. Development of the group context where change may take place.
2. Development of the group process where curiosity and natural desire to learn can be nourished and enhanced.
3. Development of participatory mode of decision making in all aspects of learning in which students, teachers and administrators each have a part.
4. Encouraging students in building their confidence and self-esteem.
5. Supporting students in discovering the excitement in life-long learning.
6. Supporting teachers to enjoy the process of teaching and accept ideas of life-long learning.
7. Supporting continuous integration of theory, practice and experience, involving contacts with social workers and social work clients in participatory rather than labelling ways.
8. Encouraging learning from one another.
9. Focusing on accepting differences as challenges, not as obstacles to mutual development.
10. Creating a context where students will work on their prejudices, or at least reveal them and discuss them.
11. Encouraging teachers in developing skills and attitudes that research has shown to be most effective in facilitating learning.
12. Encouraging students to develop their own learning plans and to self-evaluate and to provide feed-back to their colleagues.

It can be said that the aim of social work education is to link theory, practice and experience in such a way that it encourages students to become effective professionals. Therefore, experiential methods seem to be irreplaceable.

It can be argued that the focus that Experiential Learning Theory places on growth and development is essential for social work education because social work students should be able to analyse their personal growth and development needs. Students are at a stage in their lives where important changes are happening and education is a way of becoming independent and taking charge of one's own life. Accepting the idea of personal growth and development as a continuous process will help students to better understand their clients in the process of

continuous growth and development. An outstanding social work educator, Bertha Capen Reynolds sees the beginning years of social work education as the vestibule to learning:

It is a place to get rid of hindrances to growth, to gain glimpses of what professional life is like and how one must change to enter it; a place to live through the struggle between wish for change and fear of it, to find where one stands in relation to the authority of expertness and the authority of administrative responsibility. The function of a supervisor is different in this induction period from what it will be when learning is established (Reynolds, 1942: 155).

The idea of taking responsibility for one's own actions springs from ideas associated with Adult Learning Theory, based on a premise that states that taking responsibility increases involvement and vice versa. The issue of taking responsibility is of particular importance, especially for social work, where irresponsible actions may cause harm. Practising taking responsibility during the process of education increases the chance that the practitioner will be responsible in his or her future practice with clients. This concern for clients is expressed in Reynolds (1942) within the framework of caring for client protection:

In general, we find that initiating a learning experience is in the hands of the teacher, and that a group approach first is the more usual one. This approach gives the teacher an opportunity to use his knowledge of how most students learn best, and to be guided by a currently revised diagnosis of the needs of particular students. For the student, it means the security of being surrounded by others who are learning too, and the freedom from responsibility for clients which he needs in his most confused early period. No less important is the protection of the client from the student's mistakes. No supervision could be so close as to afford equal protection, and to attempt it would misorient the student as to his acceptance of responsibility later. In this initial class experience, discussion of case situations and some of the fundamentals about personality and attitudes to people (given perhaps in another course but applied in relation to classes) can be made realistic enough to give the student a sound preparation for his first contacts with poverty, sickness, and distorted behaviour as he must meet these in a responsible way in the field (Reynolds, 1942: 145).

Given that social work is a dynamic profession continuous development and evaluation of practice is essential. Development and evaluation is of the same

importance for educational processes. Because of the inter-relatedness of all participants in the teaching-learning process, they are the ones who are most competent to evaluate that practice. By practising evaluation and self-evaluation during the process of education, students are preparing themselves for the continuous evaluation of their professional work. By being involved in this process of evaluation, and by seeing clients involved in the evaluation of practice, it is more probable that students will incorporate the client's opinion in evaluating their practice.

### **1.11. Basic Theoretical Assumptions which provide the Theoretical Framework for this Thesis**

When considering tertiary students as adults, respecting their past experiences, their choice of field of study, their individual uniqueness and learning styles, then traditional, reactive methods of presenting knowledge appear to be quite unsuitable.

American sociologist W.F. Ogburn (1964) introduced the term "cultural lag" thereby identifying that some habit or way of doing things has outlived its living reality. He believes that this is the case with ex-cathedra lectures. Contemporary learning theories stress the importance of utilising the student's creativity, independence and participation in the process of learning. Instead of silent listening and getting "ready made solutions", the students are encouraged to find their own ways of improving their skills at their own pace. The responsibility for learning is on the student. The teacher's role has changed as well. Instead of "teaching and preaching" in the old fashioned sense, the teacher is required to support, provide relevant information, sometimes lead students' work and to be available to them. This epistemological shift is not new in theory but it is still perceived as being very new and rather extraordinary in some tertiary educational environments.

The following table presents the main ideas of andragogy and links these to the role of the modern teachers:

Conditions of Learning	Principles of Teaching
The learners feel a need to learn	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teacher exposes students to new possibilities of self fulfilment.</li> <li>2. The teacher helps each student clarify his own aspirations for improved behaviour.</li> <li>3. The teacher helps each student to diagnose the gap between his aspiration and his present level of performance.</li> <li>4. The teacher helps the students identify the life problems they experience because of the gaps in their personal equipment.</li> </ol>
The learning environment is characterised by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. The teacher provides physical conditions that are comfortable (as to seating, smoking, temperature, ventilation, lighting, decoration) and conducive to interaction (preferably, no person sitting behind another person).</li> <li>6. The teacher accepts each student as a person of worth and respects his feelings and ideas.</li> <li>7. The teacher seeks to build relationships of mutual trust and helpfulness among the students among the students by encouraging co-operative activities and refraining from inducing competitiveness and judgmentalness.</li> </ol>
The learners perceive the goals of a learning experience to be their goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. The teacher exposes his own feelings and contributes his resources as a co-learner in the spirit of mutual inquiry.</li> <li>9. The teacher involves the students in a mutual process of formulation learning objectives in which the needs of the students, of the institution, of the teacher, of the subject matter, and of the society are taken into account.</li> </ol>
The learners accept a share of responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, and therefore have a commitment toward it.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. The teacher shares his thinking about options available in the designing of learning experiences and the selection of materials and methods that involves the students in deciding among these options jointly.</li> </ol>
The learners participate actively in the learning process.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. The teacher helps the students to organise themselves (project groups, learning-teaching teams, independent study, etc.) to share responsibility in the process of mutual inquiry.</li> </ol>
The learning process is related and makes use of the experience of the learners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. The teacher helps the students exploit their own experiences as resources for learning through the use of such techniques as discussion, role playing, case method, etc.</li> <li>13. The teacher gears the presentation of his own resources to the levels of experience of his particular students.</li> <li>14. The teacher helps the students to apply new learning to their experience, and thus to make the learning more meaningful and integrated.</li> </ol>
The learners have a sense of progress toward their goals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. The teacher involves the students in developing mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring progress toward the learning objectives.</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. The teacher helps the students develop and apply procedures for self-evaluation according to these criteria.</li> </ol>

(Knowles, 1980: 57-58).

The conditions of learning and principles of teaching presented are compatible with Choice Theory and with Experiential Learning Theory.

The aim of tertiary education cannot be limited to just teaching verbal or writing skills or of depositing information in between student's ears. The aim of tertiary education is the development of more complex forms of coping with our ever-changing world of rapid social change. Mere memorisation and "spoon-feeding" with already digested information will not produce competent practitioners and intellectuals able to creatively contribute to the total body of knowledge in the field of their professional expertise.

It is argued that integrative approaches like those which Choice Theory, Experiential Learning Theory and Andragogy propose, offer possibilities with regard to the integration of theory, practice and experience in such a way that no part of the learning cycle is neglected. The proposed changes are as follows: that the teachers are no longer the sole sources of wisdom, and that practitioners, field instructors and clients are involved as equal participants in that process; that students are responsible for creating their learning plans according to their prior knowledge and experience, and that according to their learning needs and learning styles they will tailor their learning programmes.

The change from examination to self-evaluation and collegial and client feedback may be the most difficult change to achieve in traditional, hierarchical tertiary settings. On the other hand, it can be argued that setting standards for self-evaluation together with students and practitioners is helpful for any social work school for it encourages continuous contact with practice and sets the foundation for continuous improvement. The development of democratic and encouraging contexts where these changes can occur is the main task of a tertiary institution and that involves willingness to engage in experiential methods and action research in order to encourage the continuous improvement of teaching. Continuous follow up, action research and reflection on feed-back from all participants, needs to be in place to ensure this continuous development pattern. Such a shift calls for reorganisation. It requires a framework which does not block

flexibility but which at the same time offers sufficient structure. Flexible scheduling options should be devised so that time may be tailored to accommodate to the requirements for learning opportunities to occur in the variety of experiential situations.

Since social work is at the same time a science, a skill and an art it offers an opportunity to conduct experiential courses. Its heritage in fieldwork and its expertise in field instruction may also offer a useful example for teaching in other humanistic sciences.

Basic theoretical assumptions that form the background of this thesis are derived from Experiential Learning Theory, Andragogy, Choice Theory and my experience as a student, social worker, psychotherapist and adult educator. These are outlined below.

Theory is not a set of fixed assumptions detached from practice. The theory of social work education should be viable, continuously reflecting on practice and changing accordingly. Every theory is a construction; it is a mind tool that helps theorists and practitioners explain phenomena that are happening in the teaching learning processes of social work.

The basic principles, which provide the theoretical background for this thesis, are:

- \* Intrinsic motivation can be increased if the student sees the practical application of the presented theoretical material.
- \* The teacher's job is to facilitate the natural process of learning by providing an atmosphere conducive to learning and relevant information.
- \* The teaching-learning process should be a need fulfilling activity for all participants in the process.
- \* Learning can be fun and challenging.
- \* Learning adds quality to ones life.
- \* Quality is not added to the final product but it has to be in-built.
- \* Integration of theory, practice and experience is facilitated when courses are organised integratively.

- \* Social work values should be embedded and practised in social work courses.
- \* Human beings learn better if their total behaviour is involved in the process of learning (emotions, cognition, actions and physiology).
- \* The experiential learning spiral that comprises concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation offers a useful framework for students with all learning styles.
- \* The action research spiral that comprises initial reflection, planning, action, observation and evaluation offers a useful tool for evaluating a new method of teaching-learning social work skills.
- \* Social work clients and practitioners are an irreplaceable source of knowledge and practice wisdom for social work students.
- \* Experiential learning and practising problem solving skills on real life problems, instead of role-playing, offers a better framework for social work education.
- \* Self-evaluation can be a more powerful tool for quality improvement than being evaluated from an outside observer.
- \* Self-evaluation can increase motivation.
- \* The goal of tertiary education is to give students a relevant information and provide experiences that will help them to become independent practitioners responsible for effective and competent practice.
- \* Memorisation of data should be exchanged for teaching students how to acquire and use information and skills needed for their profession.
- \* Theory is not opposed to practice. Theory changes through practice. Practices that employ these principles improve all the time.
- \* Any of these principles should be changed if proved to be ineffective in practice.

## 1.12. Conclusion

A mechanistic or positivist worldview presupposes that social work education is a set of agreed, discrete, apolitical and value free tasks. When social work education is performed from this standpoint, the function of the course is to prepare efficient, skilled practitioners to perform social work skills and tasks. For that purpose, pedagogic models of education, apprenticeship and academic models in field instruction and the idea of supervision as a form of control fits well. A paternalistic attitude from faculty staff, which is essential for the mechanistic worldview, will encourage students to develop paternalistic attitudes to their clients.

In this thesis is argued that when social work education is performed from a ecological worldview, which proposes that human beings are in continuous interaction with their environment and that simultaneously as this environment influences them, so too is the environment influenced by them, then a more reflexive approach has to be adopted. Therefore, students who are an active part of their education, have to influence and create the way their education is performed and to become equal participants in this process. In order to become effective practitioners, students require the opportunity to reflect-in-action and to integrate the theoretical, practical and experiential parts of education. Contemporary educational science offers methods to achieve that goal.

Setting individual outcomes in the process of learning encourages students to take charge of their own learning. This process encourages responsibility and there is an obvious parallel between education and the process of social work where clients are responsible for setting and realising their particular outcomes. By exercising the skill of taking responsibility for their own learning students are actually practising being responsible and as a consequence it is likely that they will more easily transmit the message of taking responsibility for one's own life to their clients.

Experiential methods in tertiary education focus on the learner and his or

her needs, accepting a variety of learning styles and prior knowledge, and supporting the exploration of learning modes not used by the learner. The learner's control over the process of learning and of creating individual outcomes keeps courses dynamic. Being holistic in its essence, experiential learning in social work activates the total behaviour of learners supporting them in professional and personal growth and development. It does not neglect the importance of the theory but on the contrary it integrates theory, practice and experience.

Key words and basic terms have been defined and the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy has been explored. Two worldviews have been presented and it has been advocated that the ecological worldview is more suitable for social work education at tertiary levels. This chapter has attempted to overview theories that have influenced the development of the Contact-Challenge Method. The major shift of the teacher's role in the '80s and '90s has been explored and special emphasis has been placed on all aspects of experiential learning theory: its propositions, its distinctiveness from other theories, its characteristics and objectives and its implications for social work education.

It is argued that focusing only on intellectual work at modern social work schools and only on practical work in social work practice placements cannot produce competent social workers. If education is carried out in such a way then students may form the idea that social work is either a scientific discipline, or a practical skill. However my claim is that neither of these positions is appropriate, rather the main characteristic and value of social work is that it is a science, a skill and an art and therefore education in the area of social work should be performed accordingly - scientifically, skilfully and artistically.

## CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON STUDENT LEARNING AND TEACHING METHODS

*All systems of classification tend in some measure to distort reality; but it is impossible to think clearly about reality unless we make some classificatory system*

*Aldous Huxley*

### 2.1. Introduction

By presenting classifications, generalisations and categorisations that emerged as findings from the studies that are presented in this chapter, an attempt will be made not to distort or oversimplify the richness and complexity of human interactions that were witnessed in these studies. In the framework of this thesis these generalisations, categorisations and classifications will be used as an aid to facilitate understanding of every specific student in every specific situation and certainly not in terms of classifying students in categories by the way they organise their thinking and knowledge. Major research on learning styles, approaches and modes is presented, compared and discussed. Recent research on students' motivation and goals as well as research on students' perceptions of academic departments is reviewed and commented on. The research about transfer from the classroom to the field in social work education is linked to the experiential learning theory which was identified and discussed in the previous chapter.

## 2.2. Research on Learning Styles

Research on learning styles, conducted in different parts of the world such as Sweden, Australia, Great Britain and the USA, and which focussed on different dimensions of the learning process, came to similar conclusions with respect to learning styles.

Marton (1975) and his colleagues at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden carried out a study in which students were asked to read a 1500 word article. While reading students were permitted to take notes but note taking was not required. They were informed that they would be questioned on the article by an interviewer. In the interviews students were encouraged to reveal what they remembered about the content of the article as well as their process of reading. They were asked to describe how they felt about the task and to explain the approach they used in studying the text. On the basis of this study Marton (1975) differentiated between two approaches to learning, which he defined as *deep level* and *surface level* processing. The *deep level approach* was characterised by an active search for meaning. Students using this approach started with the intention of understanding the article and thus questioned the author's arguments and conclusions. They tried to relate the article to their previous knowledge and personal experience in order to enable them to appraise the validity of the author's conclusions. Learners using the *deep level approach* examined the purpose of the task, searched for underlying structures and tried to stand back to see the task in a wider perspective. They related one aspect of the task to another as well as examining the context along with other knowledge and evidence. Their minds were active in that they questioned ideas presented in the text. They were involved physically and intellectually in studying the article.

The second group of students, who adopted what Marton referred to as the *surface level approach*; reported that they tried to memorise those parts of the article on which they might be questioned. They focussed their attention on specific facts without making connections and seemed anxious about the task they had been set. *Surface level learners* treated each task as a separate entity focusing

on particular elements of the task rather than on its whole. The meaning and purpose of the task seemed to be of little consequence and thus they adopted a passive and unreflective approach.

In further studies Marton and Saljo (1976) found that the *deep level approach* was usually associated with greater comprehension and understanding and that even after a five-week interval students who had used this approach had a better recall of details than did those who had used the *surface level approach*. These basic approaches to learning as distinguished by Marton are closely linked with the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, supporting Glasser's notion that the only motivation which promotes learning is the intrinsic one because learners are motivated to learn if and when they see that learning adds quality to their lives.

Fransson's study (1977) discovered that students who felt threatened tended to adopt a surface approach. This study links to Rogers' theory where the development of a non-threatening atmosphere is essential for effective learning. Svensson (1977) and Dahlgren (1978) discovered that an excessive number of factual questions and an overwhelming study load "pushed" students into the *surface approach*. It may be concluded that the student who adopts the *deep level approach* learns more easily, a conclusion that was reinforced by Svensson (1977), who found that *surface learners* tend to find learning difficult, boring and exhausting. For the learner who is searching for meaning and who is connecting his or her previous experience with new material, learning is a challenge and therefore more interesting. There is also a certain amount of fun and playfulness in the *deep approach*. Students adopting this approach use their creativity to link knowledge with their previous experiences and to find easier ways of memorising information or of making use of it. For the *deep learner*, learning is fun and discovery therefore motivation is intrinsic. Learning is a needs-satisfying activity and for such a learner every new piece of information reinforces the motivation to learn more. For such a learner education is a life-long process and a challenge.

Svensson's (1977) study confirms Glasser's theoretical assumption that effective learning satisfies the learner's need for fun - fun in terms of challenge

and discovery not mere amusement. Integrative learning needs to be challenging as well, encouraging students to explore in depth their values and the consequences of their actions when working with clients and their families.

Even though Rubin (1981) claims that people tend to retain their preferred learning style throughout their lives being “stuck” in the “surface approach” will inevitably discourage students from continuing their education. According to Rubin’s research, it may be concluded that the development of a learning style is in accordance with whichever learning style was promoted during early education. A critical factor in the promotion of a particular style relates to teachers who become role models for their students. Encouraging students to find meaning and relevance in the subject they are exploring promotes a *deep level learning style*, and by having a deep learning style a student will become more interested and motivated to learn.

In exploring further Marton’s discoveries Saljo (1982), in his study of differences in constructing meaning from a text, stressed that adults hold different conceptions of learning. These are categorised in five stages:

1. Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge
2. Memorising
3. The acquisition of facts, methods, procedures, etc.
4. The abstraction of meaning
5. An interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality.

The first three stages reflect the surface approach; stage four and five require the deep approach. For a learner who is new to the field basic information about the field is necessary for movement to more advanced stages of learning. However, even at this first stage when information is gathered the deep approach may be employed. University students do not commence their studies as ‘tabula rasa’, because they have previous knowledge. This knowledge and curiosity has brought them to the specific field they have chosen to study. Even when the field seems to be totally unknown it is still possible to make some connections with

prior knowledge.

Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle (1984) demonstrated that a 'learning to learn programme' helps students to use 'deep learning' strategies. This shows that whatever learning style students have already developed, they may still learn new and more challenging ways of memorising information and of how to use this information.

Further developing Marton's ideas Entwistle (1991) stressed that even though there is considerable evidence of the existence of various learning approaches these are only abstractions and any individual student may manifest characteristics of two, three or four approaches. In his study on how students learn and why they fail, he classified learning approaches in three categories:

1. The *deep approach*, characterised by: the intention to understand; by vigorous interaction with content; by relating new ideas to previous knowledge; by relating concepts to everyday experience; by relating evidence to conclusions; and by examining the logic of the argument.

2. The *surface approach*, characterised by: the intention to complete task requirements; by treating tasks as an external imposition; by lack of reflection about the purpose and strategies; by focus on discrete elements without integration; by failure to distinguish principles from examples; and by memorising information needed for assessments.

3. The *strategic approach*, characterised by: the intention to obtain the highest possible grades; by gearing work to perceived preferences of the teacher; by awareness of marking schemes and criteria; by systematic use of previous papers in revision; by organising time and effort to the greatest effect; and by ensuring right conditions and materials for study (Entwistle, 1991).

Pask and Scott (1971) and Pask (1976, 1979) conducted a series of laboratory experiments and differentiated between two learning strategies defined as *serialist* and *holist*. Serialists take things step by step and look closely at details; they do not use analogies, illustrations or metaphors. *Holists* begin with a

broad focus; they try to see the task globally, to relate it to previous knowledge and to use analogies, metaphors, illustrations and other explanatory devices. Pask (1976) connected the serialist strategy with 'operational learning' and the holist strategy with 'comprehension learning'. In Pask's studies, a number of learners, who had access to both learning strategies, used them in accordance with the task they had to perform. Pask named this strategy 'versatile learning'. He also discovered 'shortcomings' associated with serialist and holist strategies. Holistic learners tended to reach conclusions from insufficient evidence and to generalise too soon because of their constant search for interconnections. They digressed and lost focus being carried along by association with another theme. On the other hand serialists tended to be overcautious, too concerned with details and, as a consequence lost the important links between ideas, facts and conclusions. In one of his studies Pask (1976) examined what happened when an extreme holist had to perform a very operational task or when an extreme serialist had to perform a very comprehensive task. He found that when tasks matched the learning styles of the learners, results were much better than in those cases where there was a mismatch.

Kolb (1984) defined four basic learning modes or orientations which were derived from Lewin's learning cycle and he developed the nine-item self-descriptive questionnaire in which learners were asked to rank-order four words in such a way that best described their learning mode. One word in each item corresponded to one of the learning modes, e.g. concrete experience - **feeling**, reflective observation - **watching**, abstract conceptualisation - **thinking**, active experimentation - **doing**. These four modes, or four components of behaviour, often feature in the literature of psychology and psychotherapy. For example in Glasser's Choice Theory (1987), total behaviour is described as a combination of feeling, doing, physiology and action. Learning modes reflect the predominant behavioural component that the learner is using. Therefore, it may be concluded that the LSI or Learning Style Inventory measures the component of total behaviour, which is dominant in problem solving and in the learning process. Learning is complete, or takes place, only if it involves the total behaviour of the learner. Thus, every learner, in order to be effective, should complete the whole

cycle, irrespective of the point at which he or she enters. For example, a learner enters the learning cycle (a never-ending spiral), at the point of *concrete experience* (feeling the situation, being in the situation with all emotions); then the learner *observes and reflects* on that experience (watching, observing, monitoring); then he or she *forms abstract concepts* and generalisations (thinking, connecting with previous knowledge). The first level of learning is completed when the learner tests implications or concepts in new situations (acting, doing), which in turn produces another *concrete experience*. When the first level or the first cycle is completed the learner is ready to move along the spiral. The learner is then ready for a new experience, which is now enriched with all four components of his or her previous experience. Another learner, the one who prefers theoretical knowledge, may prefer to enter the cycle with the formation of abstract concepts. In this case the process is similar; he or she continues testing theoretical concepts by applying them in new situations. The application of theoretical ideas elicits a response in terms of feelings, which is then reflected upon and leads to the formation of abstract concepts and generalisations. The role of the teacher is to support students in completing the cycle of learning. This is possible when the student and the teacher know which mode is dominant, and with which part of the cycle the student may have difficulties.

In real life, far from scientific generalisations, learners use their whole selves in all four learning modes. Kolb defined them as orientations toward concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, or active experimentation. Even though, for example, active experimentation focuses on action and on the 'doing component' of behaviour, the learner is simultaneously using his or her feelings, reflections and thinking and this occurs also when other learning modes are employed.

Since no person can be confined to a single category, Kolb created two axes to present the profile of the learner. Two examples of learning style profiles may be seen in Figures 2.1. and 2.2. The difference in learning styles between a female social worker and a male business administrator is obvious.

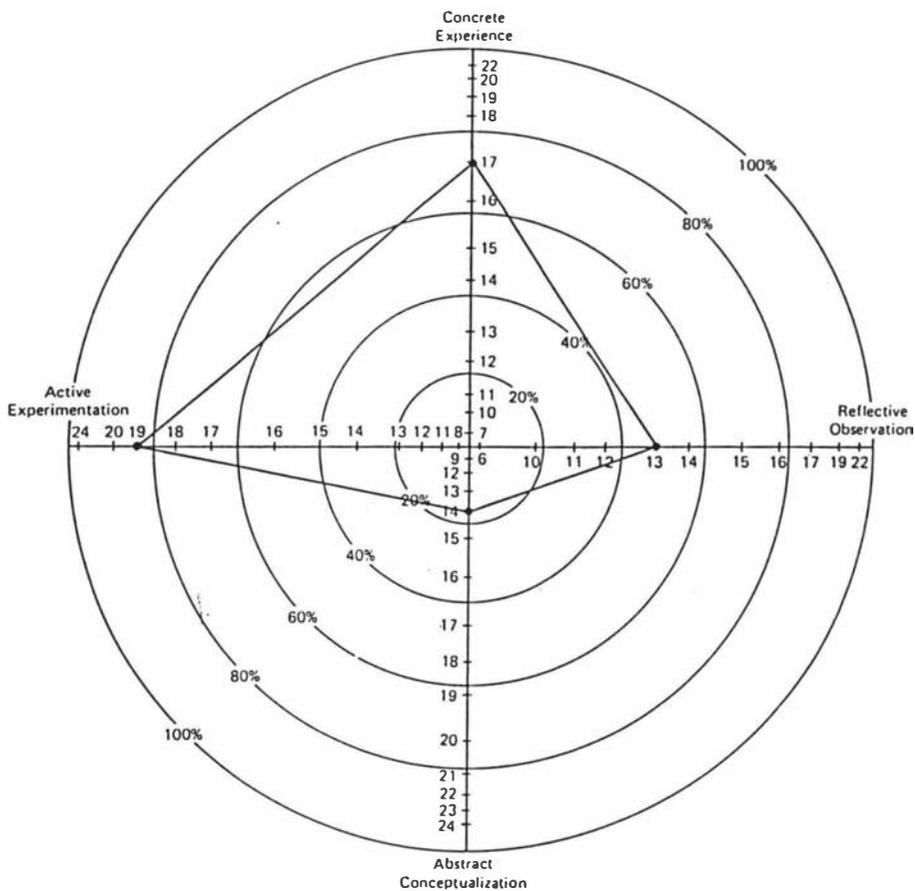


Fig. 2.1. Example Learning Style Profile - Female Social Worker (from Kolb, 1984: 70).

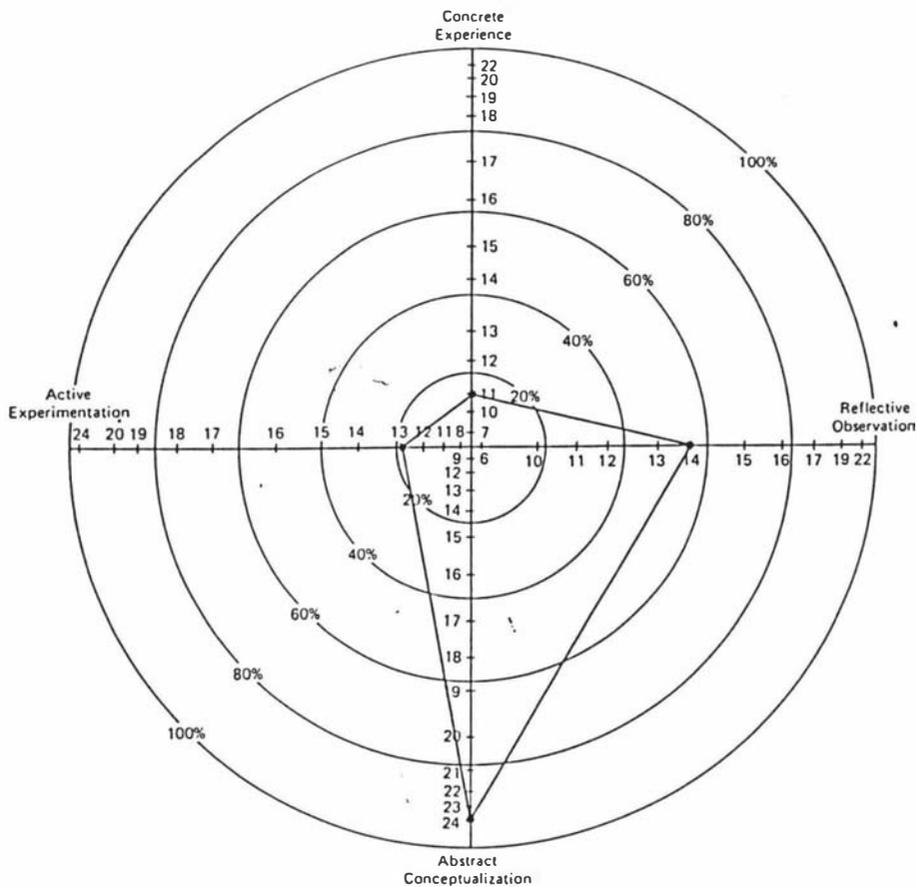


Fig. 2.2. Example Learning Style profile - Male M.B.A. Student (from Kolb, 1984, p. 72)

Based on LSI (Learning Style Inventory) scores, research and clinical observation, Kolb and his colleagues differentiated four learning styles that reflect the hereditary equipment and life experiences of each particular learner.

### *Convergent learning style*

Convergent learning style relies primarily on abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Persons who employ this learning style are fast problem solvers, successful in conventional intelligence tests when there is a single correct answer or solution to a question or problem (Torrealba, 1972; Kolb, 1976). The method they use in problem solving is hypothetical-deductive reasoning. The convergent learning style is associated with decision skills, setting goals, experimenting with new ideas. “Convergers” tend to control expression of emotion and they prefer dealing with technical tasks and problems rather than social and interpersonal issues (Hudson, 1966). In the learning process persons with this orientation need support in getting in touch with their feelings. If they chose to become social workers they may have difficulties in feeling empathy with their clients and in being genuinely involved in the problem solving processes.

### *Divergent learning style*

The divergent learning style relies on concrete experience and reflective observation. “Divergers” have great imaginative ability and awareness of meaning and values. They have the ability to see a concrete situation from different perspectives and to organise several relationships into a meaningful ‘gestalt’ or ‘whole’ (Kolb, 1984). They are more observers than they are actors, they tend to be imaginative and feeling oriented, and are sensitive to people’s feelings and values. Their basic strength is in being able to listen with an open mind. In learning to become social workers, however they may suffer from being confluent, i.e. not able to see clear boundaries between themselves and their clients or

between their private and professional lives. They tend to become overwhelmed with emotions and may be reluctant to use confrontation when necessary. “Convergers” can be very good in using creative media in work with clients because their ability to imagine and create is remarkable.

### *Assimilation learning style*

The assimilation learning style relies on abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation. Grochow (1973) observed that the greatest strength of this orientation lies in inductive reasoning, the ability to create theoretical models and assimilating disparate observations into an integrated explanation. People with this learning style are not focussed on people; they are more focussed on ideas and abstract concepts. Ideas are not valued for their practical value but for their logical soundness and preciseness (Kolb, 1984). It is not likely that a person with assimilation learning style will choose a social work profession; but if they do, they are more oriented towards research or management than to the practical work with clients. They are very good at data analysing, testing theories and ideas and building conceptual models.

### *Accommodative learning style*

The accommodative learning style relies on concrete experience and active experimentation. “Accommodators” are very good at adapting themselves to new and unpredictable situations; they are good when an active component of behaviour is predominant. They commit themselves to objectives, like working with people, and are involved in every task they perform. They seek and exploit opportunities, take risks and like to be involved in new experiences. Grochow (1973) illustrated that persons who employ this learning style tend to solve problems in an intuitive trial and error manner. They rely heavily on other people for information rather than by using their own analytic ability. Because of their constant willingness to do something, they are perceived as impatient and pushy.

Students who use this style need to learn to be patient and to use more reflective thinking in their study. They also need to find inner strength and knowledge of themselves, which will support their confidence. Their readiness to be active and not let things pass by, may help them to develop more depth in their approach to learning. They also have to learn not to push the client and not to “jump to conclusions”.

The research on learning styles conducted by Kolb and Goldman (1973) suggested that learning experiences which reinforce learning style dispositions tend to produce greater commitment in career choices than those learning experiences that do not reinforce learning style dispositions. According to Kolb's (1976, 1981) research on learning styles, social work students tend towards active experimentation and concrete experience; and therefore, most of them are of the accommodative learning style. A significant number of social work students are also of the divergent learning style, where concrete experience is followed by reflective observation. Students with the accommodative and divergent learning style are oriented towards qualitative and humanistic inquiry.

It may be assumed that learning styles (convergent and accommodative) that are found to prevail in social work students should be utilised in the process of education by means of using the familiar, or appreciated methods of teaching at the beginning, in order to support students' motivation and interest for the study. When an atmosphere conducive to learning is established and when students have developed their motivation to learn more and to be further challenged, scientific and quantitative aspects (easily accepted by students with convergent and assimilation learning styles) of material, which needs to be learned should be added, still using experiential methods which social work students hold dear. Kolb commented on his research on learning styles:

What these data show is that one's undergraduate education is a major factor in the development of his or her learning style. Whether this is because people are shaped by the fields they enter or because of the selection processes that put people into and out of disciplines is an open question at this point. Most probably, people choose fields that are consistent with their learning styles and are further shaped to fit the

learning norms of their field once they are in it. When there is a mismatch between the field's learning norms and the individual's learning style, people will either change or leave the field (Kolb, 1984: 88).

In shaping his theory and research Kolb has taken into account the importance of professional choice, which is shaped by, and in turn influences the learning style of a professional:

The third set of forces that shape learning style stems from professional choice. One's professional career choice not only exposes one to a specialised learning environment; it also involves a commitment to generic professional problem, such as social service, that requires specialised adaptive orientation. In addition, one becomes a member of a reference group of peers who share a professional mentality, a common set of values and beliefs about how one should behave professionally. This professional orientation shapes learning style through habits acquired in professional training and through the more immediate normative pressures involved in being a competent professional (Kolb, 1984: 88).

Another interesting research study comes from Kolb and Wolfe (1981). They studied the alumni from departments of social work and engineering in graduating classes of 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975, using questionnaires, tests and interviews. Social work and engineering students were chosen because of assumed differences in learning styles and because they typify the social and science-based professions respectively. The *contextualist* (or *holist* in Pask's terms) and *accommodative* orientation prevailed in social work and *formist* (or *serialist* in Pask's terms) and *convergent* orientation prevailed in engineering. Professionals of both fields, social work and engineering, once employed, had to adjust their basic learning styles. Amongst many other questions, alumni were asked how much their professional education and their work experience had contributed to the development of each of the performance competencies they listed. The research concluded that engineering education seemed to prepare or even over-prepare people for the demands of their jobs in symbolic and perceptual competencies but made little contribution to the development of affective and behavioural competencies, which tend to be acquired primarily in the work

setting. Social workers reported that their education contributed more to the performance competencies, but that it was still biased toward the development of perceptual and symbolic skills. They stressed that work experience contributed more to the development of affective and behavioural skills, which were necessary for their job. Both groups of alumni reported that they made up for these deficits through experiential learning on the job. For this kind of learning it is necessary to work in a supportive organisation where supervision and life long learning is nurtured. Where this opportunity was not provided in the organisation, it may be assumed that these professionals performed their jobs incompetently, or less effectively than might have been expected had appropriate education been offered them.

Kolb's research shows that generalisations can be drawn about the learning style of a particular profession, especially in the case of a helping profession such as social work. According to Kolb's research, we may expect that the majority of students in social work education are accommodative and divergent, a conclusion which supports research findings on students' preferences in approaches to learning. Students with accommodative learning styles will prefer experiential methods, and students with divergent learning styles will prefer self-exploration. Students who use both styles will learn best from experiential methods, because they value first hand experience and involvement.

The social professions - education, nursing, social work, and agricultural extension - comprise people who are heavily or primarily accommodative in their learning style. Professions with a technical or scientific base - accounting, engineering, medicine, and, to a lesser degree, management - have people with primarily convergent learning styles. There is considerable variation around these professional averages, however. In medicine, for example, about half of students are convergers (Plovnick, 1974; Wunderlich and Gjerde, 1978), but some of medical specialities, such as occupational therapy, are accommodative in their orientation. In social work and nursing, practitioners are clearly concrete as opposed to abstract but fall heavily in the divergent as well as accommodative quadrant (Sims, 1980; Christensen, Lee and Bugg, 1979) (Kolb, 1984: 89-90).

Even though Marton, Kolb and Pask's measures of learning styles do not focus on the same dimension of the learning process, the convergent and assimilative learning styles in Kolb's research can be compared with the serialist approach in Pask's studies, while the divergent and accommodative style can be compared with the holist approach. If Kolb's classification is compared with Marton's deep *and surface levels of processing* it may seem that they are focussed on different perspectives of the learning process. Franson's classification of deep active, deep passive, surface active and surface passive approaches, measures learners involvement, which is only one dimension of the learning process (or a prerequisite for learning). For example, a convergent learner will in most cases take an active part in learning but whether engagement occurs on a deep or surface level depends on many other factors. The variety of human ways of learning does not permit us to categorise them in four, or five "boxes". A "map" of learning styles, may give us some guidelines but it is definitely not territory where we may predict outcomes of learning. Whichever classification we use in assessing students' learning styles helps us to facilitate learning and to set learning outcomes with every individual student.

Learning styles are not fixed personality traits but rather are formed through unique individual experiences of learning. Such styles may become stable orientations when a person, due to his or her profession, employs one learning mode more often and therefore becomes very skilled in its use. The goal of the holistic, integrative and experiential education would be, then, to encourage students to use all learning modes so as to find unique ways of making learning interesting and useful.

Kolb and Fry (1975) reported that every classroom session can be 'diagnosed' for its orientation towards each of the four learning modes of the experiential learning model. An *affective environment* emphasises the experiencing of concrete events, a *symbolic environment* emphasises abstract conceptualisation, a *perceptual environment* stresses observation and appreciation, and a *behavioural environment* stresses action taking in situations with real consequences. Students learn faster in environments that match their learning

orientation, but for their growth and development it is more important that all four modes are represented. The ability to use all four modes comprises creativity and flexibility, which are essential qualities for those in the helping professions.

Entwistle, Hanley and Hounsell (1979) in their study of distinctive approaches to study in higher education, identified three styles of learning: *personal meaning*, *reproducing* and *achieving*. *Personal meaning* is connected with intrinsic motivation, autonomy and, according to Marton and Pask's classification, a deep or versatile approach to learning. They presented "reproducing" as associated with extrinsic motivation, fear of failure and anxiety, a high need to be accepted, and staying within the outline of the course. *Reproducing* is a surface approach, with the memorisation of data being the main method used by the learner. *Achieving* is associated with the anticipation of success; motivation is intrinsic and extrinsic at the same time; approach to study is calculative; and students are ready to adopt any method that leads to high grades or admiration from others. This study showed that there was no difference in grades concerning the style students employed. Unfortunately, the study did not follow up students when they were supposed to use learned materials in practice. Learning styles do not depend on students' preferences alone but also on the subjects or the content of the course and on the teacher's teaching style. In some cases a certain amount of memorisation is a prerequisite for deep approaches to study. Even though Entwistle (1981) suggested that students develop a relatively stable orientation to study he also stressed that orientation is linked with motivation. It may be concluded that if teachers encourage students to add personal meaning to the subject that they are learning there is a greater chance that they will trigger their intrinsic motivation. When their internal motivation is activated it is more probable that students will use *deep approaches* which will again, enrich the course itself, and encourage other students to add personal meaning to the content of the course.

Students covered in Entwistle, Hanley and Hounsell's study (1979) who showed low scores did not employ any consistent method rather, they tended to postpone learning and exams, and reported that they were personally disorganised.

This study shows the importance of personal balance for better studying. By teaching students how to learn more effectively and by giving them the chance to add personal meaning to the subject they study, teachers are not only helping them to become better professionals, but also facilitating their personal growth and development.

Entwistle and Tait (1989) moved further in their research into learning modes and thereby contributed to the unravelling of the complex environment where academic learning takes place. They developed the *heuristic model* of teaching-learning processes in higher education (see Fig.2.3.) pointing out the importance of precise relationships between all variables. In research on teaching-learning processes it is important to be aware of the students' characteristics, teaching characteristics and departmental characteristics, and in social work education we also have to be aware of fieldwork characteristics, which adds to the complexity of the process.

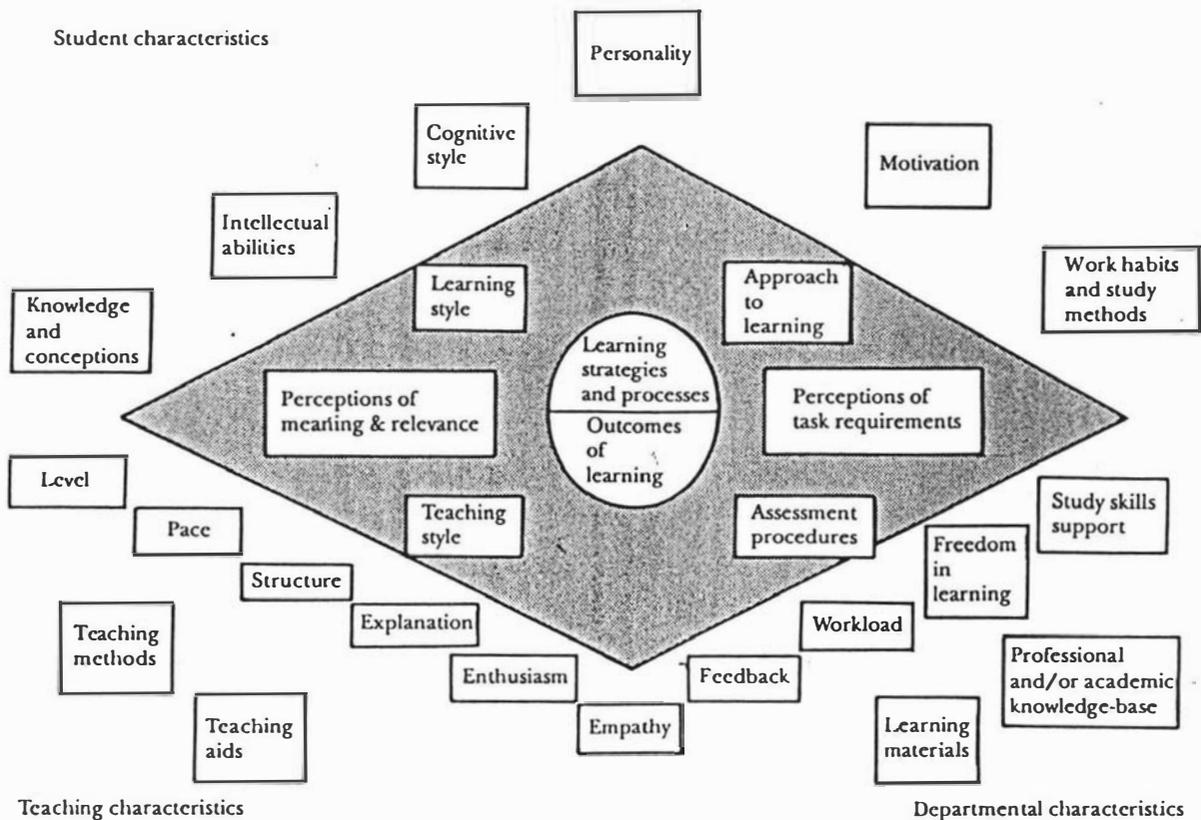


Fig. 2.3. A heuristic model of teaching-learning process in higher education (from Entwistle and Tait, 1989 found in Raaheim, Wankowski, Radford 1991: 6).

My experience in using LSI taught me that when used for educational purposes in social work, students need to self-assess their learning styles and to define their favourite strategies and possible obstacles which they may experience during learning. Taking into account students' self-observation instead of labelling them after using a LSI questionnaire encourages students to think about their learning style and to become more engaged in the process of learning.

Research on learning styles conducted in various parts of the world has focussed on different dimensions of the learning process but regardless of what classification has been used to define prevalent learning styles, it is a useful tool to help students learn better and with more pleasure and interest.

### **2.3. Research on Students' Motivation and Goals**

Dweck's research (1986) shows how the motivational process affects learning and even though the research was conducted with children it demonstrates how humans react where learning processes are concerned. According to this research the motivational process affects how well children deploy their existing skills, how well they acquire new skills and knowledge and how well they transfer these new skills and knowledge to novel situations. As in the problem solving process within social work where the effective social worker seeks to address client motivation, so too in the field of education teachers have to facilitate student motivation and thereby encourage them to reach their educational goals. If motivation is not addressed, the process of teaching and learning is clearly deficient.

Yet, motivation is an abstract term. We may speculate that a motivated educator will be more proficient in motivating his or her students but as authors such as Glasser (1984) suggest it is impossible to motivate someone else because there is no such a thing as extrinsic motivation. According to William Glasser's Choice Theory (1984) intrinsic motivation is the only existing motivation because it results from the urge to satisfy psychological or existential needs. One is

motivated only if the action he or she performs is going to satisfy at least one of his or her needs<sup>1</sup>. So if the curriculum is in general needs fulfilling, and if we ask every student the specific ways in which he or she would like to satisfy his or her learning needs, we will inevitably trigger their motivation.

When Entwistle (1988) asked students what motivated them to complete academic work successfully they gave three main answers: hope of success, fear of failure or personal interest. Motivation is crucial in education and this idea can be supported with McCombs and Whistler's research (1989) which argues that the *self* is crucial in the development of autonomous learning. They claim that all effective learning is autonomous.

It is an internally mediated, active, generative, and constructive process of attending, processing, and transforming information into both relatively stable and dynamic knowledge structures (McCombs and Whistler, 1989: 302).

Raaheim (1991) presented his ideas about motivation very much in accordance with above-mentioned research:

Human behaviour is basically motivated by needs for self-development and self-determination, and it follows that students are motivated by situations that: challenge them to become personally and actively involved in their own learning; are perceived as related to personal needs, interests and goals; present tasks that can be successfully accomplished; and allow for personal choice and control matched to age, stage and task requirements (Raaheim, 1991: 14).

Janek Wankowski (1969) an educational psychologist and university teacher found that students who had clearer picture of their professional career were significantly more successful in their studying. He discovered that students' attitudes to teaching and learning at university are most likely to derive from their wants and their expectations of how their wishes are to be met or fulfilled on entering an institution of higher education (Wankowski, 1991). His ideas are very

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<sup>1</sup>To remind the reader, according to Choice Theory, besides the existential need for survival, there are four basic psychological needs; love (belonging), power (competence, strength), fun (joy, learning, curiosity) and freedom (choice, independence, autonomy). Although these needs are universal and genetically programmed in every human being, the way of satisfying them is unique for every individual.

much in accordance with Glasser's idea that education has to be need fulfilling (Glasser, 1986) and when this is the case, the problem of motivation solves itself.

#### **2.4. Research on Effective Teaching Styles**

The teaching-learning process happens through the interaction between teachers and students in a specific context. It is essential here to focus on the research conducted on students' perceptions of academic departments and the research on what contributes to effective teaching. It is not easy to identify characteristics, which distinguish effective teachers from ineffective ones. The task is as difficult as finding criteria to distinguish effective parents from ineffective ones. How can parents' effectiveness be measured? Would performance of their children be relevant? What are the other factors that influence performance of their children? How to measure this? History shows that many exceptional individuals did not have parents who were model parents. They did not even have good teachers who encouraged their talents but they succeeded. How to measure the effectiveness of teachers? By their students' success, by the number of papers and books they have published or by the way their courses are organised? It may be assumed that the only way to measure teachers' effectiveness is by observing their performance. This is similar to measuring the quality of the service of a physician, a social worker, or a lawyer. Many variables affect the teaching-learning situation and these variables in turn are changeable. Therefore, it is difficult to measure and control each element in the teaching-learning relationship. Three main factors or subjects are present in every teaching - learning situation. First is the *student*, with his or her background, genetic equipment, needs, goals, motivation, conscious and unconscious mind, and many other features. The second is the *teacher* with his or her complexity, including personality, educational background, values, skills, worldview... The third is the *environment* or the context where the process is taking place and this is dependent on the policy, and on social, economic, administrative and other variables.

Quantitative studies conducted in the late sixties (Stephens, 1967,

Dubin and Raveggia, 1986) revealed that college teaching methods made no difference in student achievement as measured by a final examination. These studies reinforced findings from earlier research, which suggested that students adjust their learning style to the teachers' expectations in order to pass exams. Gage (1972) discovered that effective teachers tend to behave approvingly, acceptably and supportively. Their attitude towards students is positive and they tend to trust and like people in general.

Bligh (1972) commented on educational research in the early seventies, stating that the traditional lecture is an appropriate method to teach factual knowledge, whereas creative, critical thinking and analytical skills are much better developed through discussion or exercises, workshops, problem-solving and experience-based learning activities. In the twentieth century, with computerised libraries and easy access to literature, using lectures to transmit factual knowledge seems to be too time consuming. Workshops, exercises, problem solving and experience based learning activities differ from lectures in one important point and this is the level of involvement. Students may be involved in lectures but most of them are not unless it is a discussion-lecture. Sometimes the lecturer is able to keep the students' attention for two hours but for that he or she needs to be a good entertainer, as well.

Sheffield (1974) conducted a study on 1000 Canadian students asking them to describe excellent university teachers. In general excellent teachers were described as ones who are masters in their subject matter, who are well prepared for the lectures, who relate the material to practical issues, who encourage students to ask questions and who are enthusiastic about their subject matter.

Ramsden and Entwistle (1981) set up a study with a sample of 2,200 students about students' perceptions of their academic departments. The students were studying in the departments of arts, social sciences and engineering and their findings indicated that departments which were oriented towards personal meaning were graded much better than were departments which did not encourage personal meaning in their study. Students reported that personal meaning is supported when the Department encourages the freedom to learn, helps with

specific difficulties and effectively lectures. This findings reflect Sheffield's study (1974), where effective lecturing was described as lecturers being prepared for lectures, being in contact with students, showing interest for the subject they were talking about and demonstrating interest in students' opinions. Enthusiasm for the subject being taught was stressed as one of the most important characteristics of good teachers, together with concern for the students and interest in students as persons. Teachers who were described as "good" tried to convey to the students an interest in the subject. They carefully planned their lectures and were open to questions.

The characteristics of "poor" teaching were inappropriate assessment, lack of freedom to learn, heavy workload, lecturers not being prepared for lectures, confusing lectures, and distant behaviour towards students. One of the main characteristics criticised by students was the lack of interest in the students and failure to admit that there was a lack of communication between teachers and students.

Brennan and Percy (1976) followed findings from Entwistle, Marton, Ramsden and Hounsell obtained during the period from 1970 to 1976, and pointed out that students from different universities were almost unanimous in their criticism of teachers, with a high degree of consensus between teachers as to how university teaching should present itself. The way in which students and teachers described the *poor teacher* coincided, and while teachers thought that such a person was an exception, students thought that "poor" teachers were common at universities. Students even pointed out that they considered only a few teachers as *good*. Both parties agreed that courses should be organised with the aim of stimulating students' independence, flexibility and critical thinking. Both students and teachers attached blame to a system that was inefficient and provided poor working conditions (lack of time, shortage of resources, large number of students in lecture and tutorial groups, numerous committee assignments). However external conditions such as these, should not establish barriers to effective relationships between students and teachers in education; a goal which according to the research, both parties are seeking. While both parties seek similar goals the

situation changes significantly when it comes to practice. Brennan and Percy (1976) identified inconsistency between the statements of teachers and their actual teaching practice. One example they gave, quoted teachers as saying that they were not in favour of rote learning, of strict dependence on the curriculum or on mechanical routines, yet these were the aspects of the teaching process they stressed most in their daily work. Brennan and Percy found that even though students and teachers stress the importance of 'criticism', 'enthusiasm' and 'tolerance', they attach different meanings to these words.

Entwistle (1984) points out that lecturers' educational objectives in higher education are frequently inconsistent with their teaching practice. Most teachers, when asked, claim that they encouraged *deep approach* to learning and student involvement but in practice, they adhere to the traditional paradigm of learning, teaching and research, expecting students to regurgitate rather than to critically examine the material.

Waters, Kemp and Pucci (1988) conducted a study on psychology students who described good teachers as professionals with positive personal, motivational and interpersonal characteristics, while 'poor' teaching was described in terms of incompetent behaviour in the classroom.

Marsh (1987) and Kurz, Mueller, Gibbons and Dicataldo (1989) agreed that there was no single criterion of effective teaching, but at the same time they considered student evaluations to be reliable, stable and valid.

McCombs and Whistler (1989) argued that in order to enhance autonomous learning, the teacher has to understand and demonstrate real interest, caring and concern for each student and his or her needs, interests and goals. The teacher must challenge students to invest effort in taking personal responsibility, to be actively involved in learning activities; to relate content and activities to personal needs, interests and goals, and to structure their learning so that each can accomplish personal goals and experience success.

Common (1989) states that there are four primary responsibilities of an effective teacher and these are: responsibility to create, maintain, lead and close teaching settings. In his research he found that there are five characteristics of an

effective teaching setting:

1. All participants are actively engaged,
2. The setting is governed through decentralised management,
3. There is orderly instructional practice,
4. The setting evolves in educationally worthwhile ways, and
5. The setting is closed through the summative evaluation of the worth of its process and products (Common, 1989).

All mentioned research supports the following characteristics of excellence in university teaching: enthusiasm, clarity, preparation and organisation, stimulation, love, knowledge and experience. The other group of desirable characteristics of an effective teacher are described as interpersonal skills or abilities and are listed as follows: ability to create warm, close relationships with students; ability to support; ability to listen, to accept students' opinions and experiences; ability to give positive and negative feed-back without favouritism or criticism; ability to support students in being creative and independent; and ability to support mutuality and a non-competitive atmosphere in the classroom.

Research on student perceptions of academic departments suggests that ongoing education for academics, including teaching skills training and information in the specific field in which the teacher is involved, and continuous evaluation of the courses from its participants, may keep university education viable and improve its quality. Continuous communication between students and teachers may contribute to this goal. Exploration of student motivation, knowledge, needs and outcomes prior to a course is essential in creating courses that will help students achieve the knowledge they need for their future career. It is also important that teachers explore their own motivation, knowledge, needs and outcomes. The characteristics of the environment, goals and outcomes and standards for assessment need to be presented to the students and if possible discussed and changed according to their learning needs. When teachers and students are clear about how the teaching - learning encounter can help them

achieve their outcomes, it is easier for them to activate their intrinsic motivation, set individual educational outcomes and be involved in the process of learning. The process of preparation requires careful planning and the taking into account of the unique needs of individuals and the distinctiveness of each setting. This is particularly important for social work field instruction.

## **2.5. Empirical Studies in Social Work Field Instruction<sup>2</sup>**

In some social work schools, especially in the USA, approximately fifty percent of the students' time is spent in practicum settings (Brownstein, 1981), yet until 1980, research exploring field instruction in social work was minimal. Most researchers focussed on participants and not on the actual process of practice teaching. Holtzman and Raskin (1989) conducted a study that revealed that special attention should be directed towards:

1. Ascertaining the criteria and variables that are key for an efficient, functional placement/replacement process
2. The need to implement the value of effective collaboration between all the principle agents involved - faculty, agency, field instructor, and student
3. The quality, quantity and appropriateness of learning experiences, including their sequence/progression in the field, and relatedness to the school curriculum.

In 1984, a one year Project on field instruction was conducted to explore current challenges to quality in social fieldwork education (Skolnik, 1989) in the USA. Findings indicated agreement between field educators and agency personnel about the following problematic areas:

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'field instruction' is defined in Chapter Three under the subheading 3.4. The Challenge of Fieldwork – Making Sense of Actions

1. Integration of academic content and field experience.
2. Conflicting demands of job and field instruction responsibilities.
3. Need for standards for the evaluation of students.
4. Training for new and experienced field instructors.
5. Communication between school and agencies.
6. Qualification and needs of students (Skolnik, 1989).

Other studies conducted in the USA and Europe defined the same problem areas and stressed the importance of integrating fieldwork with the academic content of the programme.

### ***2.5.1. Research on Transfer from the Classroom to the Field***

In the field of social work education the learning process is considered to be effective if knowledge can be transferred from the classroom to the field. Glaser (1984) considers that effective learners are characterised by self-regulatory or metacognitive capabilities, by which he means being aware of one's own knowledge, being able to predict the outcome of one's behaviour, planning, apportioning time and resources, monitoring and adapting one's own resources. These skills, when used in a variety of tasks and in several fields of knowledge, can become abstracted competencies. What Glaser calls *metacognitive capabilities* is in accordance with what Schon (1987) refers to as *reflectiveness*, or the capabilities of a reflective learner. Block (1985) believes that the problem of transfer can be overcome by including three essential features: metacognitive skills, abundant real-life examples and exercises and an emphasis on writing skills.

Prawat (1989) argues that effective learning involves knowledge, strategy or skill, and the disposition either towards performance or mastery of the specific skill or knowledge. Raaheim (1991) claims that knowledge, strategy or skill and disposition are largely a function of two important factors, organisation and awareness, and the task of the educator is to encourage these. It is proposed that

organisation can be encouraged by the presentation of key concepts which are carefully selected and which have maximum potential for relationships with other concepts and wide applicability and, that awareness can be encouraged by supporting students to articulate their own thoughts, discuss ideas and apply information.

Bergendal (1983) in his analysis of Swedish Higher education argues that at most universities the dominant kind of knowledge is theory based, propositional and cognitive. He maintains that academics view knowledge as objective, independent of the world it describes, value-free and explicit, whereas there are other equally legitimate forms of knowledge such as skills, experience and empathy. Bergendal tries to explain that research takes precedence over teaching because those who teach are less interested in how and why students learn than in what they know in terms of what they exhibit in the examination process. Bergendal's research was conducted in 1983, since then, teaching methods especially in social sciences, have moved from linear towards more circular and holistic approaches, but they are still an exception. Bergendal's research suggests the importance of focusing on the process of teaching and learning, as opposed to education which is only content oriented.

Radford and Rose (1989) in their analysis of academic education in the field of psychology, stressed that skills, experience and empathy have come to be of less value, or even irrelevant in the education of psychology students. Their research has shown that psychology students are trained to be laboratory researchers rather than helping professionals despite the fact that a relatively small number ended up as researchers and most psychology graduates entered the helping professions.

Collins (1985) conducted research on transferring interviewing skills from the laboratory to the field in social work education with the major finding being the inability of students to transfer the learned interpersonal interviewing skills from the laboratory to the field practicum. This study showed that laboratory teaching, using role-play methods, proved to be effective if the researcher measured students' improvement in interviewing skills in role-play situations, but

students showed difficulties in transferring those skills into the real life situations. While role-play methods may be useful they are insufficient in themselves in teaching students how to perform professional social work. In Collins' study students who showed good interviewing skills in the laboratory, in contact with real clients tended to be "warm and supportive" yet quite unprofessional, and they did not use any of the skills learned in the laboratory. Secker (1993) calls this approach the *everyday social approach* describing it as an approach where the student is simply trying to meet the client's needs by being friendly. An *everyday social approach* may initially be comfortable for the client, but it rarely produces any change and is not particularly helpful for the client. When using this approach, students do not feel that they have been of any help after such interactions, and they do not have the chance of testing out and developing an expanding their skill repertoire (Collins, 1985).

According to Collins there are three possible reasons why students did not transfer skills learned in the laboratory to the field:

1. Depressed scores in the field due to measurement anxiety
2. Differences inherent in the laboratory setting as compared to field setting, example, differences in expectations lead to differences in skill performance
3. Differences in skill measures, that is, written, role-play or actual client lead to differences in skill performance (Collins, 1985: 56-57).

It is interesting that Collins in her study made no specific mention that by using the social *approach* in work with clients, students showed their sensibility and common sense and in spite of the pressure that every measurement provokes, (students were instructed to use the skills they had learned with their clients) they chose to use the social approach, which at least may do less harm to the client than 'practising newly learned skills' on their clients. It may be that those students who were careful or even cautious in using learned skills and who did not agree to experiment on clients were the most ethical and the most empathic. It is not easy to be certain about what was the real 'cause' of not using learned skills. Even students themselves, may not be aware of the complex processes which happen in

client-student situations. The other difficulty which may have an impact on the validity of the experiment is the fact that every instance of an observer, a screen, or video-equipment influences the experiment. Furthermore, social work processes are complex and it takes time to carry out an intervention. In other words it is much easier to confront a colleague in a role play situation than it is to confront a client in distress. The confrontation in the latter situation may have more serious consequences.

Gayla Rogers (1985) developed a model, which attempted to overcome the gap between the classroom and the field in social work education. In her exploratory research she found that block orientation bridges a gap between the classroom and the field and provides a greater opportunity for maximising learning opportunities available through the field setting. This format proved to be preferred by students and she measured more participation and commitment than in traditional settings. Her exploratory study was conducted with students in the third year of a BSW programme. Block orientation comprised an intensive week of practicum instructions (27 hours) at the beginning of the term. Rogers observed that students placed in agencies for their first field practicum were often confused, and lacked confidence, skills and knowledge. She perceived an absence of a support peer group, which may have provided a communication network, and an outlet for sharing concerns, fears, frustrations and accomplishments. Through observation and discussions with students and field instructors she realised that it often took until midway through the thirteen week placement before the student felt comfortable or secure enough in the setting to take the fullest possible advantage of the practicum learning experience. A similar situation was observed in the classroom and supervision settings where it required at least six weeks to establish group solidarity, exhibited by openness, sharing and support (Rogers, G. 1985).

Rogers attempted to overcome these limitations by organising the practical part of the education in such a way that during the first week of the term (27 hours) students were first instructed in the classroom, and then in the second week

commenced fieldwork. During the first week students had the opportunity to review what they had already learned and to transfer this information into a practice context. They had the chance to identify what they needed to learn in order to achieve objectives. During the first week of preparation for fieldwork, skills and techniques were practised using videotaping and role-playing. Value issues and concerns were addressed and students began to identify the abilities and strengths, which they already had. In this preparatory phase students were presented with an overview of social work practice with particular emphasis from a systems perspective on basic constructs. According to the report the students became actively engaged and involved during that week. Experiential exercises were used to build trust among students and by the end of the week they were able to formulate their learning objectives and expectations. Students were asked to form dyads and to conduct a twenty-minute interview with one person presenting a real personal problem or concern, and the other was in the role of a helper. Interviews were videotaped and later played back for the entire class, then evaluated and discussed with regard to structure, format, techniques, concepts, merit, limitations and relationship to theory.

The outcome appears to be that students begin the process of taking responsibility for their learning which is required for the practicum experience to be successful and they begin to identify their peer group as a resource for themselves. An atmosphere of familiarity and the outgrowth of mutual respect which creates a vibrancy and high level of energy are characteristic of this intensive week of contact. The students appear to take risks, to deal with differences, to disagree and to confront each other at an earlier stage. They also appear to support each other, to value feedback, to share concerns, and to place a high regard on the importance of the group early in the term. The data suggests this positive group experience and group solidarity enhances the value of the practicum and demonstrably expands the learning experience. (Rogers, G. 1985: 63).

This evaluative research shows that students find group support extremely valuable, because it offers the opportunity to express their ideas, take risks, and give and receive feedback. Students involved in the block course expressed the need for additional workshops aimed at practising skills, which was predictable

given the short time planned for skill acquisition in the curriculum. Rogers' research shows how important it is to listen to students' feedback when courses are organised. It also demonstrates that preparation before entering the field may help students to use the field experience to better advantage. Her research illustrates that skills training in social work is a complex process. It is not sufficient to simply present steps of the problem solving process to students and to expect that they will apply it correctly and immediately in a fieldwork situation. Performing social work methods and skills is tightly tied to the ethics of the profession, which is not possible to be rote learned or trained. When personal growth and development is embedded in the course, it encourages group commitment, involvement and holistic learning and it affords students the opportunity to explore their own values which will inevitably govern their future practice.

As the mission and the vision of social work education varies from country to country and from school to school, so too do educational objectives for social workers. Most studies conducted in the USA evaluating the effectiveness of training in helping skills, were pre-test post-test experimental designs (Fischer, 1975; Clubok, 1978, Shapiro, Mueller-Lazar and Witkin, 1980; Kopp and Butterfield, 1985 and Larsen and Hepworth, 1982). According to Secker (1993), in these studies researchers sacrificed the validity of their performance measures in order to achieve an acceptable level of reliability. The aim of these studies was to evaluate the effectiveness of training and while in all studies students' skills improved, the skills - which were measured, were confined to role-playing situations. Only Kopp and Butterfield (1985) went further and carried out a test designed to ascertain whether the skills demonstrated in the role-plays were successfully transferred to practice. Commenting on their research Secker observed:

They found out not only that the skills acquired in training did not transfer to practice, but also that a homogeneity of style which developed amongst the student sample during training dissipated in the field. (...) Kopp and Butterfield offer a number of explanations for these findings, including the possibility that work with clients involves complexities which are not reflected in role played situations (Secker, 1993: 7).

Schon (1983) rejected the commonly held assumptions about the use of theory in practice and wrote that skilled practitioners do not solve problems in a step by step way as commonly prescribed within the professions. He claimed that effective practitioners engage in a 'reflective conversation' in the course of which the particular situation is framed and reframed according to the practitioner's repertoire of theories (explanations) and skills to find possible solutions. These explanations and solutions are then adapted until a satisfying solution is found. The solution is at the same time an explanation. Schon calls this process 'reflection-in-action' and the process of learning for the practitioner is in adding the new solution and explanation to his or her means of understanding and resolving problematic situations. The new solution and explanation will then be adapted and modified in new situations. Schon views practitioners as researchers who develop their own stock of theories through experience.

Gould (1989) supported Schon's ideas (1983, 1987), arguing that social work educators should focus on enabling students to derive theories from their experiences in practice. England (1986) proposes that the use of theory is to enhance social workers' understanding of the situations they encounter. This is impossible if theories are presented in the form of discrete sets of propositions, which offer a complete explanation for human situations. At this point we are drawn back to the idea that permeates the first chapter of this thesis, namely, that the use of theory is not to explain, but to probe, check and test. Probing may be the step forward in applying theory to practice. According to Schon:

Perhaps we learn to reflect-in-action by learning first to recognise and apply standard rules, facts and operations; then to reason from general rules to problematic cases in ways characteristic of the profession; and only then to develop and test new forms of understanding and action where familiar categories and ways of thinking fail (Schon, 1987: 40).

Schon's considerations are in accordance with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and notions of andragogy. Secker's (1993) comparative research, using a qualitative, descriptive methodology contributes to these ideas. She

analysed three approaches adopted by students in field practice: the *everyday social approach*, already mentioned earlier, in commenting on Collins' research, the *fragmented approach* and the *fluent approach*.

The three approaches observed in Secker's research can be interpreted and integrated within the framework of Kolb's experiential learning theory in which three levels of consciousness in learning are distinguished; registrative, interpretative and integrative. Students using the *everyday social approach* use their registrative level of consciousness by simply being in contact with clients, listening, watching, talking with them and getting involved. Students who employ the *fragmented approach* are able to connect theory with practice only in hindsight, so they are only able to interpret what happens in the client-student situation after the experience. Kolb (1984) stressed that an interpretative level of consciousness gives direction and structure to the unfocussed elaboration of registrative consciousness. It also channels experience into more integrated forms of affective, perceptual, symbolic and behavioural complexity. The interpretative level of consciousness is very powerful and can be a trap into which many young professionals may fall. Interpretation of a specific situation, if it proves to be 'right', helpful or if reinforced by the teacher, creates positive feed-back that may channel experience in that direction. The student who has developed integrative consciousness is less inclined to put labels on clients because he or she will be concerned with the client's situation in its totality. If students become "believers" in a single theory there is a danger of labelling clients and of attempting to fit them into 'Procrustes beds' and never moving further to reach an integrative level of consciousness. Integrative consciousness introduces purpose and direction to the experience.

To interpretative consciousness, integrative consciousness adds a holistic perspective. Interpretative consciousness is primarily analytic; experiences can be treated singly and in isolation. Integrative consciousness is primarily synthetic, placing isolated experiences in a context that serves to redefine them by resulting figure - ground contrasts (Kolb, 1984: 150).

Issues of integrative consciousness are defined broadly in time and space and this level of consciousness creates integrity by centring and carrying forward

the flow of experience. The *fluent approach* can be employed only through integrative consciousness, or if talking in terms of Experiential Learning Theory when a learner has already accomplished the acquisition and specialisation stage of development and when he or she has reached the integration level of learning. Integrative consciousness deals with what Glasser (1984) calls the *quality world*, with what Frankl (1967) calls *meaning* and requires what Antonowski (1987) calls the *sense of coherence*.

It may be assumed that the person with a developed integrative consciousness will easily transfer knowledge from the classroom to the field. The key question essential for social work education which arises from Kolb's and Secker's findings, is:

***What teaching methods in the academic framework enable students to develop abilities necessary for a fluent approach or the development of integrative consciousness?***

Abilities of registrative and interpretative consciousness are prerequisites for developing integrative consciousness. Different teaching methods activate different levels of consciousness. In Secker's research students indicated that lectures on human development and family work were very useful and stressed that theory heightened their awareness of facets which they had previously taken for granted. During the process of note taking at lectures registrative consciousness is active. Students reported that 'labels' helped them to discuss the matters and therefore learn more effectively. In 'labelling', interpretative consciousness is active. On the other hand, 'labelling' has to be rejected in order to develop a flexible approach and to activate integrative consciousness. Thus labelling and trying to apply ready-made theories in practice is part of the way of becoming an effective practitioner. It is obvious that students have to pass through all levels of consciousness in order to develop an integrative consciousness. At this point the problematic nature of teaching social work practice becomes apparent. Is it ethical to let students practise 'labelling' and 'step by step' ready

made theories on clients in order to become effective practitioners some time in the future? Is it ethical to practise skills with clients who have sufficient problems on their own to solve, and who do not need a young and more or less ambitious student to test on them theories just learnt at school? While the value of experience with clients is irreplaceable the issue for social work education is how to organise curricula so as to support students in becoming 'integrative practitioners' without condoning practice *on* clients?

This thesis focuses on evaluating effectiveness the Contact-Challenge Method, which offers an opportunity to students to use the social, fragmented and fluent approach during the course in their own pace. Students use the *social approach* at the beginning of their encounter with clients and during skills training workshops students have the chance to experiment with the *fragmented approach*, practising problem solving skills with each other in order to become aware of its advantages and disadvantages. The aim of the programme is to enable them to develop the *fluent approach* and to be ready to apply it in their placement in the following year, or, if they develop it during the year, to approach their client with a more advanced approach. The *fragmented approach* may be dangerous in that it may cause harm to clients. It is argued that if students go through that phase practising with each other in a safe skills training group atmosphere they will not then need to practise these skills *on* clients.

### ***2.5.2. Research on Methods of Teaching Social Work Practice***

Burgess and Jackson (1990) stressed the importance of active involvement in social work education. Their article about action learning describes a thematic approach that aims to involve students in defining their learning priorities and of addressing them through a range of learning resources. In response to students' criticism about a traditional, passive, ex-cathedra way of presenting knowledge, in the last decade a range of innovative, experiential and active approaches has developed. Harris (1985) exploring the transfer of learning in social work education suggested that teaching methods which avoid a 'master-pupil'

relationship and emphasise the student's active role and responsibility for finding solutions, are more closely related to the demands of practice than are traditional methods. In Secker's (1993) study, sixteen of nineteen students interviewed at the end of their training singled out the emphasis on lecturing as being amongst the most disappointing features of the course. A student from her sample described the traditional way of organising social work education in the following way:

I mean, you get sociology thrown at you, you get psychology thrown at you, you get social policy thrown at you, you get human development thrown at you, and then you get twenty-seven client groups thrown at you. Now there may be a lot of information there that's useful and valid, but there's no way of linking it together. It's all divided up separately and I find it difficult to learn from that. I needed a map, something to make it make sense (Secker, 1993: 109).

The main disadvantages of the traditional approach as expressed by students are boredom, a huge amount of information not connected to practice, lack of acceptance of their own experience, lack of interest for their values and attitudes, and lack of guidelines as to how to use theoretical knowledge in future practice (Secker, 1993). The disadvantages of the traditional, or as Freire (1972) calls it "banking" approach to education are highlighted with students outlining clear preferences as to how their education might be conducted. In Secker's study one student remarked:

I've learnt far more from my placement than from the school learning. I think through experiencing something I learn more, whereas the course dismisses your experience as if what was before wasn't important. "You're now back to learn how to do it properly", that's the attitude. Whereas a lot of what we were doing was good work. It was important work, and it was hard work. Try telling them that. They pay lip service to it, but they don't listen (Secker, 1993: 110).

Writing about the part played by academic teaching in social work education, Secker stressed that:

It seems possible, then, that an emphasis on lecturing, and a concomitant lack of attention to the student's own experience as well as to their values and attitudes, may have played some part in developing or perpetuating the fragmentation of knowledge depicted in many of their accounts (Secker, 1993: 111).

In Secker's study (1993), tutorials were perceived by students as not being very helpful. What the students did perceive as helpful was the kind of approach which combined warmth and a personal interest in the students as individuals, combined with a more challenging approach to identifying strengths and learning needs. Students identified as very helpful the inclusion of practitioners in order to supplement information presented by lecturers. They also identified videotaped role-play in skills teaching as very helpful and appreciated the fact that it was undertaken in small groups. They also appreciated the opportunity to observe and reflect on their practice and to hear feedback from their teachers and fellow students.

As an answer to demands coming from practice and students, a *Contract Learning* approach was developed in the USA. The approach is described by Knowles (1990) as a most potent tool in the processes of teaching and learning. *Contract Learning* was designed to address the wide range of educational backgrounds, experiences, interests, motivations and abilities demonstrated by students, and at the same time to tailor educational programmes according to students' prior learning and learning goals. It envisaged an individual perspective with regard to learning and supported students in taking responsibility for their own learning. The use of learning contracts is applicable in various fields of learning with the framework being the same in all settings. Students create their own learning contracts following the eight steps that Knowles (1990) proposed:

1. Diagnosing learning needs
2. Specifying learning objectives
3. Specifying learning resources and strategies
4. Specifying Evidence of Accomplishment
5. Specify how the evidence will be validated
6. Review the contract with consultants (supervisors, teachers)
7. Carry out the contract
8. Evaluation of learning (self - evaluation, peer - evaluation, supervisor's evaluation)

The Learning Contracts approach has been developed as a result of significant research about adult learning conducted by Tough (1979). Tough's

findings show that when adults initiate learning they experience it as something natural, (as contrasted with being taught something), and as a consequence, they became highly self-directed. What adults learn on their own initiative, they learn more deeply and permanently than when they learn by being taught (Knowles, 1990).

Michael (1976) described a similar approach in social work education called the 'educational contract'. The starting point is addressing students' learning needs, exploring their strengths and skills, as well as their previous experiences. The approach is supportive and encouraging with students being respected and accepted as unique individuals. Continuous connections with theory are made and cases are discussed without imposing a specific theoretical or ideological framework. Students are encouraged to reflect on their work and supervisors do not offer ready-made solutions. Student's concerns are utilised as opportunities to learn. They set the standards themselves according to which their achievements are evaluated and ultimately they accept responsibility for demonstrating learned knowledge, skills and change in values.

## **2.6. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Teaching Methods**

At the same time when action research in the seventies used a combination of social research and social action to improve practice (Halsey, 1972, Parlett and Hamilton, 1976); the model of evaluating programmes by client evaluation started to emerge. Mayer and Timms (1970) published a study "The client speaks" where sixty-five clients were asked to evaluate the social services they received. From that time an increasing number of social welfare organisations, both statutory and voluntary, acknowledged that consulting the consumer could enhance the effectiveness of services (Croft and Beresford, 1990). The term *empowerment* became a key word in practice and social scientists as well as professionals started to see clients as being responsible for their behaviour and for the evaluation of the services. Asking client's about the quality of the services they received became an

integral part of evaluation in the nineties. The opinions of clients were accepted but in a different form from the psychoanalytically oriented social workers of the 1970's and 1980's who had used what clients said to contribute to the professionals' expert diagnosis of a client's pathology. Today, client evaluation is accepted without interpretation, as relevant information. A social worker attempts to understand what contributed to that perspective and how clients' opinions can help social workers improve their practice. A social worker discusses clients' views with them, respecting their position, but not necessarily agreeing with them. Social workers are not in search of an objective truth, but rather are engaged in the study of social systems, constantly trying to improve their understanding of human behaviours and conditions. The client's opinion, therefore, is essential in enabling social workers to better understand the broad spectrum of situations and ways of experiencing things that human beings encounter.

In the field of education qualitative evaluation requires finding out what is happening from a participant's way of thinking, feeling and doing. Methods suitable for this kind of evaluation are participant observation, in-depth interviews, case studies, diaries, and questionnaires. The responsibility for evaluation is thus moved from the external 'expert' to the internal participants. Positivist belief that an evaluator can observe and not influence the process is exchanged with one emphasising a holistic worldview where the researcher is engaged in the process of participant evaluation and all participants evaluate the process in which they are involved. Action research is in its essence evaluative and evaluation is not a separate entity but rather is built into the assessment process.

It can be argued that the evaluation is the key to improving the quality of teaching. Testing achievement by examination, accreditation procedures or both does not improve the quality of the education. It may only support the perpetuation of the same methods of teaching. Dahllof (1991) suggests that the main reason why evaluation of higher education should not rely only on the testing of achievement in examination or accreditation procedures, is that:

- (1) Examinations do not provide explanations for poor results.
- (2) In order to assist improvement, examinations must be supplemented by special diagnostic studies of the underlying causes, in terms of resources, organizational issues (or frame conditions) and processes. In turn this implies considerable delay before appropriate action can be taken (Dahllof, 1991: 147).

Evaluation by students combined with other methods provides very useful information for course improvement. Feedback from practice is essential to keep tertiary education alive and in continuous contact with 'real life' outside the campus. Methods that were suitable two years ago may not be appropriate anymore. Students studying social work today will be practitioners in the 21st century. They have to be prepared for the challenges that the future will bring. Self-evaluation methods seem suitable for the evaluation of social work education because they are transferable to social work practice with clients and at the same time are useful for social work educators in evaluating their own performance. Self-evaluation is empowering, in that it leads to improvement and increases responsibility. It also provides the opportunity for self-insight and for the possibility for self-correction.

### **2.6.1. Action Research in Higher Education**

Self-corrective practice and continuous improvement of teaching programmes is the main aim of the action research. It is an empowering method of evaluation and it might influence higher education by giving students greater opportunity to participate in the organisation of courses and by enabling teachers to be reflexive and self-evaluative. For the purposes of exploring and improving education for helping professions (social work, medicine, nursing, education, psychology, special education and the like) where fieldwork is an essential part of the curriculum, action research offers methods that evaluate learning in terms of theory, practice and experience. Since action research requires the teaching staff to adapt to the needs and styles of various student groups and to respect student's prior experience and learning styles, it requires flexibility, readiness to change and

open-mindedness on the part of teachers. Action research is participatory, evaluative and self-reflexive. It is therefore particularly suitable for courses where the traditional transmission of a body of knowledge through lecture-assignment form is exchanged with experiential teaching that draws on the experiences of students, through processes of concurrent negotiation and subsequent evaluation (Winter, 1989).

Tertiary education has to be innovative and responsive to the demands of practice that are constantly changing. Courses that comprise fieldwork have a greater chance for constant improvement particularly if they employ action research methods where field instructors, teachers, students and clients are equal participants in the process of education. Zuber-Skerritt's (1992) meta-research on action research showed that through systematic, controlled action research, tertiary education teachers can become more professional, more interested in the pedagogical (in fact, andragogical) aspects of tertiary education and more motivated to integrate their research and teaching interests in a holistic way. She concluded that action research can lead to greater job satisfaction, better academic programmes, improvement of student learning and practitioner's insights and contributions to the advancement of knowledge in tertiary education (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).

Another example comes from Australia, from the Faculty of Agriculture at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, where, from 1979 experiential programmes have been continuously developing using action research for evaluation and improvement (Pacham, Roberts and Bowden, 1989). In 1989 Pacham, Roberts and Bowden reported that for ten years the Faculty had been developing experiential programmes - experientially, creating changes based on conceptual explorations of what they had experienced. The programmes continued developing and improving and the whole faculty became organised in an experiential way with a remarkably high level of participation. Their research not only showed how they educated their students but also how the programmes themselves kept developing. Involvement of farmers in the process of education and organising field placements for students on the farm helped them to learn holistically how to deal

with technological issues in agriculture. The focus was on the process of innovating, rather than on innovation itself. Since assessment of experiential learning had to be different from assessment in traditional forms of education, the experience of Hawkesbury College offered a model that could be applied in other university settings. The core mode and philosophy of all courses became experiential learning theory. The focus was on real life situations, using Kolb's experiential learning cycle to create abstract conceptualisations. Every abstract conceptualisation was tested in real life situations with students not only expected to take responsibility for their learning, but also for the validation of learning. Validations were obtained at various stages in the learning project in accordance with Kolb's learning modes where each stage represented one learning mode in the cycle of learning. Hawkesbury validations included:

1. Feedback from the situation explored as to the client's reaction to the learner's approach and any outcomes of the project from their perspective.
2. Reflections by the learner about the methodology used, techniques and skills developed, the process of learning itself, and what the project has meant to the learner in terms of personal growth.
3. Feedback from staff or other resource consultants on their use of particular concepts, methodologies, techniques and skills.
4. Feedback from peers on their role as a group member, or other aspects the peer is qualified to comment on.

Taken together such validation build up into a package that answers the questions:

- \*What did I plan to do, and why?
- \* What happened?
- \* How did it happen?
- \* How did I learn?
- \* Where does this lead me? (Pacham, Roberts and Bawden, 1989:141-142).

These validations were brought together by the students and integrated into an application to progress, or to graduate. Two teachers read the document (or three at the graduation plus a relevant external person to ensure community

acceptance of the standard of graduate) and then listened to an oral presentation by the student. This was a summative<sup>3</sup> rather than a formative assessment which was an ongoing process that occurred during most learning activities. Students were expected to respond to the formalised feedback, which they received for the tasks and projects they had completed. Throughout the whole curriculum focus was on three groups of competencies: affective, conative and cognitive. The learners' behaviour was accepted as total (comprising all aspects of the behaviour - thinking, feeling, doing and physiology), with the development of the learner being evaluated at the end of the course. The Hawkesbury experience demonstrates how experiential learning accompanied by action research can produce good results and enrich the continual development of the curriculum<sup>4</sup>.

Another interesting study from Australia is the Zuber-Skerrit's (1992) action research which sought to improve student learning and improve teaching in tertiary education through workshop and curriculum review activities. The aim of the research was to improve student learning through practical considerations and changes in the curriculum. From 1979 to 1992, when the study was published, the course on 'student study skills' was changing and developing through the continual process of action research. In 1985 it changed its name to "Course on learning skills". The learning skills programme in the research of Zuber-Skerritt (1992) comprised six parts including: introduction to university study and learning skills, library skills, essay writing skills, discussion skills, maths skills and study skills. In the first four weeks there were 15 learning skills sessions and at the end of the first term a workshop on examination skills was conducted. It was designed to reduce anxieties by familiarising students with the examination process. At the beginning of the second term three workshops were conducted and students were

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<sup>3</sup>There is a distinction between 'summative' and 'formative' evaluation, drawn by Scriven, Tyler and Gagne (1967) and the same distinction may be applied to student assessment. Summative evaluation is concerned with informing decisions about the overall achievements of a curriculum or course, and formative is aimed at course improvement, informing decisions about how developers should modify and refine curricula (Kemmis and Stake, 1988). In the context of student assessment 'summative' would be concerned with outcomes, and 'formative' with processes of how to achieve certain skills or knowledge.

<sup>4</sup>Hawkesbury experience is described in detail in Weil and McGill (1989) *Making Sense of Experiential Learning - Diversity in Theory and Practice*, Stony Stratford, SRHE and Open University Press.

encouraged to review the learning skills they had developed. The last four weeks included problem solving - understood as the highest cognitive skill including problem analysis, synthesis of solutions, creative brainstorming and evaluation. The programme was taught by 15 members of staff from various disciplines. Not all of the staff agreed with the philosophy of experiential learning and action research, and staff workshops were necessary to assist the implementation of the programme. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) concluded that meta - learning focusing on the process of learning in combination with the content of the course helped in establishing a positive learning environment. The study revealed that:

... a learning skills programme fulfils the function of setting up a learning environment which is conducive to effective learning for individual students as well as for groups of students, and in which the responsibility for the effectiveness of learning from discussion in tutorials or other group activities lies with the students, rather than with the teaching team (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992:34).

The study revealed that students who participated actively in learning sessions were able to appreciate that there were certain characteristics, problems and solutions that were common in learning and studying but which were also individual, depending on a person's existing knowledge. Active learning supports students in becoming more confident and motivated to learn how to learn. This occurs especially when students experience through discussion, that they can gain insight into their learning, and at the same time, develop skills and methods that are the most suitable for their personal cognitive systems.

Zuber-Skerritt (1992) suggested that student learning skills workshops should be an integral part of the academic programme. The study revealed that it is better if academics teach these skills as an integrated part of their course and that these skills should not be taught by outside experts or student counsellors. When academics are involved in such workshops they gain a better understanding of the process of student learning and also the means by which they might teach and help students learn. In such a way the *deep level* approach to studying was adopted. When students took responsibility for their learning they actually encouraged traditional teachers to change their attitudes towards rote-learning and

surface approaches. The processes of learning became mutual and vivid.

Harris and Zuber-Skerritt (1985) conducted action research that began with a study aimed at identifying gaps between institutional expectations and the needs of graduate professionals enrolled in the Coursework Master Programme at the School of Modern Asian Studies at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. After defining skills required for the programme and identifying student needs, the workshop course was designed and implemented. The workshop was evaluated by an open-ended questionnaire and reflected student appreciation of this type of approach. The process was perceived as being interactive and unthreatening, supportive and clear (Zuber-Skerritt and Rix, 1986). Students reported that they had benefited in at least two ways:

...they realised that their fellow students shared the same fears and difficulties; and they learnt skills and techniques which helped them psychologically and strategically in their dissertation writing (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).

From studies cited it may easily be seen that all action research is participatory and therefore suitable for evaluating teaching methods 'from inside'. Further, it can be seen that it does not provide definite answers or proof that any particular method is 'right' or 'wrong'. Rather, it offers a framework for reflection and ongoing improvement. There are no hidden questions in tests, which trick the participants in order to reveal 'scientific' truth. Action research is open and direct and relies on and addresses the same qualities in its participants.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

Research studies reviewed in this chapter show the importance of accepting differences in learning styles and the prevalence of the divergent and accommodative learning styles of social work students. Kolb's findings in the field of learning styles are central for developing effective programmes for social work education. All learning is tightly linked to student's motivation and goals. Motivation will increase if education is matching a student's learning style. An

individual approach to the learner and respect for his or her previous experiences improves the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Research about students' perceptions of academic departments shows that they desire good relationships with their teachers. In cases when such a relationship was realised student motivation increased. The process of education has to be complete and integrative in order to be effective. It is argued that integrative and holistic education must comprise concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalisation, and testing implications of concepts in new situation. Studies on effective teaching methods at academic departments have shown the effectiveness of andragogic ideas and they provide useful suggestions for tertiary education. Since in the field of social work the aim of education is the transference of skills from the classroom to the field, special emphasis should be put on designing curricula in order to provide a sound theoretical background, relevant skill training, and experience in practice that will be in accordance with the ethics of the profession.

The review of research on student learning and the effectiveness of teaching methods demonstrates the importance of communication between teachers and students. Teaching social work for the twenty first century should be different from teaching social work for the twentieth. Innovations in information technology should serve to improve global communications and to enhance relationships. Technology, seen from a mechanistic worldview serves to improve efficiency, whereas from a holistic worldview it should serve to improve effectiveness, the quality of services, networking and communication. Action research is now increasingly accepted in academic environments and offers a useful and powerful tool for improving courses by involving the participants in the process of evaluation. Experiential learning methods employ whole learners - their thinking, feeling, acting and their physiology. With adequate guidance learners are encouraged to use all learning modes and to develop an in-depth approach to learning. Learning is understood as a process, which adds quality to the learner's life. Learning contracts support students to be responsible for their learning and to take charge of ways in which they might achieve their learning goals. By using

these methods the whole tertiary atmosphere may change. It may become more vivid, more active, and more connected with practice. This is the challenge that social work education can not afford to miss.

## **PART TWO – PLANNING**

### **CHAPTER 3**

## **THE PROCESS OF TEACHING-LEARNING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

*Unquestionably, much of the genius of social work education has been, through the years, an intermingling of conceptual and experiential learning. Other professional disciplines have looked to social work as a model in the use of the practicum*

*Richard Lodge*

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter moves from a general discussion, as outlined in the previous chapters, to a focused discussion on social work education. The importance and indeed the necessity for the provision of integrated education in social work practice is discussed. The position that has been argued is that it is essential that the fieldwork is integrated into the course and not separated by time and schedule. Integrated learning of social work practice implies that learning theory, participation in practice and personal growth and development (which include reflecting upon one's own experience) are happening simultaneously. The integrative approach that has been advocated here focuses on enabling students to continuously reflect on their practice and to draw from their personal experiences. Furthermore, it allows social work values to be continuously challenged and checked for their cultural suitability. The proposed approach is interactive and requires action research for continuous evaluation, which accompanies it in order to maintain viability and flexibility. The position has been taken that the integrative courses are vivid and viable; they continuously integrate theory, practice and experience, and are based on notions of adult learning theory.

It is argued that effective education produces change in understanding, attitudes, values and skills – therefore, students who complete an integrative social work course should develop better understanding, become more skilful in dealing with various groups of social work clients, and change or enhance their perspective of themselves by becoming more in contact with values they hold dear as well as becoming more aware of their prejudices. These changes precede the change in attitudes. This chapter sets the stage for development of the Contact-Challenge Method. It focuses on the conditions, which are necessary for effective performance of the Contact-Challenge Method in social work education.

### **3.2. Teaching-Learning Social Work Theory - Attaching Meaning to the Words**

Theories offer frameworks for understanding; they also have a function to broaden students' knowledge. In the social work field the use of theories is to offer a scientific map for better understanding. Theories can also be limiting. A practitioner immersed in one theory may not be able to fully understand clients and may label their behaviour according to the theoretical approach to which the practitioner adheres. It is argued that reflective theories are the viable ones because these allow for scientific inquiry and change. Effective practitioners develop their theories according to their experience and their theoretical knowledge, advocating the position that the reflective approach is very valuable for social work practitioners because it

...acknowledges that contrary to the idea that formal theorising precedes action in a linear (from cause to effect) and deductive relationship, theory is typically implicit in a person's actions and may or may not be congruent with the theoretical assumptions the person believes themselves to be acting upon (Fook, 1996: 4).

Theories are useful for social workers in order to help them understand their clients and to broaden their knowledge, but theory of itself is not of any use

for the client. Social workers' ability to integrate theory with skill and values is essential for their performance to be effective. Therefore the value of teaching theory in social work is to offer a broad range of social work theories to students and to encourage them to develop the ability to critically reflect on them and to find ways to draw upon them in practice. Effective learning about theories should produce change in understanding. This change does not happen by rote learning and by mere accumulation of data. The change in understanding happens by reflection on learned theories and by integrating new knowledge into the learner's body of knowledge. Change in understanding happens when a learner makes sense of learned theories and when he or she is able to make use of them.

Lectures and literature reading are traditional and common ways of teaching theory at tertiary education environments. Lecturing is a method which is content-oriented and lecturer-centred (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). Discussions, experiential and experimental methods are, on the contrary, student-centred and process-oriented as explored in more detail in Part One of this thesis. Since one of the main goals of higher education is to develop a critical mind, rather than to accumulate a vast amount of factual knowledge, the main task of tertiary teachers is to encourage students to look for key concepts, to use prior knowledge, to be able to retrieve information and to develop the ability to reflect on learned theories. When education is participatory students are encouraged to understand, to reflect and use their creativity rather than only memorise facts.

It is argued that lectures are suitable for modern social work education only as an auxiliary form of teaching. Lectures may be helpful when literature for the specific field is not available to students, or as a short introduction to discussion on a specific theme or field of interest. Unfortunately, due to the usually large numbers of students, the tradition, and the attitude of "teach the way you have been taught", long lectures often make up the largest part of tertiary education. Bligh (1972) concludes that even though lectures, as a form of teaching, are accepted as a way of information transmission in higher education, for stimulation of thinking, personal and social adjustment, and change in attitudes, they are much less valuable than other teaching methods. The idea that

tertiary education has to be modernised is not new. Whitehead (1929) wrote about 'dead knowledge' that students are receiving by passive listening to the lectures and by swallowing ideas without any sense of their practical use. He wrote of the futility of accepting facts without checking and without creative testing of new ideas in new situations. Whitehead's idea was that students' creative potentials are underestimated by expecting them to take in huge amounts of data. This kind of knowledge is hard to memorise and easy to forget. Tertiary education has to enable, support and to build students' independence, or as Whitehead wrote,

...the sense of university education is a transformation of the boy's knowledge to the man's power (Whitehead, 1929: 38).

Whitehead uses terms such as wisdom and knowledge, assuming that knowledge is a prerequisite for wisdom and that wisdom is a creative knowledge, which is permanently applied and enriched. Sergejev (1977) mentions that the difference between knowledge and wisdom is that knowledge requires discipline and wisdom requires freedom and creativity. Therefore, utilising the wisdom of these two scientists and in trying to apply this wisdom to the education of social workers, we may say that social work education, in order to be effective, should encourage intrinsic motivation, creativity, freedom of choice, participation, independence, self-evaluation and activity. Ex-cathedra lectures are not the best method to achieve this goal.

Most teachers are used to the ex-cathedra approach and, most students take it for granted, as something that is impossible to change.<sup>1</sup> Lectures for two hours

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<sup>1</sup>Very often in tertiary education lecture theatres we may see 'student-sleepers', 'student-newspaper readers', 'student-eaters' and even 'student-card-players'. We may also meet some 'student-note takers' who may easily be mistaken for students who are copying missed lectures from 'student-note takers', or 'student-scribblers'. We may also meet few 'student-listeners' who are trying to follow what the lecturer is trying to transmit. An average ex-cathedra professor will ask at the end of the lecture, "Any questions?" or "Is everything clear?" In most cases students will politely nod, regardless to which of the mentioned categories they belong, because they know, that if they do not ask anything, they would have a break and discuss matters if the lecture was interesting, or have some fun, discussing something unrelated to the lecture. If a student asks something at the end of the lecture, others will in most cases start to make noises with papers or start moving in their chairs, knowing that this is the chance for the teacher-preacher to continue with his or her endless monologue. This description may sound too harsh, but it is unfortunately the reality of many university settings.

on topics for which literature exists, is as senseless as encouraging rote learning on a tertiary level. If the goal of tertiary education is to stimulate students to become responsible, to create change in their understanding and to enable them to orient themselves in various situations in life, it is necessary to give them opportunity for active participation in the teaching-learning process.

Many authors from various parts of the world have written about the inappropriateness of the ex-cathedra approach in modern tertiary education (Gregory, 1975, Sergejev, 1977). The ex-cathedra approach under-estimates the student's abilities and is time consuming. An average reader requires only half an hour to read and understand material for which two hours of lectures are needed. On the other hand, lectures are, in most cases, interpretations of the books of very well known authors. When students learn from notes they have taken, they learn from interpretations of the interpretations. Long monologues rarely stimulate the thinking processes and connections with previous knowledge. More often, they encourage passivity and lack of interest.

The above mentioned critique of lectures as an outdated method of teaching does not intend to completely negate its effectiveness. There are many excellent lecturers who are able to transmit knowledge through this medium. An interesting lecturer may stimulate creative processes in listeners, but only in cases when certain conditions are present. The following conditions are derived from Gregory (1975), Sergejev (1997) and from my personal experience as a student and as a lecturer. They are presented and applied to social work education and the analysis is based on research on student learning presented in Chapter Two.

The aim of a lecture is to supplement and explain required literature. For the practical and continuously changing profession as social work is, discussions are necessary to help students become aware of the actuality and application of recommended readings. According to Gregory (1975), the aim of the lecture is not to interpret materials from the required literature. Therefore the form of a dialogue as opposed to monologue is more suitable for tertiary education. The balance of talking and listening is the main feature of a good dialogue. When topics are linked to students' personal experiences and enriched with the lecturer's

experiences in the field, students' prior knowledge and experiences from the field of social work or related fields, become important and therefore, students become more motivated to make sense of the learned theories.

When students are encouraged to ask questions during and not after lectures, the monotony of the lecturer's monologue is interrupted, the content is refreshed and discussion is stimulated. These interruptions are most relevant for the change in understanding to happen. When themes are discussed and when students ask questions they clarify ideas in their minds and integrate them with their prior knowledge. Students' participation gives an opportunity for lecturers to get to know their students, to learn from them and can encourage peer-learning. In the field of social work, discussions on controversial issues deepen the theoretical knowledge of the value base of social work. This enables students to explore their prejudices and that is essential for becoming an effective social worker. Students' examples are valuable because they show students' understanding of the presented material and they add freshness to the lecture. The lecturer's personal experience is a valuable resource as well, unless it is overdone. Students should know what advantage is to be gained by participating in lectures. Coming prepared to a lecture should be required of all students as the aim of a lecture is to clarify issues arising from literature and to enable students to express their thoughts and attitudes about certain problems.

During a lecture various perceptive channels can be used. Focusing on only auditive or visual channels may make lectures boring. When all five senses are used in lecturing, students learn holistically. Humour and anecdotes can be very helpful, but neither the lecturer nor the students should ridicule anybody. Feed-back from students is essential for effective lecture performance. As active participants in the process students need to have the opportunity to express their ideas and to share with the lecturer those methods, which they do not find beneficial.

In the age of information technology teachers are definitely not omniscient transmitters of knowledge. From research on students' perceptions of academic

departments<sup>2</sup>, being honest with students is one of the qualities that most students stress as being very important

According to findings of the research on student learning, and students' expectations of University departments the manner of delivering lectures should be changed. Learning how to be co-operative is a more useful skill for a social worker than learning how to be competitive. Encouraging students to be involved in group projects and developing an atmosphere for peer-learning will inevitably help students become co-operative colleagues in teams.

Teaching theory in an integrative way requires continuous linking with practice and active student participation. Change in understanding occurs through dialogue and change in understanding is the prerequisite for change in attitudes.

### **3.3. Teaching Skills and the Utilisation of the Personal Growth and Development in Skills Training - Putting Words into Actions**

Social work students often ask for more skills training or the teaching of micro-skills in the tertiary settings because they find it difficult to transfer theories learnt during the course to their work with clients. Role-playing is the most common method used for skills training at tertiary institutions around the world. Research (Collins, 1985) showed that skills learned through role-plays are rarely transferable to the field and that students who show skill in laboratory sessions often do not have the ability to transfer these skills when working with clients. Further more, role-playing may not be the culturally appropriate way of learning, because, for example for some Pacific cultures, acting as if you were somebody else may evoke spirits from the past. Students also, often complain that they have

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<sup>2</sup>Many studies on this topic were conducted from '60's to '90's, only to mention the most interesting ones: Stephens, (1967), Rosenshine (1970), Entwistle, Marton, Ramsden and Hounsell (1970-1976), Bligh (1972), Gage (1972), Sheffield (1974), Brennan and Percy (1976), Ramsden and Entwistle (1981), Dubin and Raveggia, (1986), Marsh (1987), Waters, Kemp and Pucci (1988), Common (1989), Kurz, Mueller, Gibbons and Dicaldo (1989) and McCombs and Whistler (1989).

chosen the social work programme to learn how to become effective social workers, not to learn how to act and pretend that they are social work clients or social workers.

It is argued that in order to develop the skills of effective problem solving, a student needs to learn how to:

- ◆ make a genuine contact with a client, family or group
- ◆ create a pleasant context when working with clients, families or groups
- ◆ interview a client, family or group
- ◆ define a problem without imposing his or her assumptions and be able to understand what the client, family or group sees as a problem,
- ◆ develop the ability to explore a problem from various viewpoints
- ◆ set outcomes,
- ◆ carry out assessments,
- ◆ construct contracts,
- ◆ negotiate and mediate when needed,
- ◆ evaluate one's own work, and
- ◆ bring to a closure the relationship with the client, family or group.

This thesis explores effective ways of creating contexts where students can learn how to embed social work values in their work in order to understand clients in the totality of their existence, as individuals and as social beings involved in their families and social networks. It seems that social skills can be learned only through practice. When students practise new skills they need to have the freedom to make mistakes. The question, which may then be asked, is whether it is ethical to allow students to make mistakes while working with clients. For this reason it is argued that problem solving processes can be practised in skills training groups where students can practise on their professional and personal outcomes with one another. This does not mean that skills training should become personal therapy. The focus of the skills training is on learning, and by using their own examples students make the whole problem solving process more viable for them. By

making it more viable and life oriented, the motivation increases. They can easily make sense of theories and methods learned during the course. Practising problem solving skills with one another allows students to feel what it is like to be in the role of a client, it provides opportunities for constructive feed-back, it offers a place where students can engage with one another in the safe environment of the training group and feel free to test and experiment with new ideas and methods of social work.

Role-playing can be used only for some specific skill training when is not possible to provide real-life examples from the students in the group. I am critical of role-playing being considered as the one and only method of skills training because it may be ineffective and it may also be dangerous. When students role-play they often choose their own personal problems but act as if these were somebody else's. In such cases the student who is role-playing a social worker may, without intention, ignore the seriousness of the problem and by doing so may cause hurt to a student who is actually presenting his or her own problem. The opening of deep issues (pretending as if they were not real) and not completing work on them can be dangerous. It is argued here that one of the possible ways to integrate personal growth and development and of mastering the skill of conducting the problem solving process is to give students the chance to practise with one another problem solving processes in a safe skills training group environment. By so doing, principles of adult learning are exercised, and students are encouraged to learn from one another. This type of work is exciting and challenging, with students taking responsibility for their learning and for preparing themselves for responsible practice. When students present their professional or personal outcomes they are usually very supportive of one another. If someone opens an issue that cannot be fully explored in a skills training group, counselling should be readily available. In role-played situations those issues, which are not resolved, are not always transparent whereas in real-life situations there is continuation of the process and follow up. In some schools the problem of students choosing role-played situations close to their own personal issues was attempted to be avoided by giving specific role-play situations to students. They

were, for example asked to read about their role and act in a role-played situation accordingly. At the end of the role-played situation, they would “de-role” themselves stating who they were and how different they were from the person they had acted. Such acting however adds phoniness in understanding social work practice. Students may get the impression that they are in the social work field to ‘perform as professionals’ and not to *be* professionals and show genuine interest in their clients. In most cases, students are amused while role-playing but do not develop the ability to transfer acted skills to the field.

Encouraging one another to achieve learning outcomes creates a good learning atmosphere among students and they learn how to relate to one another and to co-operate rather than being competitive. Confidentiality and activity contracts are essential for this kind of work. Experiential exercises deepen understanding of the theories presented in the course. When skills training is presented in this manner, changes in skills and attitudes are accompanied by changes in understanding.

It is essential to note here that the primary aim of skills training is education, not personal therapy and when experiential methods are used it is necessary to emphasise this. The focus is on learning whereas “real life” issues are presented in order to provide useful examples for internalising theoretical and practical knowledge. Changes in understanding, skills, values and attitudes happen simultaneously.

This thesis springs from the position that it is very important that the natural process of personal growth and development is utilised in social work education. Problem solving processes are the main methods of social workers’ interaction with clients and students need to learn the theories and values that lie behind social work skills used in problem solving processes. They need to practice these skills, to master them, and finally, they have to be able to apply them in practice. Given that the outcomes of experiential learning methods are personal development and the development of competencies (Weil and McGill, 1989) both of these outcomes should be achieved simultaneously. The nature of social work practice and the integrative nature of social work education offer that possibility.

In line with this integrative nature, it is argued that personal growth and development is an inevitable part of social work practice education, though very often neglected and taken for granted or, simply seen as a by-product of effective teaching. Experiential learning approaches stress the importance of the development of self-awareness in the process of teaching-learning. In the process of education, personal growth and development come about when students are provided with opportunities to explore new ways of being in the world. This comprises recognising unproductive patterns in their ways of responding and learning that what they say and think may be contradicted by their behaviour. It also involves changing old ways of responding to interpersonal situations and affirming aspects of themselves which they may undervalue (Weil, McGill, 1989). For Rogers (1983) the inner world of the individual appears to have more significant influence upon his or her behaviour than does external environmental stimulus. The old saying '*Physician heal thyself*' is a starting point for a whole range of experiential methods in education. It is assumed that a social worker, who has a similar problem to the client, cannot help that particular client, because that social worker is too tangled in his or her own processes. When the social worker solves that personal problem, he or she may become an expert in it. Students often become aware of their own projections, identifications, and counter-transference with clients during their supervision sessions and the sooner students learn how to recognise their personal issues, which may interfere with their professional performance, the sooner will they become competent professionals. It has to be noted that personal growth and development and learning are life-long and never-ending processes, which continuously improve effectiveness of professionals.

The process of growth and development inevitably happens during maturation and education. But, when experiential learning methods are employed, special emphasis is put on individual and interpersonal experience. In educational settings experiential learning includes the development of understanding about how emotions, fears, defences, prejudices, values and attitudes influence behaviour but this is accomplished in such a way that respects privacy and the boundaries between therapy and the educational or work-based environment (Weil

and McGill, 1989).

The reason why such an emphasis is put on growth and development issues in this thesis was foregrounded by Reynolds (1942) who noted that social work may be particularly appealing for students who have troubles adjusting to life, and who may hope, either consciously or unconsciously to find help for themselves. Even though this is not a good starting point for learning, and such students should be advised to ask for help directly, personal growth and development built into the curriculum may help students to become aware of their real motives for studying. This may increase the chance that they will do something about their problems before engaging in a professional career. Furthermore, students then have the chance to explore their career goals and if their only motivation to become social workers was to solve their own problems, they can go to counselling and make another career movement. Such approach is very much in accordance with the idea that was emphasised at Aotearoa - New Zealand Schools of Social Work Conference in 1997:

If you think abortion is a sin, that men are naturally masters of women, that God is a man “out there” and that the modern English translation of the Bible are God’s actual words you can be in my not very humble opinion a priest, a minister, a plumber or Goddess help us a doctor. But you can’t be a social worker. Similarly if your experience of oppression and abuse means your dominant feelings are hate, fear, and distrust and your dominant mode is one of dissociation then you can be a very precious gift to the profession but not until the healing journey is well under way (Halbert, 1997: 1).

During the education process the context where learning takes place is essential for personal growth and development. Experiential methods emphasise the creation of a context, which is conducive to risk taking, mutual support and challenge. In educational groups where personal growth and development is stressed the basic assumption is that:

...social change will result from increased opportunities for people to become more self-aware, more genuine, more understanding of others’ perspectives and experiences, and more attuned to factors influencing group and interpersonal effectiveness (Weil and McGill, 1989: 19).

In social work practice education personal growth and development is inseparable from professional development. When a student knows more about him or herself, he or she should be able to better understand others. The less students are burdened with private problems and inner conflicts the more they will be able to devote their time and expertise to the client.

Inclusion of personal growth and development in social work curriculum has numerous advantages and some disadvantages. The main advantages are that students have the chance to experience how to work on a personal problem and to test the effectiveness of problem solving methods in their lives. They also have the chance to explore their prejudices and unsolved problems without feeling blamed or embarrassed. Successfully solved problems encourage students to be more confident regardless of whether they were in the role of the client or in the role of helper. Closed groups where personal growth and development is encouraged, help students to develop a sense of belonging and mutual support, that these attitudes are usually jeopardised at big universities where competition is high.

A possible disadvantage is that an educational environment may become “too therapeutic” (like in the *therapeutic approach* to field instruction). Therapy is not the aim of the education. This can happen when students are overwhelmed with personal problems and when the facilitator encourages therapeutic work but does not link it to the education process and social work theory. This can be prevented by setting clear boundaries and group rules with students. It is not the group leader or facilitator who should work on personal student issues as this may raise the issues to do with dual relationships and ethics. It is more useful when group facilitator just provides a context where such personal growth and development may occur. It is also more valuable if social work students can practice problem-solving skills with one another, with a facilitator helping them only when they come to an impasse and supervising that process. The facilitator’s role is to continuously link experience with theory and social work practice, being careful not to label the students and to comment only on the process not on the content. However, comments should be given only with students’ permission. Counselling provided by an independent counsellor should be available for

students when needed.

Salmon (1988) argues that the deepest kind of learning is when the learner genuinely moves forward and reconstructs the basis of his or her knowing. The experience of solving a personal problem or working towards a personal or professional outcome by using social work methods helps students not only to solve particular problems or attain their outcomes but also allows them to feel what it is like to be in a position of asking for help. It also gives them the opportunity to accept that problems are part of life and to experience, which methods are effective and which are offensive or provoke resistance. It encourages students to accept the importance of lifelong learning and continuous personal and professional growth and development for competent social work practice.

Mere knowledge about various theories that explain human behaviour cannot help professionals to solve their personal problems, and these everyday problems, no matter how trivial they may be, can prevent students from being effective. Through direct work on personal growth and development, in skills training workshops or individual counselling sessions, these problems may become challenges which students can easily solve and which at the same time help them develop problem solving skills of help to them in professional practice. Being immersed in one's own education helps the integration of theory, practice and experience.

Is there anything in the process of learning and practising social case work that corresponds to the growth that transforms a careless boy entering medical school into the kind of person who is a physician in every nerve and fibre of his being? Is social casework a profession in the sense that it makes those who devote themselves to it different, although perhaps in ways hard to define, from those in other walks of life?

Anyone is more different by the work into which he [sic] pours his energies. The more of himself he gives to it, the more his vocation shapes him to its purposes. The practice of an art through which the whole person translates what he receives from life into terms which others can understand, feel and enjoy, shapes a person most of all (Reyndols, 1942: 253-254).

Even though today social work is regarded as a science or at least an

applied science it is useful to remember what prominent social work educators have written about social work, long time ago:

Social work is an art, or it is worse than nothing. Like medicine, it finds its medium in people, and its aim in social well-being. Knowledge and skill can be applied to the lives of people only when there is a feeling for them, joy in their possibilities. The worker must be freed from personal anxieties and tension, from isolation and unreality. Beauty and truth in human living are assisted into being only by nature's way of working, which is growth from within out into social expression in active life (Reyndols, 1942: 54).

Skills training groups are places where students need to feel safe to make mistakes and feel free to explore the meaning and the essence of social work as an art, skill and science. Development of an atmosphere conducive to learning is essential for effective learning, and skills training groups should be the place where students feel free to express their viewpoints, dilemmas, worries and learn from one another.

### **3.4. The Challenge of Fieldwork - Making Sense of Actions**

As Siporin (1982) noted - field experience is the situation where providing a service to the client is turned into a teaching-learning situation (Siporin, 1982). While social workers' commitment is to provide effective services to their clients, it is not easy to turn this encounter into a learning experience for the student without diminishing the value of the intervention for the client. It is essential that this experience is organised in such a way that both the client and the student benefit. In social work education several approaches to fieldwork are used often being accompanied by matching methods for field instruction. Most schools prefer to a combination of methods, which are suited to their particular situations, rather than just one approach or orientation to organise field experience.

Field instruction is an experiential form of teaching and learning in which the social work student is helped to:

- ◆ consciously bring selected knowledge to the practice situation
- ◆ develop competence in performing practice skills
- ◆ learn to practice within the framework of social work values and ethics
- ◆ develop a professional commitment to social work practice
- ◆ evolve a practice style consistent with personal strengths and capacities
- ◆ develop the ability to work effectively within a social agency (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982: 3).

Fieldwork is a vital component in the education of social workers. It assists in overcoming the artificial gap between theory and practice through careful planning of field instruction and by continuously linking theory and practice in the classroom. Fieldwork is where integration of the change in understanding, skills, values and attitudes is most likely to happen, but it is also a place where the artificial gap between theory and practice may become most obvious.

### *The apprentice approach*

The *Apprenticeship approach* was the first used in social work education. The idea that lies behind it is that the students learn the best by monitoring experienced social workers and by trying to copy their behaviour. This approach is inductive in its essence, as students are encouraged to develop theory from practical examples. In the apprenticeship approach emphasis is put on the student's involvement in the role of observer, with theoretical knowledge being presented later in the course (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982). The rationale is that if experience precedes theory then students will be more able to reflect on the theory and to apply it. The problem however is that in any group form of teaching it is impossible to organise the presentation of theoretical knowledge in such a way that will accord with each student's learning style and experience in the field. The logical organisation of the lecture may not match a student's readiness. The apprenticeship approach also entails an ethical dilemma. Students are expected to work with clients as soon as possible and the question arises, is it ethical to let

inexperienced students without sufficient knowledge of the theory of human behaviour to practise “on” clients? Even when students are in the role of observers either in an interview or behind a one way mirror, their presence is likely to influence the flow of an interview. In the apprenticeship approach responsibility is placed on the experienced social worker and on the student to ‘catch up’. The student may be fortunate and have a field instructor who is a good role model, who is ready to not only show how he or she works but who is also able to explain why a particular method or intervention was used. On the other hand a student may be exposed to poor social work practice or may not have the chance to discover why certain methods have been used.

The apprentice approach employs a range of methods such as: the student being present while an experienced social worker is interviewing; monitoring a session through one way mirrors; or watching of videotaped problem solving processes. Each of these methods does not effect change in understanding, skills and attitudes. When students are considered to be apprentices, their prior knowledge may not be recognised and the learning outcomes may not be considered important. Detachment between students and field instructors deepen as well as detachment between students and clients. Clients become used to being observed and analysed without students being able to check with them their goals and outcomes. Such a detached approach may easily produce detached professionals.

When the apprenticeship method is used the professional social worker represents a role model and it is assumed that students will by watching and following what the professionals do and by observing how the social agency functions, incorporate social work skills. Later, when a student is ready to work as a co-worker in a group or directly with clients in individual work, collegial observation is very often part of the learning process. In such settings students have the chance to comment on the work of colleagues and experienced social workers.

When the apprenticeship method is combined with theoretical learning - for example, when a field instructor explains after working with a client why

certain methods were used, it is more likely that the student will integrate theory with practice and be able to use that specific intervention with more understanding. However, in busy social work agencies, it is possible that the field instructor will neither have enough time to support a student to link theory, practice and his or her experience in the meaningful whole, nor to encourage a student to reflect and become aware of the change in understanding, skills, values and attitudes that may have happened during the placement.

Nonetheless, the advantage of this approach and accompanying methods is that students are provided with direct exposure to skilled practitioners, who may help them to develop practical competence and contribute to the learning of practice skills (Shafer, 1982). The main disadvantage is that, knowing about the variety of situations in social work and variety of learning styles in students, it is not likely that only by watching others working, will students develop as competent professionals. The focus is on behaviours and strategies but it omits reflective and conceptual activities (Bogo and Vayda, 1991). In the apprentice approach, theory and practice are artificially split and therefore it is left to the student's individual ability to integrate the material into a sound knowledge base. The responsibility for the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge rests with the student and the field instructor. Theory teachers are excluded from the process and skills training teachers operate separately. The tertiary institution and the agency where students are placed do not need to be in continuous communication so the mutual learning is not happening. Assessment is based only on theoretical knowledge, and in most cases, all that is required is to participate in the fieldwork and the quality of a student's performance or learning is not assessed.

### *The academic approach*

The academic approach was developed by academics as a reaction and a critique of the apprentice approach. This approach places the emphasis on a student's cognitive development (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982). Knowing and

understanding is emphasised and if we use Kolb's learning style diagrams, it is an approach, which is appropriate for those students who have convergent and assimilative learning style. But according to the research of Kolb and Goldman (1973) on learning styles of Social Work and MBA students, it is very rare indeed that social workers have convergent and assimilation styles. They incline more towards divergent and accommodative learning styles. Therefore, a solely academic approach seems to be inappropriate for social work students.

As deduction is a form of reaching conclusions, it is generally expected that students will be able to form conclusions from the theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom and utilise these in the practice. It is argued here that the academic approach is very suitable for traditional ex-cathedra teachers. In this approach where theory and practice are split, there is little chance that the student will ask practical questions in a classroom where theory is taught. Because the artificial gap between theory and practice in this approach is so big, when students obtain their degrees and start working in practice, in most cases, they have to start the whole new social work study for practical purposes.

When a school inclines towards the academic approach, field instruction takes the form of field visits in large groups, with students observing the agencies or institutions they visit. There is a little chance for them to communicate with the clients. These visits inevitably deepen the distance between students and the persons with whom they will work because real contact is avoided. Changes in attitudes, skills and understanding are unlikely to occur. The difficulty with the academic approach rests with the student's need to apply the theoretical material while it is being presented. For many students, the task of storing a large body of knowledge and then drawing on it as needed is difficult (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982).

As in the apprenticeship approach theory and practice are split and the primary responsibility for integrating theory and practice rests with the student.

### *The therapeutic approach*

As opposed to the academic approach where the focus is placed on the cognitive component of total behaviour, and the apprenticeship approach where the focus is placed on observation, the *therapeutic approach* is focused on exploring personal issues, which may hamper professional performance. The therapeutic approach has been used more in supervision than as a part of fieldwork in social work education. Supervision is possible only if the student is actively involved in work with clients. Schools that take a therapeutic approach to supervision organise various voluntary activities for students so that students may practise learned skills. Problems that arise in the field are brought to the supervisory sessions. It may not always be clear whether the supervisor is an educator or a therapist. Grace Marcus (1927) was the first person to stress the link between professional and personal growth and development. She described the supervisor as a person who is not only concerned with students' professional problems encountered in fieldwork but with their personal problems as well. She stressed that if supervisors help students to solve their personal problems, they are also contributing to their development as competent professionals. In this approach professional development is accepted as a by-product of personal growth and development. Under the influence of Freud's theory of personality, personal growth and development became one of the conditions for effective social work. The therapeutic approach was advocated by Doris Byars and Marjorie Boggs (1929-30) and they demonstrated that where field instructors accepted the individual differences and needs of their students and at the same time helped them in understanding their clients, they encouraged independent thinking and the application of learned classroom knowledge. The method of field instruction used when the therapeutic approach is dominant is the clinical treatment method. The field instructor or supervisor has to be aware of where instruction or supervision ends and where the treatment or therapy begins.

The therapeutic approach may be harmful and exclusive when supervisory sessions become group or individual psychotherapy and professional development

is set aside. Students then may get the impression that only personal growth and development is important and may not focus on professional issues at all. They may gain the impression that for effective social work it is enough to be empathetic and to grow and develop personally. The most uncomfortable misuse of this approach for students is when supervisors label students and do not respond to their real needs, but try to fit them into the theoretical framework of the specific school or theory.

The therapeutic approach tries to go beyond the teaching-learning process to reach students on a personal level. If used in field instruction it has to be performed in supportive and non-judgmental settings. In cases when the teacher is the one who has to assess students' performance as well as assume the role of their supervisor and therapist, the whole process becomes too complex. When personal problems overwhelm supervision sessions, dual relationships occur and the clarity of the boundaries becomes less visible. After every supervision session the student may gain not only on a professional, but also on a personal level, however on the other hand, lack of clarity with regard to the roles may cause harm. It could be said that when the therapeutic approach is employed it is important that personal gains are secondary, otherwise, it may happen that the student will see the supervisor as therapist and time planned for supervision will be spent working on personal problems, whilst ignoring the client's situation. Clear contracts are essential as these dual relationships can block the process of teaching-learning.

In this approach, theory and practice are not split and may easily become too confluent. This approach appeared as a reaction to the distant academic approach, but if misused, students may become confused about their roles as social workers. The approach may also erase the fine line between social work, counselling and psychotherapy. This fine line is essential for the professional identity of social workers, who must know what their responsibilities are, and when and how to refer a client to other professionals. The focus on changing attitudes may diminish the value of learning about new understandings and the development of useful practical skills.

*The mentor approach, group field instruction and team teaching*

Another approach that has attempted to overcome the split between theory and experience is the *mentor approach*. It is characterised by a one-to-one relationship. Students have mentors whose task is to help the students gain new knowledge and to encourage them to make sense of theory and practice. This method offers an opportunity for students to share their dilemmas and to ask questions while they are in an agency. This individualised approach gives mentors the chance to get to know students and to directly consider their attitudes and value systems. The mentor's task is to help students to develop insights into the realities of social work, to support their personal growth and development and to help them in understanding the unique contribution social work has in the society. The mentor supports also the acceptance of other professions preparing students to work co-operatively. Various methods are used in this approach and in some schools a mentor works simultaneously with a small group of students to alleviate the costs. Videotapes, individual conversations, students' presentation of their work and/or dilemmas may be monitored and discussed. When students are ready for individual work with clients, they may work independently, according to the mentor's instructions. After completing a task they discuss their work with the mentor. The mentor approach, in spite of its advantages is very expensive and is usually used only in postgraduate studies. The mentor is typically a person employed at the educational institution and is rarely a field instructor working in the field of social work. The tutorial is the method most commonly used in schools where a mentor approach is predominant with the mentor taking a facilitating and enabling role. When this method is used selected case materials are discussed in individual conferences based on recordings or other material presented by students. It usually depends on a mentor's interests as to whether the focus is placed on theory, practice or experience and how changes in attitudes, understanding and skills happen. However, the mentor approach is only an approach, and not a comprehensive method of helping students to learn social work.

*Group field instruction* is a method usually combined with the mentor approach. It has to be organised in small groups with the advantage of this approach being that students have the chance to share their experiences and to learn not only from their experiences, but also from one another. The small group, if effectively led, becomes a source of support for students and it provides the opportunity for new ideas to be tested. The disadvantages of this approach are that a small number of students may be always active, while others may just sit silently. Effective leadership can easily solve this problem and group field instruction is usually a good source for the integration of the theory, practice and experience.

*Team teaching* is a method where every student has several mentors or tutors who are helping in specialised areas. Team teaching requires co-ordination between the instructors to assure that the student is able to integrate the separate experiences (Shafer, 1982). Although expensive and requiring good organisation, team teaching offers students many opportunities to experience a broad range of viewpoints in the field of social work.

### *The articulated approach*

The *articulated approach* was developed in the sixties when social work educators drew on learning principles from Ralph Tyler (1949) and Jerome Bruner (1960) in order to organise the content and to select methods of instruction in fieldwork (George, 1982).

The articulated approach is concerned with a planned relationship between cognitive and experiential learning (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982: 17).

In this approach the responsibility for the integration of knowledge lies with the student, teacher and field instructor. A key aspect of the responsibility is also on the clients involved in the process of fieldwork. Knowing, understanding, emotions and doing are equally valued in the learning process. The goal of this approach is to support the student to be aware of what is done in a specific

intervention and why it is done. Field settings are viewed as laboratories where students can test and reify what they have learned in the classroom.

The structure of learning which the articulated approach requires begins with simple skill development at the time basic behavioural and practice theories are introduced. Perhaps, the most appropriate learning sequence would be to begin with a laboratory experience in which fundamental helping skills are developed and the student is helped to develop self-confidence in using basic helping techniques. As more complex theoretical material is introduced in the classroom, the student might progress to a modified practicum or even a volunteer experience where these skills are tested and refined-or the student might move directly from the lab to the full field experience (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982: 17-18).

In the articulated approach students gradually build on their knowledge and experience and it is equally effective for students who are deductive learners as for students who are inductive learners. The approach accepts a variety of learning styles and tries to encourage simultaneously the cognitive and practical abilities of the student.

For years the articulated approach has been a goal in social work education but the real link between the classroom and the field has more often been on paper or presented at conferences than performed in real life. To organise and to carry out fieldwork in the framework of the articulated approach is a very complex task. However, professionals who advocate this approach claim that the quality of social workers educated in this way is significantly better than are other approaches.

The greatest strength of the articulation approach is its focus on student learning. The faculty, the agency, and the field instructor join with the student to produce a practitioner capable of knowledge and value-guided practice. Its greatest limitation is the inordinate amount of planning and communication required to maintain an articulated plan. The cost of that activity, if it is done properly, is significantly more than for the apprentice and academic orientations (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982: 18).

Various methods are combined in the schools where the articulated approach is employed. A strong link between faculty and field instructors is

essential, and integration of theory and practice is the main goal.

Chambers and Spano (1982) emphasised the advantage of field learning in the integration of all learning occurring in the professional curriculum. The aim of the field placement is to reify idea sets learned as abstractions elsewhere in the curriculum. Reification in this sense means to act upon learned ideas.

The abstractions become ideas about which the learner develops personalised definitions. In this way, the ideas become embedded as part of the learner's worldview and, to that extent, the learner's self-identity (Chambers and Spano, 1982: 226).

Integration implies synthesis but unless a learner is conscious of inter-relating theoretical and practical parts of education, and its personal implications, synthesis cannot occur. Chambers and Spano (1982) propose that students need training in how to use the reflective rather than the reflex approach to practice. They claim that an increase in student's cognitive complexity accounts for variability in the effectiveness of personal helpers. Cognitive complexity is reflected in the ability to give various possible explanations for a given phenomenon. Cognitive complexity is related to flexibility. All field instruction methods originating from the articulated approach consider the following issues:

- ◆ Integration of cognitive and experiential learning
- ◆ Acceptance of the student's learning style
- ◆ Strong links between Faculty and Field Instructors
- ◆ Considerable planning
- ◆ Consideration of the needs of clients, agency, students and overall educational process

When this approach is employed it is not expected that students should provide services without having an adequate knowledge base (Sheafor and Jenkins, 1982). Therefore, adequate timing and continuous communication with students is essential.

When the articulated approach is employed the responsibility for the integration of theory, practice and experience lies with all the participants in the process. Roles and responsibilities are listed as clearly as possible and the successful functioning of the program promises benefits for everybody involved.

Within the framework of the articulated approach quite a few approaches have developed. Modern social work schools attempted to utilise all the resources available and to develop their unique models. The *Role Systems Approach* (Wijnberg and Schwartz, 1977) for example, has its roots in andragogy and is related to Knowles' ideas about effective learning, presented in Chapter One. The relationship between the field instructor and the student is egalitarian and collaborative. They interact as equals and mutual feedback is considered essential for the development of that relationship. A *Competency Based Approach* (Arkava and Brennen, 1976) focuses on concretising a particular professional knowledge base in the form of measurable behaviours. Bogo and Vayda (1991) adapted Kolb's learning cycle to social work education and developed the *Integration of Theory and Practice Loop* (ITP) which is in a spiral form and begins with retrieval, loops to reflection, then to linkage and then to professional response. The ITP Loop was constructed in an attempt to provide a structure for the integration of theory and practice. The approach is focused on field instructors' and students' understanding of active processes, which are simultaneously affective and cognitive. These processes influence the choice of professional response and the tentativeness of these responses when they are applied through dynamic and complex human encounters. The ITP loop can be used to teach social work practice at any level and its intention is to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

A whole range of new and creative ways of approaching fieldwork developed as a reaction to the changes caused by economic reforms, which emphasised market economy and managerialism. It has become increasingly difficult to find placements for social work students. In 1996, almost 500 students needed placement just in the Auckland region (Beddoe and Worrall, 1997).

State agencies that, in the past, showed a great commitment to taking students and ensuring the standards of the profession were upheld, are now seeing the student as an encumbrance and which cannot be accounted for in the “output” mentality that measures performance of strictly defined tasks (Beddoe and Worrall, 1997).

Social work schools have to find ways to encourage agencies to take students because the education of social workers cannot be provided without effective fieldwork. Taking a student on placement is a responsible job and doing it effectively without being paid for it may be a difficult task. However, utilising potential from all participants in the process may be the key to solving the problem of delivering an integrative education for social workers.

### **3.5. The Integration of Theory, Practice and Experience**

Integration of theory, practice and experience is an ultimate goal of social work education. The way this goal is achieved is usually dependent upon the theories that lie behind the ideas presented in the curriculum. A notable social work educator Bertha Capen Reyndols perceived the issue of integration in the following way:

Learning an art, which is knowledge applied to doing something in which the whole person participates, cannot be carried on solely as an intellectual process, no matter how clearly and attractively subject matter is presented with the aim of insuring that the conscious attention of the learner shall not flag. As progressive educators have pointed out, unless there is opportunity to practice its use, there is invariably gap between knowing a thing and being able to do something with it (Reyndols, 1942:69).

The Contact Challenge Method, which is to be evaluated in this study, attempts to integrate the art, science and skill of social work by using the Theory of Adult Learning, Experiential Learning Theory, Choice Theory and a holistic world view as its background.

By accepting and recognising different learning styles the goal is not in making those styles rigid, but on the contrary, encouraging learners to consider

every practical learning situation from a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, and to learn how to use these various learning styles when needed. In accordance with humanistic theories, the integration of theory, practice and experience can happen only in a safe environment where non-judgmental attitudes and other social work values are practised. Continuous challenging of social work values, principles and theories inevitably happens in direct contact with practice and provides a rich framework for integration and reflection.

In proportion as we think of learning in dynamic terms, instead of assuming that knowledge is stored and can be drawn upon at any time, we are concerned that practice shall be immediate and related to living use, and that content shall be continuously tested and modified by what is found in experience. We have called social work an art, by virtue of its application of knowledge to practical problems in the field of interrelationships between human beings and their life situations and have seen (especially important in the learning of an art) that practice should not only accompany but be interwoven with theory. In all these ways, then, we are brought face to face with the question of curriculum planning. How may the whole learning process be integrated, as between the classroom and the field practice? (Reyndols, 1942: 136-137)

In the same source it was noted that as long ago, as 1941, the American Association of Schools of Social Work had stressed the importance of regarding field teaching as on the same plane of values as class teaching, demanding equally well-qualified teachers and carefully selected agencies used in fieldwork. The break-through of the experiential methods and the usefulness of action research in tertiary educational settings in the eighties and nineties in the USA, Europe and especially in Australia, is an attempt to fill the gaps between theory and practice which traditional educational approaches have created.

...educational practice is something made by people. Educational practice is a form of power - a dynamic force both for social continuity and for social change, which, though shared with and constrained by others, rests largely in the hands of teachers. Through the power of educational practice, teachers play a vital role in changing the world we live in (Chemise, in Introduction to Carr, 1995: 1).

Experiential education provides the opportunity for students to test their readiness to be devoted to the profession they have chosen. When students choose a profession that matches their ideas of their life in the future, their interests and motivation increase. The aim of experiential learning is to help students make sense of theory learned from lectures and reading literature. Knowing, understanding and acting are integrated in experiential education by learning through, and from, experience.

The purpose of integration in social work education is to encourage students to create a change in their understanding, skills, values and attitudes. It also gives students a wider perspective of problem solving processes and enables them to work effectively with their clients. Without understanding background theories and the use of the professional self, effectiveness in social work practice may be only accidental. Therefore, as Hamilton (1981) noted, fieldwork is a core of the total social work curriculum, and to this thought has to be added that the link between the fieldwork and theoretical parts of the education is also essential. Studies on students' responses to fieldwork (Brennen and Arkava, 1974, Brennen, 1978) revealed that students consider fieldwork as one of the most significant learning experiences. The manner in which fieldwork is organised, especially the first contact with practice, may influence students' attitudes towards their future profession to a great extent.

Writing about the way, in which integration may be achieved, Schneck noted:

Teaching methods for the integration of learning ideally should respond to rather than dictate the pace and learning styles of the students. To the extent possible and reasonable, we should take our cues from the needs and readiness of our students in the selection of teaching-learning activities. This is the most difficult and exciting kind of teaching. It calls for flexibility, the perception of individual and group needs, and an ability to spontaneously adjust content and format to respond to student needs (Schneck, 1991:112).

Values that permeate this quotation are humanistic and they are the basis for andragogic principles in education. Experiential education in social work is

emerging from the humanistic philosophy, and humanistic principles and values, which have hitherto permeated social work practice. These values include respecting the uniqueness of each individual, a holistic approach, acceptance, self-determination, confidentiality, evaluation and constant improvement of practice. If humanistic values are used only declaratively and are not built into a curriculum, social work education is only demagogically preaching "how students should act as competent professionals". In that case, it is not giving them the chance to be responsible, to choose what they want to learn, to use their previous experiences and they are not treated as unique human beings. By being paternalistic in adult education we only encourage students to become distant "quasi-professionals" or "intellectual half-men", as Jaques Barzun (1971) calls them. He uses the term to describe persons who may perform their tasks diligently and consciously, but never creatively and enthusiastically. One of the basic goals in experiential and humanistic approaches is, according to Patterson (1973), to stimulate the affective parts of students' personality in order to become persons who understand themselves and others and, who are able to relate to others.

Techniques and methods of experiential education encourage students to analyse their personal experiences and to utilise those experiences in gaining new knowledge. When educators belittle students' life experiences or their approach to problems, not only do they show their impoliteness, but they prevent students from talking about themselves, sharing their experiences, learning about themselves and finding new or better ways of solving problems. By encouraging them to utilise their experiences students may become more ready to learn new information and to learn from one another. By preventing them from utilisation of these natural processes, educators prevent them from integrating theory, practice and experience. Therefore it is necessary to provide students with the opportunity to be as much as possible in touch with fieldwork and clients so they may integrate social work theory continuously connecting it with practice.

### 3.6. Conclusion

In social work education content and process are equally important. Overemphasising either of these features, to the expense of the other, prevents integration. The social context of social work education plays an important role in integration. One of the possible ways of integrating theory, practice and experience is explored in the following chapters where the Contact-Challenge Method is proposed as a tool for achieving integration. It is argued that the experiential and theoretical components of education must be integrated in order to support social work students become human beings capable of realising their full potential.

This thesis attempts to find alternatives because it is argued that teaching social work practice in the isolated atmosphere of a classroom and hoping that integration will happen spontaneously when students start working can be naive. It can also be naive to attempt to reflect on theories that are permeating social work practice by using only apprentice, academic or therapeutic approaches in field instruction. Personal experience inevitably plays an important role in social work practice and it cannot be isolated from professional performance - therefore, it is likely to be useful to utilise it in the process of teaching-learning. It is argued that "real life" and theoretical knowledge are not two separate units and they can only enrich each other. In the practical profession such as social work, theory and practice are indivisible and it is important to organise courses in such a way that students will be encouraged to integrate theory, practice and personal experience in their professional development. The next chapter focuses on some practical solutions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CONTACT CHALLENGE METHOD

*If you can dream it, you can do it. Remember, this whole thing was started by a mouse.*

*Walt Disney*

#### 4. 1. Introduction

This chapter further introduces the Contact-Challenge Method which was developed as a practical response to my dissatisfaction with the way social work practice was taught at tertiary settings. The articulated approach described by Sheafor and Jenkins (1982) sounded very appealing and I was looking for a method, which would be in accordance with the ideas that the articulated approach offers, but which would be inexpensive. Typically whenever I would speak about the advantages of the articulated approach, colleagues would argue that the ideas are brilliant, but that the department could not afford it.

The Contact-Challenge Method was created as a response to problems that social work practice teaching is facing. It is envisaged as a viable, self-organising system, which continuously improves itself throughout its performance by means of participatory action research. It is necessary here to make a distinction between Contact-Challenge as a Method and Contact-Challenge as a Programme. The Contact-Challenge Method is a method of teaching-learning which employs andragogic principles and is focused on teaching and learning for practical purposes. It is “consumer” oriented and all participants in the process create and re-create the method through continuous feed-back processes. It is focused on the integration of theory, practice and experience. When the Contact-Challenge Method is put into practice it is always reflective of the participants needs. The Contact-Challenge Programme is created on the basis of information gathered from participants. Every Contact-Challenge Programme informs and further develops the Contact-Challenge Method, which is then improved on the basis of

new experiences. The Contact-Challenge Programme is the practical application of the Contact-Challenge Method; it is unique for each setting where it is applied because it reflects the context where it is applied as well as the needs of all participants. It can be applied and modified to suit any teaching-learning environment where the integration of the theory and practice is required. The Contact-Challenge Method is presented in this chapter, whereas two different Contact-Challenge Programmes are presented in Appendices.

This thesis focuses on the application of the Contact-Challenge Method in social work education, which is evaluated on the basis of performance and continuous development at two Universities from 1990 to 1997. This thesis focuses on evaluation of its effectiveness in two different settings.

#### **4.2. Essential Features of the Contact-Challenge Method**

Although the performance of the Contact-Challenge Method reflects the context where it is performed and the needs of the participants, the following features of the method are essential and not negotiable.

1. Clients are asked to help students to become better professionals. They are, therefore, to be treated as experts and not as “guinea pigs”.

2. Clients’ consent is essential and they offer their expertise, their viewpoint on their condition and they share their previous experience of professionals with the students. They are encouraged to suggest how they would like the professionals to support them and what they expect from them. Through dialogue with clients, students offer their views and learning is mutual. Discussion of the role of the professional helper in a specific situation usually results in better understanding of the problems, which face clients and their families.

3. Clients and students arrange to meet and these encounters are one-to-one. They meet for at least two hours weekly throughout the Programme. At their

initial meeting they set mutually agreed goals and outcomes, which they evaluate at the end of the process. Clients set outcomes in terms of improving their quality of life and students set outcomes in terms of their learning goals.

4. Students practise problem - solving skills (or skills relevant for their future profession) with one another, and work in skills training workshops on their learning goals or issues that arise from contacts with clients. Role-playing is substituted with real-life situations. Experiential exercises are used for personal and professional growth and development and students are advised as to how they can modify these exercises and use them in work with clients when they complete their studies.

5. Lectures are interactive and students are required to come prepared so they can actively participate in discussions and debates about social work theories and their application in practice.

6. All aspects of knowledge (theory, practice and experience) occur simultaneously, and students have the chance to reflect on the way theories relate to practical experience.

7. Students plan their learning according to their prior knowledge, theoretical background and interests. The Contact-Challenge Method uses andragogic principles. Students are responsible for their learning and each learning contract is individualised, reflecting both the client's and the student's needs. The plan reflects student's individual learning style.

8. Students are in regular contact with their clients, and these contacts provide an opportunity for students to get to know the clients' families, social networks and agencies that offer support. In doing so they achieve some of the goals, which they together set at the beginning of the year.

9. Group supervision sessions are held with field instructors coming from various practice settings (unless the student group is bigger than 12). By discussing problems they face in a particular field with one another, the students have the opportunity to learn about the nature of problems in other fields, as well as about possible solutions to these. If there are more than 12 students in the Programme, supervision sessions take place gathering students around their field instructors, and they are encouraged to visit other settings to be more informed about fields of practice different from the one they are involved in.

10. Every student constructs a learning contract at the beginning of the Programme stating his or her learning outcomes, strategies for achieving these and evidence of accomplishment. Self-evaluation is the essential part of the assessment process.

11. The Contact-Challenge Programme, tailored to suit students' and client's needs, has to be flexible enough that students' input can be put in place during the Programme. Teaching methods used in Contact-Challenge are derived from andragogy and the approach to all participants is empowering and respectful.

12. Action research is used as a research methodology to evaluate and continuously improve the method.

The Method can be applied in a variety of settings, wherever good human contact is essential for effectiveness. The name "Contact-Challenge Method" reflects its essence; that is, students learn from direct contact with clients, and it is this contact which provides the challenge for both, students and clients. The Method is not only useful for students and clients, but for teachers and field instructors (practitioners) as well, because through continuous interactions their understandings, values, attitudes and skills are challenged. The Contact-Challenge Method focuses on communication and participation. The nature of action research, which is participatory and emancipatory perfectly suits the ideas that are

imbued in the Method and hence provides a means for continuous evolution and modification.

### 4.3. Background

As an Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work, University of Zagreb, I have created the Contact-Challenge Method and developed the first Contact-Challenge Programme in the academic year 1990/91, by drawing together needs from social work clients, social work practitioners, and students, as well as the requirements from the Department of Social Work for effective education. I continued to refine it until February, 1995, when I was accepted as a Doctoral student at Massey University, Albany Campus, in New Zealand. I continued to work on the method and adjust it to New Zealand conditions. The Method is continually developing itself by means of reflexive evaluation conducted by all participants: students, field instructors, clients and myself. We, as equal participants in the project, further developed the Method through its actual performance. The Contact-Challenge Method, in its present form, emerged as a result of participatory and self-evaluative action research that is described as a Croatian study in Chapter 6.

At the Department of Social Work in the University of Zagreb, the approach to field practice was mainly academic (in terms discussed in Chapter Three). Students asked for greater contact with clients, but at the same time acknowledged that they were not ready for independent work. They expressed a desire to work on resolving some personal issues as well. They spoke openly of their prejudices and fears in working with persons with special needs<sup>1</sup>, their constant comment was that they 'felt sorry for them', and they indicated that they would like to develop a more 'open minded' attitude in order to become more effective professionals. At the same time persons with special needs and their

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<sup>1</sup>The term *persons with special needs* is used here in its broadest sense, meaning any person who needs help or support in performance of everyday activities. The term is not used not only for persons who are intellectually or physically impaired, but also for children with behavioural problems and elderly or persons who suffer from any chronic disease.

families expressed their need for some kind of non - institutional support in everyday activities, and were very keen to meet with students, especially when offered the opportunity to become active participants of the Programme in which they were invited to help students become more effective social workers. All persons with special needs, who were asked to be a part of the Programme, were experienced in “handling social workers”. They were asked to help students become better social workers, acting as experts who knew how would they like to be treated by social workers, and to offer their knowledge about their general life situation. Families were invited to participate in the process as well. Since each of them had unique and valuable experiences (good, neutral and bad) with social workers, they had ideas about which abilities and skills an effective social worker should have, and which behaviours would be unacceptable. There were three conditions that had to be met for the person with special needs to become a participant in the Contact-Challenge Programme:

- ◆ They had to have some experiences with social workers.
- ◆ They had to see how they could benefit from participation in the Programme.
- ◆ They had to be ready and keen to help a student to become a better social worker.

In return, students were asked to respond to the expressed needs of individuals and their families. Some clients needed students to accompany them on walks; some of them were lonely and wanted to socialise; some needed help with housework; some needed help with transport; some parents needed time off; some clients just needed a break in everyday routine. All individual differences were valued and all ideas were considered.

The Programme was evaluated during its performance and at the end of the each year. Improvements were introduced after every evaluation. When the Contact-Challenge Method is employed, the continuous link between theory and practice is the main strength of the Programme; students listen and read about social work theories and are active participants in lectures; they participate in

laboratories where they practise problem solving skills; they are in contact with clients throughout the whole academic year; and they participate in supervision sessions with field instructors. All these aspects of education happen simultaneously.

The “Contact-Challenge Method” differs from traditional methods of teaching. It is radical, extraordinary and provocative, constantly changing and correcting itself. The method challenges students, persons with special needs, field instructors and faculty staff. In its essence it is experiential and full of contact, and it challenges social work values and principles in real-life situations. These challenges encourage students to become active participants in their learning, not allowing them to “swallow” social work principles and steps in problem solving processes without first experiencing them and connecting them with practice. Basically, the method attempts to integrate theory, practice and experience, assuming that students learn better as whole human beings, when their total behaviour is involved in the process of learning. It respects students’ and clients’ rights for self-determination to the point that they create their own learning contracts and assess their own achievements.

#### **4. 4. General Aims of the Contact-Challenge Method in Social Work Education**

1. To encourage students to integrate social work theory, practice and utilise their personal experience in order to become effective practitioners.
2. To facilitate the process of exploring individual learning styles, prejudices and values.
3. To improve the quality of life of persons with special needs and their families by offering support and help in the way they see appropriate.
4. To further develop the Contact-Challenge Method of teaching and learning social work practice by means of evaluative action research.

#### **4.5. Individual Outcomes - Aims of the Contact-Challenge Method in Social Work Education**

Since the Contact - Challenge Method is individually tailored by every student and every client in each situation, individual outcomes are always individually set. However, four broad outcomes are offered at the beginning of the course, which students then individualise in terms of their own needs.

Suggested broad outcomes are:

1. To learn how to conduct problem solving processes.
2. To create a good relationship with a client where both can learn.
3. To learn directly or indirectly about various settings for social work practice.
4. To attain some personal outcomes.

#### **4.6. The Contact-Challenge Method in Action (The Programme)**

The Contact-Challenge Method applied in social work education focuses on utilisation of students' and clients' experiences and on creating change in understanding, values, skills and attitudes. The Method is designed in such a way that individual, cultural and personal differences are valued and utilised for learning from one another, reducing prejudices and broadening horizons. Individual learning styles and prior knowledge are accepted, and every student tailors his or her experience according to his or her learning needs. Detailed Contact-Challenge Programmes, the Croatian Programme and the Aotearoa - New Zealand Programme are enclosed in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

#### **4.6.1. Participants**

1. Programme co-ordinator
2. Field instructors:
  1. a social worker working in a school setting
  2. a social worker working with senior citizens
  3. a social worker working with persons with physical disabilities
  4. a social worker working with persons with intellectual disabilities
  5. a social worker working with persons who suffer from mental illness
3. Students
4. Clients

The number of settings, field instructors, clients and students varied from Programme to Programme. It depended on the availability of field instructors and on the number of students enrolled on the course. With the larger choice of settings, the aim of learning about various fields of social work was easier to achieve. The variety of client groups encouraged students to learn more from one another during skills training and supervision.

Field instructors were recruited from social workers working in the five above-mentioned settings. They were experienced social workers, recommended by faculty staff and already engaged in field placements.

#### **4.6.2. Components of the Contact-Challenge Programme**

- 1. Theory** - Interactive lectures on Social Work Theory - two hours weekly throughout the academic year.
- 2. Skills training** - two hours weekly - throughout the academic year.
- 3. Contact with clients** - two hours weekly - fifty hours throughout the academic year.
- 4. Supervision with field instructors** - two hours fortnightly, individual sessions are available if needed.

## *Theory*

Teaching social work theories in a participatory manner is the essential part of the Contact-Challenge Programme. At the beginning of the year the Programme is presented to students and they are invited to define their learning outcomes, explore their learning styles, analyse their prior knowledge that may assist them to become effective professionals and to access their internal motivation. Learning contracts or goal attainment scales can be used for the purpose of increasing motivation. Theory is learned through active participation in lectures; by studying the literature; and in class discussions. Students are encouraged to fully discuss the content of the lectures, and to question and challenge the ideas and material presented. They are also encouraged to interrupt, give examples, and discuss the lecture content.

Theories are taught and their effectiveness is explored by discussing their implications in social work practice. A broad range of theories is presented and students are encouraged to convert knowledge into professional service and to learn how to tailor that knowledge to the unique requirements of the client. A reflective approach is used throughout the Programme.

Lectures are not traditional lectures in ex-cathedra style. It is expected that students come prepared to the class and take an active part. They are asked to bring their experiences from real life; for example, they have to find real life situations where social work values might be challenged, when social work values are the theme of the lecture. It is also expected that students consult relevant literature in order to prepare themselves for discussions that take place during lectures. Lecturing is as condensed as possible and the role of the teacher is to facilitate and focus vivid discussions about relevant themes.

Social work theories are continuously linked with students' experience in skills training workshops and their contacts with clients. Each lecture is followed with skills training workshops where students have the opportunity to test learned theories via working with one another.

### *Skills training*

During skills training students gain opportunities to: explore their prejudices, values and attitudes; gain experience in integration of theory, practice and personal experience; and take responsibility for the achievement of their learning goals.

The main focus in skill training sessions is on practising social work skills and students are expected to do this not by practising *on* clients, but rather by working *with* each other in the safe laboratory setting where they can freely discuss professional and personal issues which they experience as obstacles to their professional performance. Role-play is substituted by real-life situations and issues and peer-learning is encouraged. Skill training is performed in small, closed groups and a confidentiality contract is agreed to at the beginning of the year. There is no pressure to work on deep personal issues, and students are encouraged to work with one another on their learning outcomes. However, if students open some kind of deep emotional issue they would like to work on, or to explore it in more detail, they are encouraged, if they wish, to take counselling sessions. Even though students are practising problem solving skills on real life outcomes they would like to achieve, the focus is placed on learning and practising problem solving, not on personal therapy. The most important difference from usual skill training is that students are not role-playing. When a student wants to discuss a problem he or she has with the client, the student works on it with another student who uses a problem solving method in a supervisory manner. When presenting a client's problem, role playing may be used, but more as a tool of becoming more aware and developing more understanding of the client's situation, than as a tool for teaching problem solving methods. I have chosen to support students to work on their personal outcomes (challenges) in skill training workshops, because my experience as a social work teacher taught me that many students, when they role-play, actually play themselves or pick up roles that are somewhat similar to their real-life situations. The role playing situation is always a kind of "game" for students and, without intention, they may hurt one another by "not taking it

seriously” when the situation may be indeed very serious. When students practise problem solving skills with one another on issues that really bother them or on situations they would really like to improve, they take it seriously; they take care of one another; and they are very motivated to offer support to one another in the process of growth and development. At the same time they have the opportunity to experience how it is to be in the position of a client; and the value of confidentiality and other social work values are continuously exercised in the group. They can also see effects of their interventions and hear feed-back from their colleagues. The common competitive atmosphere, which may exist in learning environments, is then exchanged with co-operation and mutual support.

Experiential group exercises are used to sharpen students’ awareness and explore their attitudes, goals and perspectives. They are also used as a way of integrating theory, practice and personal experience.

### *Contact with Clients and their Families*

Students are in contact with one client who has previously agreed to participate in the Programme. These contacts continue for 50 hours, throughout the academic year. Students and clients are expected to meet once a week for two hours. However, alternative arrangements are possible if needed. These contacts are primarily one-to-one, though students may occasionally organise trips or visits in groups.

Every pair (student and client) creates a simple plan of their association during the Programme, according to their needs. They set their individual outcomes and the way they are going to attain them. Students and clients are advised to make small and concrete plans. Client outcomes refer to the improvement of their quality of life and the gaining of skills; student outcomes refer to their learning goals. They assess attainment of these goals at the end of the Programme. Even though goal attainment gives a feeling of success to students and clients, more focus is placed on the process than on the outcome. Outcomes should be realistic, ethical and achievable and clients and students are responsible

for their realisation. Sometimes, not achieving a goal may be a better learning experience than achieving it. Field instructors and the Programme co-ordinator help students and clients to set outcomes.

In cases where students have already had some contact with social work practice, they utilise these experiences by reflecting on them and by further developing skills necessary for competent practice.

By being in contact with one person, over a period of time, students have the opportunity to meet the client's family and that person's social network, as well as the availability of services provided in the community and by a range of agencies.

### *Supervision*

Supervision sessions with field instructors are provided in such a way that all field instructors attend at the same time if the group is not too large (less than twelve). This offers a broader view on social work practice, because students have the chance to discuss issues from four various fields of practice. If groups are big, like they were in the Croatian study, supervision is performed in small groups according to the setting where students practise. Specific qualities of every social work setting are discussed as well as possible problems or dilemmas that arise from the contact with the clients and their families.

At supervision meetings at least one student presents his or her learning from the client. These presentations provide a rich material for discussion and for further learning for other students.

#### **4.7. Roles and Responsibilities when Contact-Challenge Method is Used in Social Work Practice Education**

Under the following subheadings, roles and responsibilities of all participants within the Contact-Challenge Method will be explored.

##### ***4.7.1. The Role of the Agency and the Field Instructor***

The agency that is accepting students has to see its role and meaning in student education. Three major responsibilities of the agency described by Selig (1982) are:

...the responsibility to make commitment to the educational process at all levels within the agency, to provide a positive educational climate for staff and students alike, and to provide adequate learning experiences (Selig, 1982: 142-143).

The main problem in most social work schools is that it is difficult to find quality placements for all students. Taking a student is a very responsible and time-consuming job. If we want agencies to take students they need to see their benefits in that process.

A student in field practice is not 'just another service person' in the agency, theorists argue. This usual pitfall may be avoided by careful planning, by setting clear outcomes for the placement and by assigning a field instructor who has responsibility for providing the field experience. Students may enrich the agency with their knowledge and continuous contact with the faculty, social work theory and research is essential for effective functioning of a social work agency. As social work teachers need agencies to be in continuous contact with the practice, social work agencies need faculty and students to enrich their practice. Field instructors' work needs to be recognised, and by recognising the value of their input, the quality of their performance will inevitably be improved.

The agency has to see what are the advantages of having students. The permanent gain for the agency may be in the direct contact with the learning

institution, that means continuous contact with new trends in performing practice and in giving the opportunity to field instructors to have a direct impact on tertiary education. Knowing students who might be interested in work in the agency when they complete their studies is an advantage for the agency as well. Students can carry out useful work for the agency and reflect on its practices. Students, as outside persons, may also see advantages and disadvantages of the services the agency offers. Fieldwork is actually, an exchange programme, where it is necessary to clarify goals, outcomes and benefits for all parties.

When Contact-Challenge is employed social work students are useful for the agency, because they help clients to improve the quality of their lives. By being in continuous contact with the client, a novice student can undertake some simple everyday activities with the client that can improve the client's quality of life. A student is also a valuable link between the social worker and the client and his or her family. By the end of the first field work experience, a student may become so skilful that he or she can undertake some professional social work tasks as well. Continuous attendance at supervision sessions and being in touch with the teaching institution helps field instructors to meet their needs for professional development. It also offers the opportunity to meet with colleagues and have the chance to learn about other fields of social work and theories that underpin social work practice.

The role of the field instructor is in helping students integrate theoretical knowledge and experience in the field. He or she helps students to identify, understand and focus on the specific task and accept client's view of the specific problem. The role of the field instructor is to create a context where students will be able to consider ethical and other dilemmas that are often present in social work practice. Field instructor's role is to help students to identify those problems and develop personal attitudes that they will need for their future job. Clarification and application of social work values in everyday practice helps students to become competent professionals. In the Contact-Challenge Programme field instructor's role is to match students and clients and to negotiate their roles in the Programme. His or her role is to supervise and be continuous link between clients,

students and the Programme co-ordinator.

The job of the field instructor is to encourage a student to go beyond his or her comfort zone and to allow him or her to understand and practice the art, skill and science of the professional social work. That means to help students develop the high level of knowledge and skills based on theory and principles of social work, support them to think critically about it, and develop their professional identity. Students have to be encouraged to re-examine their value systems, ethical integrity and standards for quality job performance. Because of these broad goals for effective field instruction, the field instructor has to develop an approach where students will not be seen as apprentices who have to follow every instructor's suggestion blindly, but responsible colleagues who have to be encouraged to become effective professionals.

To expect from a beginning student to confidently intervene as a professional is generally too demanding. Therefore, when the Contact-Challenge Method is employed, students have the chance to go step by step, following client's needs and reflecting on their actions during supervision sessions with field instructors.

The field instructor's responsibilities are clearly defined in the Contact-Challenge Method:

1. To select clients who may benefit from the Programme
2. To ask clients if they would like to participate in the Contact-Challenge Programme and assist social work students to become better professionals
3. To be present at group supervisions and available for individual consultations if necessary
4. To maintain continuous contact with the client and his/her family.

During the field experience social work values may be challenged more often than during lectures. For example, the issue of client's self-determination when presented in lectures is rarely questioned by students. However, when

students are involved in fieldwork, it becomes apparent that their own prejudices and personal beliefs can prevent them from respecting a client's right for self-determination.

Field instructors have to be aware that learning for doing entails theory, skill and experience, and their main task is in the integration of the three. Field instructors have to be able to dialogue with students about alternative ideas or assumptions, permanently linking theory with practice. They should be able to explain the same event from different theoretical view points and to support students to do so.

The role of the field instructor is in helping students understand the Programme and the mission and the vision of the agency where he or she works. The field instructor has to encourage students to accept clients' life styles, values and backgrounds, which may be very different from theirs. When a client's life style, values and background are similar to the student's, the field instructor has to assist them in setting appropriate boundaries. During the field instruction students have to be helped in defining their roles and responsibilities and in accepting roles and responsibilities of the other persons involved in clients' lives. The role of the field instructor is to supervise and help a student when engaged in problem solving with the client, and to help him or her when student's personal problems are blocking the communication between the student and the client or between the student and the field instructor. In social work education, students are very often told not to mix personal experiences with professional practice and that "professional distance" is very important for effective practice. It is necessary to discuss that with students. It is naive to believe that student's or practitioner's personal experiences will not influence their practice. It is also impossible to exclude personal experiences and beliefs completely. Trying to exclude them can only prevent social workers from being in contact with the client. However, it is necessary for students to be encouraged to learn about their prejudices, and ways to prevent doing harm to clients. It is also essential that during their professional training students have enough opportunities to learn about their professional roles. Social workers can use their personal experiences as a rich source for a helping

relationship. Continuous supervision can help disadvantages of this approach. During the practical experience in the fieldwork, students have to clarify their dilemmas and attitudes, and that may help them in their future jobs. Values that permeate social work practice, described in the code of ethics of the profession have to be discussed and connected with examples in practice. The choice of a client is essential in order to organise that experience in such a way that the client and the student can benefit from that encounter.

The job of the field instructor is to help students feel comfortable with social work practice through establishing comfortable working relationships. Field instructor's job is to give constructive positive and negative feedback to the student and to be able to listen and accept student's viewpoints. By supporting students in their professional growth and development, field instructors have the chance to clarify their own professional qualities.

For the effective performance of the above-mentioned roles, field instructors have to be in continuous contact with the learning institution and have to have a small number of students. They have to have time and space to discuss situations in the field with students in order to convert regular everyday practice to the educative experience. It is also argued that field instructors have to know their clients really well in order to provide useful experiences for them while in the contact with students. When Contact-Challenge Method is employed the whole experience has to be educative and useful for all participants.

#### ***4.7.2. The Role of the Client***

This thesis argues that clients are an integral part of the teaching-learning process in social work. The first client is likely to be remembered throughout one's professional practice. Encounters with clients, be they individual, group or family are vital for the complete education of social workers. The client's consent to participate is essential for the learning that may happen from that encounter. Randolph (1982) argues that a client's agreement to encounter students, to some extent, assumes responsibility for a portion of a student's education. Client's

experience has a potential great value for students, especially their previous experience with social workers. The value of this experience has been utilised in the Contact-Challenge Method. Clients involved in the Contact-Challenge Programme know how would they like to be treated from social workers and what they need from them. Their previous experience with social workers - being good, bad or neutral - when shared with students can add a special value to the learning process. Long term clients, that is persons with special needs (in the widest sense of the term, where it encompasses every person who needs help and support in performing everyday tasks) are a rich source of wisdom for social work students. Furthermore, they can also benefit from being in contact with students, who may help them perform everyday tasks and become more integrated in the community. Therefore, in the Contact-Challenge Method, clients are openly asked to share their experiences with social workers, whereas students are asked to offer them help and support in such a way clients see as appropriate. Principles of mutuality, respecting the uniqueness of each individual and empowerment are exercised continuously during the Programme. Clients are treated as experts and their responsibility is clearly defined.

This is very much in accordance with Paolo Freire's political viewpoint about education. These ideas can be utilised equally in education for social workers and in social work practice.

Authentic education is not carried on by *A for B* or *by A about B*, but rather by *A with B*, mediated by the world - a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the programme content of education can be built. In its desire to create an ideal model of the 'good man', a naively conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real man. Authentic humanism in Pierre Furter's words, 'consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation and as a project'. We simply cannot go to the workers - urban or peasant - in the banking style giving them 'knowledge' or to impose upon them the model of the 'good man' contained in a programme whose content we have ourselves organised. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views

of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their action) the *man-in-a-situation* towards whom their programme was ostensibly directed (Freire, 1972:66).

Educational programmes, especially those that refer to social work (which is a profession that provides services), should be tailored by consumers and for consumers. In social work education, firstly - students are consumers, secondly - social work agencies are consumers, because they employ students when they complete their studies, and thirdly - social work clients and their families are consumers because social workers 'created' in social work schools are going to serve them. Having these three consumer groups it is necessary to involve them as much as possible in tailoring educational programmes.

In the Contact-Challenge Method the responsibilities of the client are:

1. To meet with students once a week during the academic year
2. To make a plan of association with the student according to his or her needs (with parent's, field instructor's or student's help if necessary). This plan may involve learning or fun activities, walks, help in everyday tasks, learning together, shopping, trips, conversations...
3. To tell the student how would he or she like to be treated from social workers, and by doing that help social work students to become better professionals
4. To share any concerns about the method with the field instructor or programme co-ordinator.

In cases when clients are too young or too disabled to undertake these responsibilities, they are discussed with family members, caretakers or field instructors and the learning contract is modified according to the client's abilities.

#### ***4.7.3. The Role of the Programme Co-ordinator***

The main role of the Programme co-ordinator is to co-ordinate the Programme and to provide a context conducive to learning. His or her job is to provide a Book of Readings and suggest relevant literature for the course, to

moderate interactive lectures, to lead skills training workshops and to participate in supervision sessions.

Since teachers, are traditionally responsible for the transmission of theoretical knowledge at tertiary education settings, they have the key role in presenting theory and assessing theoretical knowledge. According to the Andragogy, Choice Theory and Experiential Learning Theory, the role of the teacher is changed and he or she becomes more a facilitator who equally participates in the process of learning rather than an omniscient transmitter of knowledge. The teacher became an explorer and a source of information, or according to Lindemann:

He [sic] is no longer an oracle who speaks from the platforms of authority but rather the guide, the pointer-out, who also participates in learning in proportion to the vitality and relevance of his facts and experiences (Lindemann, 1926: 52).

The role of the facilitator is in helping students to learn how to learn, to use their learning styles and develop new learning styles in order to learn more effectively. Machlup (1979) argues that every good teacher can become more effective if he or she adds to his or her fine qualities (as a lecturer, expositor, discussion leader, advisor and sympathetic friend of students), the requirement for reading and other homework for his or her students. Lectures are meant to be complementary with readings, not repetition or substitutes of reading. Lectures are the chance for classroom discussions to take place, based on assigned readings. The focus is on comprehension and understanding, not on mere memorisation of data. In Contact-Challenge lectures are primarily interactive. Endless lecturer's monologues are exchanged with vivid discussions and students are expected to come prepared to lectures.

It has to be emphasised that the teacher is not only a facilitator of student experience. He or she

...must play an active role in constructing and presenting well-integrated and coherent frameworks within which to locate and understand individual as well as group experience (Brah and Hoy, 1989: 75).

Bertha Capen Reynolds (1942) believes that the role of the teacher in social work is to give students the security in the fundamental belief that people are worth respecting and worth working with for improvement in social relationships. She sees that the role of the teacher is to give students a scientific orientation, be honest and tell them that the contradictions between the best social workers knowledge and social workers usual practice are regrettable, but not permanent. This helps students to see the profession in constant development and improvement. When the Contact-Challenge Method is employed these values are modelled and continuously challenged through open discussions.

The Programme co-ordinator's job is to help students learn from one another and develop a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom. The focus is placed on supporting students in their appreciation of each other's capacities to contribute to their education and development of self-confidence. The role of the Programme co-ordinator is not to put students down by convincing them that they should know more than they do, nor is to seduce students and be their 'guru' or to convince them that learning is a tough job. The role of the Programme co-ordinator is to encourage students to continuously search and extend their knowledge and experience in order to fulfil their full potential. His or her role is in creating a safe learning environment - where students are free to think, challenge, debate and discuss controversial issues in social work without fear. By participating in the creation of this kind of environment students learn how to create it when they are with their clients.

Another important task is to integrate the theory and practice of social work. It is argued that this can be carried out more effectively if the same person is teaching theory and skills and if the Programme co-ordinator is actively involved in the organisation of fieldwork. If this is not possible continuous co-operation between all participants in the process is essential for effectiveness of the process.

The Programme co-ordinator's job is to assess students' competence. The assessment and giving negative as well as positive feed-back to students was explored in 1942 and it is still a burning issue at Universities.

There are many ways of giving criticism. Behind any method is the attitude of the teacher. If criticism expresses the teacher's frustration, or impatience with the student, it will be felt as expressing just that. If it comes from genuinely understanding analysis of the job to be done and the student's work in relation to the job, and if the method of giving is chosen with regard to an educational diagnosis of the student's best way of learning, the criticism may be resisted because it is painful, but it can be dealt with by the student with real profit to himself. It is when the criticism is loaded with frustration of the relationship to the supervisor that the student cannot handle it because the relationship which should help him is thwarted (Reyndols, 1942: 247).

In the Contact-Challenge Method Programme the co-ordinator is not seen as sole source of knowledge and an examiner. Development of a co-operative learning environment conducive to learning is essential, as well as the emphasis on self-evaluation. When the Contact-Challenge Method is employed the responsibilities of the Programme co-ordinator are:

1. To co-ordinate the Programme by being in continuous contact with field instructors, students and clients
2. To provide relevant information on social work theories linking them with practice
3. To facilitate skills training workshops
4. To develop with other participants in the Programme an atmosphere conducive to learning
5. To support and encourage students to take risks and practice problem solving with one another
6. To provide critical positive and negative feed-back to students not as an ultimate assessment but as an opportunity for discussion and reflection
7. To teach students the skill of continuous self-evaluation
8. To participate in the assessment process at the end of the Programme.

#### ***4.7.4. The Role of the Student***

Social work students come from a wide range of previous life and educational experiences. Motives for engaging in social work education range from the genuine willingness to help others to a need to find solutions to personal problems. Regardless of the motives at the beginning of the course, when the Contact-Challenge Method is in action, every student has the chance to explore his or her motives and outcomes.

In order to gain from experiential learning students should have a certain natural ability and vocation to work with people. He or she has to be open to change and work on prejudices, as well as be prepared to discuss problems that appear in the field. For that openness to develop, the Programme co-ordinator's and field instructors' readiness to create an atmosphere where students will feel free to express their emotions, conflicts, fears and dilemmas in work with clients, is crucial.

Unique needs and outcomes that students set for themselves should determine the way the Programme is performed and the principle of *respecting uniqueness of every individual*, used in social work practice can be utilised in that process. Students' responsibility is to find ways to understand their clients and their worldview and understanding, and to work continuously on their personal and professional growth and development. The student's responsibility is to take an active part in the process of learning.

In the Contact-Challenge programmes students are encouraged to freely express their thoughts and feelings, so they can be open to learn. When students are overwhelmed with personal problems or with too much information to be memorised, their focus will be narrowed and they will not be able to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Therefore, when the Contact-Challenge Method is in action students' learning needs are taken into account as well as the aims and goals of the Programme.

The social work classic Bertha Capen Reynolds understood social work as an art and her view of the social work education was as follows:

Education in the arts must begin with relaxation of the artist that he may be free to be himself. It must consciously relate him to the life of his times, that he may speak to people in a language of beauty that is not foreign to them. Whatever his medium, he must combine what is unique in himself with what is universal (Reyndols, 1942: 232).

To Reyndols' romantic vision of the process of teaching-learning social work I would add the necessity of encouraging students to learn how to achieve their learning goals and how to evaluate their achievements. No matter which problem solving methods they are going to use, they need to learn how to evaluate their professional interventions. They also need to learn how to respect the clients right for self-determination in this process. In the Contact-Challenge Method students exercise problem solving and goal attainment on their own examples, working on their learning goals. They self-evaluate their achievements and they are expected to learn how to teach their future clients the same skill.

When the Contact-Challenge Method is employed, students' responsibilities are:

1. To attend lectures, skills training workshops and supervision sessions
2. To meet with their client once a week throughout the school year and to learn from them
3. To discuss with the client what is his or her role and to negotiate the contract in such a way that both can benefit
4. To construct a learning contract with set learning outcomes, strategies to attain them, and evidence of accomplishment and criteria for validating evidence
5. To practice social work skills with one another, to give feed-back to colleagues on their performance
6. To actively participate in lectures, coming prepared for discussion
7. To write a learning journal

8. To complete three written assignments relating to the integration of the theory, practice and experience

9. To strive for quality and to self-evaluate their achievements.

Student's responsibility is not:

1. To do any kind of therapy or counselling with clients from whom they learn how to become better social workers.

A learning contract is created by a student and is verified by the Programme co-ordinator, field instructor and his or her client. Completing a Goal Attainment Scale (Kiresuk and Sherman, 1968) can enrich the learning contract. The learning contract encompasses learning outcomes, possible ways of achieving these and the method of evaluation. Goal attainment scales focus on levels of attaining outcomes. Both tools help students to stay focused and to integrate theory and practice in their learning process. Every student is in control of his or her contract (or outcomes) being able to re-negotiate it with the course co-ordinator, field instructor and a client.

In their journals, students are instructed to reflect on their experiences according to the subheadings: *action-reflection-planning* used in action research. They may choose to answer on three simple questions after every encounter with their clients:

1. What did I offer to the person I am associating with (what was my input)?
2. What did I receive from this contact (what did I learn, realise, understand)?
3. What can I do next time to improve my practice (knowledge, contact)?

Some students like to write more in their journals, but action research subheadings or answers to these three questions are considered essential. All answers, as long as they are authentic and sincere, are appreciated and it is assumed that they promote learning. If students find these questions inappropriate for reflecting on their contact with clients, they can explain their specific situation

and replace these questions with whatever they believe is more appropriate for their unique experience and learning style and justify their choice.

#### **4.8. Evaluation of the Programme**

Students, clients and field instructors evaluate the Programme three times during the year so improvements can be incorporated in the Programme during its course. At the end, all participants evaluate the Programme. Possible improvements are discussed, and students evaluate their own work in areas of their theoretical knowledge, involvement in the fieldwork, and the process of goal attainment. Reflections, ideas and suggestions for innovations are a welcome part of the evaluation process. Evaluation sheets are handed to all participants. Students and clients evaluate the organisation of the Programme, the work of field instructors and that of the Programme co-ordinator.

#### **4.9. Assessment**

Students' self-evaluation, clients' assessment, field instructors' assessment and peer assessment, are the basic tools for the marking of student work. Since field instructors are in contact with the clients involved in the Programme, they assess student participation in the Programme, taking into account, but not for granted, clients' opinion. Evaluation is mutual, and self-evaluation plays an important role in the process of assessment at the end of the Programme. The Programme co-ordinator gives feed-back and discusses the field instructors' assessment with a student. The final examination, if a part of the curriculum, is oral and performed in a group. The examination is in a non-threatening discursive format and students are supposed to demonstrate their understanding of integration of the theory, practice and experience. Students complete three written assignments relating to the integration of theory, practice and experience in social work practice. The oral examination process happens at the end of the Programme and it is actually a group conversation about theoretical and practical issues. At

the end of that group discussion students self-evaluate their theoretical knowledge, involvement in the fieldwork and the process of outcome attainment. Their assessment is compared with the field instructor's, peers' and Programme co-ordinator's assessment, and the final mark is discussed in a group with other students.

#### **4.10. Endings**

At the end of the Programme, a closure celebration is organised for all participants. If the Programme proves to be effective, the same clients may be involved in the Programme the following year. Certificates of participation are handed to all clients. When structure of the Curriculum allows continuation of the Programme, students who participated in the Programme introduce their new colleagues to the clients if clients choose to participate in the following year.

#### **4.11. Conclusion**

When the 'Contact-Challenge Method' is employed, social work theories learned in the classroom are continuously tested in real life situations. Therefore, theoretical assumptions, values and principles of social work are constantly challenged through field experience. The integration of the theory, practice and experience happens continuously, because supervision, fieldwork and skills training take place simultaneously. Students have the chance to connect theory and practice immediately, and reflect on it. The next chapter focuses on action research and its value for continuous improvement of the Contact-Challenge Method.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## IN PURSUIT OF AN ADEQUATE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*Motivation is fuelled by cause, driven by vision and implemented by action.*

*Pat Mesiti*

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the utilisation of an action research methodology as a key tool for evaluation and improvement of the Contact-Challenge Method. The Contact-Challenge Programmes have evaluation built within the process. This chapter links action research with experiential learning and justifies its compatibility with the Contact Challenge Method.

The major challenge confronting research in social work education is choosing a methodology, which is consistent with the values that permeate humanistic sciences. The significance of 'values' is exemplified by the distinctions that can be drawn between the positivist and ecological worldviews. Although social scientists in the positivist tradition assert that they are 'value-free', their research is consistently defined by three characteristics or 'values': objectivity, neutrality, and determinism. These values permeate positivist research and as such they are incompatible with contemporary social work practice and education. Filstead (1979), Carr and Kemmis (1986), Everitt, Hardiker, Littlewood and Mullender (1992) and Whitehead (1992) among others claim that there are more compatible ways of undertaking research in social work and education than adopting a traditional positivist methodology. They propose a participatory or collaborative approach, which accepts values like subjectivity,

participation and flexibility. The emphasis is not confined to final outcome, but rather it is extended to the process and dynamics that develop between participants. The methods they propose are compatible with the values that permeate social work and educational practice. Filstead (1979), Heron (1981), Oakley (1981), Wadsworth (1984), Huxley (1988) and others have documented the limitations of the positivist approach largely because of the way in which it exercises power over participants. In particular, Heron (1981) charged the positivist tradition with being an agent of authoritarian social control, demonstrating that whereas knowledge and power is on the side of the researchers and their political masters, those who provide the data and are subject to its interpretation have little or no power themselves.

By contrast, participatory forms of research accept the subjective experience of participants as well as their active contribution. Participants are acknowledged as true experts (Stanley and Wise, 1983). According to Filstead (1979) participants are active agents of the research act making sense of the realities they encounter, rather than simply responding to stimuli.

## **5.2. History of Action Research**

The fact that Kurt Lewin (1946) - who largely influenced the development of experiential learning theory, developed and applied action research in a series of community projects - lends support to the notion that action research is the most appropriate method for studying experiential learning methods. Lewin described action research as a spiral of steps where each step had four stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. He derived his model of action research from his Experiential Learning Model (see Fig. 1.1. on page 55).

Kurt Lewin developed the action research method to invite democratic participation in exploring social and educational problems and in taking action to improve the situation instead of merely observing the situation.

Paolo Freire (1972) analysed dialogue stating that the word has two

dimensions, action and reflection. Sacrifice of action leads to verbalism and sacrifice of reflection is activism. Only through the dialogue where action and reflection are in continuous interplay effective practice can occur.

In the United Kingdom, John Elliott (1982) used action research as means of helping teachers develop enquiry learning in their classrooms and he promoted the idea of self-evaluation in the classroom. Winter (1989) elaborated the method of action research and conducted a number of action research projects in the field of education in the United Kingdom.

In the USA, Brock-Utne (1980) and van Manen (1984) conducted studies in the field of education, using action research. In Australia Brown, Henry, Henry and McTaggart, (1982), Carr and Kemmis (1986), McTaggart and Garbutcheon-Singh, (1986 and 1987) and Kember and Kelly (1993) were all active in promoting action research. In Great Britain, McNiff (1992) and in the USA Sagor (1992), published significant textbooks on how to conduct action research, offering principles and case studies. At the beginning of the nineties, action research was no longer seen as a strange and unusual way of exploring education, but rather it had become an established way of thinking and improving practice. In the process it engaged practitioners to research and evaluate their own work.

Whitehead (1985) identified a dialogue as a crucial element of action research. Dialogue, comprising questions and answers, was seen as the essence of dialectics. The focus was on changing the point of view, expanding awareness and developing through contact with another person and through sharing thoughts and opinions. Questions and answers in action research are interrelated with one question becoming another question's answer in turn, which, becomes a new question (McNiff, 1992).

Action research was developed because scientists and practitioners realised that life was not static, and while, statistical methods could be useful in learning about certain situations, these methods could not in themselves bring about change. In educational research, questions and answers are in continuing communication. Science is not static and it has to be viable; as all viable systems, it has to be flexible, adjustable, reflexive and responsive to the environment in

which it exists.

When action research is employed, theories are not validated independently and then applied to practice; instead, they are validated through practice. At tertiary education levels, action research is not only possible, but particularly appropriate, because it promotes critical attitudes, research into teaching, accountability, self-evaluation and professionalism.

### 5.3. Definitions of Action Research

The main difference between traditional forms of research and action research is that in traditional settings, a set of researchers carry out research on another set of people (Bartholomew, 1972). Action research, however, is

the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it (Elliott, 1982:1).

Action research relies on self-evaluation and professional development (Elliott, 1982) where researchers are at the same time subjects of the research. A key goal of action research is professional development, which indicates the basic unity of theoretical and practical knowledge.

The process of action research involves reflection and immediate changes in practice:

[a]ction research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Kemmis, McTaggart, 1988:5).

Zuber-Skerritt (1992) defines it within the framework of tertiary education as being

a collaborative, critical enquiry by the academics themselves (rather than expert educational researchers) into their own teaching practice, into

problems of student learning and into curriculum problems. It is professional development through academic course development, group reflection, action, evaluation and improved practice (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992:1-2).

Action research, therefore, can be defined as the search by teachers themselves for effective ways of conducting the teaching-learning processes and of testing these through evaluation, reflection and review of the teaching-learning methods.

Hart and Bond (1995) distinguished action research from other methodologies, selecting seven criteria of action research:

1. is educative;
2. deals with individuals as members of social groups;
3. is problem-focused, context-specific and future-oriented;
4. involves a change intervention;
5. aims at improvement and involvement;
6. involves a cyclic process in which research, action and evaluation are interlinked;
7. is founded on a research relationship in which those involved are participants in the change process (Hart and Bond, 1995).

These seven criteria distinguish action research from traditional methodologies, making it applicable for research in health, social work and education. In these fields involvement of participants in the process of evaluation makes the research process interesting, empowering and challenging for all participants.

#### **5.4. Why not a Comparative Study**

Even though a comparative design might have seemed to be the most suitable for the evaluation of a new method of teaching, it was judged inappropriate to use an experimental and control group in assessing the Contact-Challenge Programme. Hamilton (1978), noted that group comparisons in evaluation of education may give equivocal results, especially if more than one

variable is studied, also, the control group may appear superior in one variable, and the experimental in another. Hamilton (1978) also argued against comparative evaluation, because every new method, course or curriculum sets its own goals and standards.

Tyler (1967) developed an approach where innovative methods of education are measured against agreed internal standards. A critique of Tyler, by Scriven (1967), maintained that Tylerian models of evaluation are unable to solve the problem of comparison, because course and programme objectives and achievements are always established by reference to, or in reaction to, the objectives and achievements of other courses or programmes. In comparative studies it is often hard to distinguish the effect of the actual programme from the impact of all the other inputs which intrude when humans are involved.

Action research offers models of evaluation where control groups are not necessary in order to gain relevant and scientific conclusions. Action research offers models of evaluation based on sharing power and responsibility with participants. Lifelong experience of social relationships may generate a more sophisticated account for educational practice than proficiency at multivariate analysis and the tacit knowledge of practitioners may be more significant to program operation than the generalised statements of theoreticians (Hamilton, 1978).

Education as a dynamic and viable process cannot be effectively studied by breaking it down into dependent and independent variables. In the framework of action research it is inappropriate to experiment *on* people. Action researchers use a disciplined form of inquiry where they make the practical problem public, propose a solution, then act, evaluate and modify their thematic concerns. Public criticism is used as a check against which to judge the validity of their accounts. The goal of action research is to enhance and improve, not only to describe. Pre-test - post-test studies describe the situation as it is, and they may be a good starting point for an action research, but they do not take into account the social and personal factors that play an important role in learning processes. Action research starts in the **here and now** of the actual problem.

Development of a Contact - Challenge Programme in each educational setting starts with questions such as:

“How can the Contact-Challenge Method be applied in this specific setting?”

“How can participation in the Contact-Challenge Programme improve the quality of life of the clients involved?”

“How can field instructors benefit from the Programme?”

“What are the learning goals that students would like to achieve?”

“How does the Programme cater for these needs?”

“What tools for evaluation can be used in this particular Programme?”

“How can Contact-Challenge Method be improved by means of creating this particular Contact-Challenge Programme?”

“How can students learn more, and enjoy the process of learning?”

“Is this programme offering what students really need to become competent professionals?”

“Do I and my students, clients and field instructors share the same values?”

“Are my personal values denied in my professional practice?”

“How can we create change in understanding, values, skills and attitudes?”

Action research attempts to move forward to find solutions, which are never definite and static. The action research methodology does not use measuring in a conventional sense but it uses various evaluation methods to find out whether or not a contribution has been made to enhance the quality of education. All participants in the process of education are evaluating whether this contribution has been made. For all these reasons, action research methodology seemed to be more appropriate than a comparative study.

## 5.5. Experiential Learning and Action Research

Action research is closely linked to experiential learning theory. It is simply another loop of the spiral of the experiential learning process, which comprises concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Action research is a participatory and collaborative way of exploring teaching and learning processes. Experiential learning programmes should be evaluated by action research given that, the same epistemology lies behind both processes. Evaluating any Contact-Challenge Programme by assuming that the researcher is an objective observer would be impossible, because the researcher is involved in the performance of the method; furthermore, the Contact-Challenge Method has evaluation built into the process, and all participants are equally involved in the process of evaluation anyway.

The main difference between experiential learning and action research is that in experiential learning, change is occurring within the learner, who is willingly changing him or herself by being on different stages of the experiential learning spiral; whereas in action research, change is occurring in the course or programme which is being studied and in every participant involved in the process. The change is internal and external at the same time, it is the change in the content and the change in the process. The ecological systems theory idea that humans are influencing their environment simultaneously while the environment is influencing them, is accepted in this research; the purpose is to discover how these mutual interactions occur and how to improve them.

Accepting Brew's (1993) idea that research is a process of learning from particular kinds of experiences, action research seems to be the most suitable method for exploration of experiential and integrative educational methods. Action research unites science and practice, by relying on experiential learning cycle. Similarly, as experiential methods of education offer an alternative to traditional forms of teaching, so action research offers a genuine alternative to positivism. Winter (1987) perceives action research in the field of education to be a form of inquiry that seeks to reveal to teachers the transient and contingent

status of their practice in such a way that makes it amenable to critical transformation. Winter (1987) and Carr (1995) consider that action research should be concerned with enabling teachers to reflect critically on the contradictions between their educational ideas and beliefs and the institutionalised practices through which these ideas and beliefs are expressed. The relationship between action (practice) and research (science which allows hypotheses to be tested towards the formation of theory) has to be grasped dialectically.

The idea of reflexivity is one of the basic terms in this kind of inquiry. Writing about reflexive action research, Winter noted that this kind of research would not offer a “theory”, but rather propose

..... to subject the theories of common-sense and of professional expertise to a critical analysis of their located-ness within the practice whose intelligibility they serve. Action research thus proposes a move ‘beyond’ theories (....) which prescribe and justify an interpretative basis for action towards a reflexive awareness of the dialectic which can sustain their mutuality while transforming both (Winter, 1987:150).

Weber stressed that in social research subjective meaning and action cannot be excluded in favour of monitoring behaviour.

In ‘action’ is included all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it. Action in this sense may be either overt, or purely inward or subjective; it may consist of positive intervention in a situation, or of deliberately refraining from such intervention or passively acquiescing in the situation. Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course (Weber, 1964: 88, in Kemmis’s Introduction to Carr, 1995).

The traditional positivist scientist's view is that practice cannot be understood by reference to the self-understandings of the actors, while sociologists, like Weber, believe that it cannot be understood without reference to self-understanding of the actors.

When the subject of research is another human being or a group of human beings, positivistic methods seem to be inappropriate, as “human subjects” have

the ability to observe, interpret and decide how to respond. If the research is conducted in such a way that a researcher intends to disguise his or her intentions, and pretends that he or she is objective, we may never know about the reality of the process of research that particular research.

Hence, the positivist researcher's desire for detachment, for large data samples, and for interpretations with the status of general laws, must be seen as fundamentally misplaced - as a combination of naivety and arrogance - because they can never explain how they themselves (as researchers) are freely creating new understandings through their activities, whereas the people they are observing can apparently be interpreted as merely behaving according to general rules, which the researchers hope to be able to specify in their findings. In other words, positivist social science researchers can always only *assume* (and can *never* be sure) that they are not being misunderstood, taken for a ride, set up, manipulated, or otherwise misled by those activities they claim to be able to 'describe' (Winter, 1989:29).

The idea that social sciences should replicate the methods of research of natural sciences is opposed by interpretative approaches to educational research which insist that the aim and purpose of social research is not to construct scientific theories that can be experimentally tested, but to construct interpretative accounts which grasp the intelligibility and coherence of social action by revealing the meaning it has to those who perform it (Bantock, 1965; Carr, 1995). Opposition to these two conceptions put scientists in the position of having to choose between the two in their scientific practice, as if scientific explanation and interpretative understanding are two mutually exclusive goals. In the field of social work and in the field of education it is impossible to exclude scientific explanation from interpretative understanding and vice versa. In both fields, theory and practice are indivisible.

[T]heoretical problems do not arise out of the theoretical vacuum but, instead, always reflect and result from the theoretical background against which they occur. The problems of social scientific research, therefore, are not determined by inadequacies in any of the social practices or human activities which such research may seek to explain, but by inadequacies in the theoretical framework in terms of which these investigations are conducted. For example, psychological problems about learning are not

determined by the practical problems experienced by learners but by the psychological theory of learning that guides those engaged in this kind of research.

Educational problems, being practical problems, are not governed by the rules and norms of theoretical research. Rather, they occur when the practices employed in educational activities are in some sense inadequate to their purpose (Carr, 1995:80).

The methodology of action research tries to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and reunite planning, action, reflection and observation. Carr (1995) noted that all problems are reflections of a gap between theory and practice. He claims that educational problems reveal the failure to reconcile the realities of practice with the theoretical framework within which these practices are experienced or understood. Therefore, it may be concluded that bridging the gap between theory and practice, observed equally in social work practice and social work education, should not be the matter of finding ways of improving the practical application of theories, but one of improving theories used by practitioners to make sense of their practices.

Carr's thoughts can be applied to social work research, and are equally relevant for research in social work education. Hilgard and Bower (1966) arrived at a similar conclusion when they stated that:

It has been found enormously difficult to apply laboratory-derived principles of learning to the improvement of efficiency in tasks with clear and relatively simple objectives. We may infer that it will be even more difficult to apply laboratory-derived principles of learning to the improvement of efficient learning in tasks with more complex objectives (Hilgard and Bower, 1966 :542).

Action research allows for change, complexity, conflict and contradiction which may occur in the teaching-learning process. The evaluator's task in action research is to make explicit these different views, leaving it to the readers of the report to make sense of the different views and to judge among them (Everitt, 1992).

## 5.6. Issues of Generalisability, Validity and Reliability of Action Research

The test for ability to generalise lies in the possibility of applying the research findings in different settings and contexts from that in which the findings were obtained. In the framework of an ecological worldview, experiential learning and action research context plays an essential role. Context is closely linked to the findings of the research, and subjects of the research are indivisible from the context in which the research takes place. In participatory action research, subjects are active participants who by their being and acting in the process of research are creating the context in which the research occurs. The generalisability of action research is reflected in the notion that context is embraced as an integral part of the research; and findings from one study to another can be applied only when the context where the research is happening has been taken into account. In this thesis, the teaching-learning method that proved to be effective in one context is modified and 'translated' into a different context. If it proves to be effective in the new context, this will not mean that the first findings were generalisable; action research is situated and every situation is unique. The findings from the action research will tell only about that situation, and no other. Attempting to conduct two exact same studies would mean to ignore the context and, as such, would not be in accordance with the values and ideas that permeate action research.

The question of the validity of action research is based on answering the question, "Does this data really measure or represent what it says it does?" (Sagor, 1992). Action research does not attempt to be objective. Traditional positivist researchers claim that its findings cannot be universally tested and therefore are not valid. Action research starts from a different epistemology, which is graphically represented in the form of a never-ending spiral. Participatory action research does not attempt to find absolute answers but attempts to improve or change educational practice. Validity is gained through self-validation, peer validation and learner validation (McNiff, 1992).

The strength of action research is that individual teachers interpret their practice and make decisions about improving it. ... Individuals recognise the potential in their interpretations of their practice. Such personal judgements may make a significant contribution to the lives of other people. One individual in making public his (her) particular form of life, invites others to share that form. If others are prepared to do so, they agree that it is worthwhile, that is, they validate his way of life and his claim to knowledge (McNiff, 1992:133).

The claim for valid knowledge can be realised only through communication and through persistent attempts to understand the context wherein the education process is occurring. Universal truths exist only in the 'quality world of values' of every individual, which is always unique. It is paradoxical that something that we call 'universal' is actually something that is unique for every human being, and distinguishes that person as an individual. These universal values can be tested in the 'world of action' through communication and interaction. The validity of action research is to be found in its relevance, emancipation, democracy and collaboration.

Reliability is concerned with accuracy of the methods of measurement. Triangulation, used in the Croatian study, and again in the New Zealand study, adds to the reliability of the findings. Instruments that are used and combined in triangulation, attempting to evaluate the method and to pinpoint its advantages and disadvantages.

### **5.7. Limitations of the Action Research**

The main limitation of action research is that it may over-emphasise the views of participants. It may also put all responsibility for improvement onto the participants themselves, what may be in some cases empowering, but it may also put too much responsibility on consumers' (clients or students) shoulders. Clear goal identification and clarity of responsibility may resolve this limitation. Another limitation of action research is that it is very time consuming. It requires enthusiastic professionals who can see advantages of improvement of their

practices which action research offers.

McNiff (1992), maintains that action research focuses only on one track of life at a time, ignoring that related but dissimilar problems may arise and oust the main focus, and that real people have the flexibility and creativity to move from one problem to another and then return to the original one. The complexity of human relations, which arise in educational processes is so rich that is impossible to follow all tracks at the same time. Being aware of the context of the research and being aware of the uniqueness of every educational process, we may encourage flexibility and allow creativity of participants to improve our research projects. Since every occasion of action research opens new possibilities for further research, it also offers the chance to overcome this disadvantage.

### **5.8. Stages of Action Research Used to Evaluate the Contact-Challenge Method**

Lewin described action research as a spiral, where the ending of every phase is the beginning of the next. Action plans are flexible and responsive. The basic steps of the action research are: planning, action, observation and reflection. (Fig. 4.1.) These steps reflect the experiential learning cycle (Fig.1.1. on page 55).

Which step will be the first, depends on the nature of the problem. Elliott (1982) suggests that the first step should be an analysis of current practice, that is, reflection as a prelude for further planning. Brown, Henry, Henry and McTaggart (1982) suggest that action research should start with the implementation of a change in practice. Wherever the action research starts, since it is in the form of a spiral, each step has to be employed at least once.

## THE ACTION RESEARCH SPIRAL

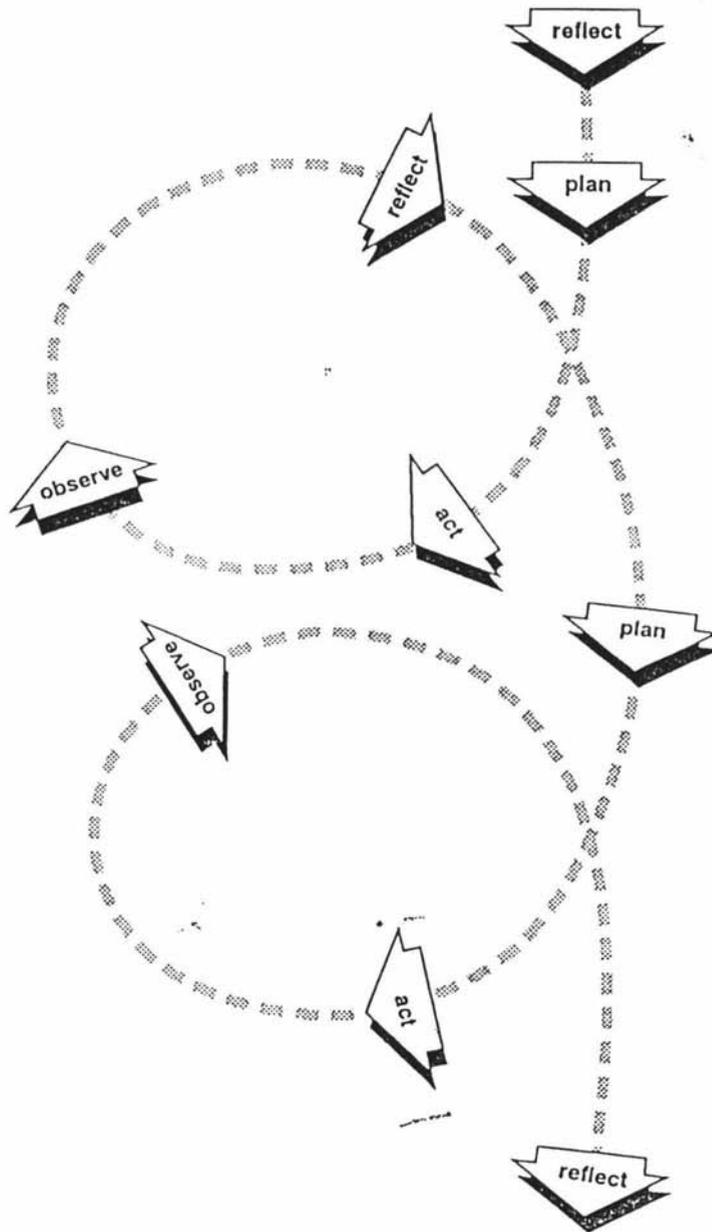


Fig. 5.1. The Action Research Spiral (from Kember and Kelly, 1993: 6).

Sagor (1993) focuses on three related stages of action in action research:

1. Initiating action
2. Monitoring and adjusting action
3. Evaluating action

Given that action research is a never-ending process, evaluation is always followed by further action.

For Zuber-Skerritt (1992) the research process in an academic setting consists of the following steps:

1. Analysis of the problem in the field, consulting literature and reflecting on the state of art in practice.
2. Designing a workshop course, integrated into the timetable, content and structure of the programme and monitoring it during its implementation.
3. Evaluating the success and effectiveness of the intervention by the following methods:
  - questionnaire survey,
  - semi-structured video group interview,
  - informal discussion,
  - analysis of the results of student's dissertations and examiner's reports.
4. Discussion and reflection on these results and drawing conclusions for the next revised workshop course and for postgraduate education generally.
5. Presenting a conference paper or publishing an article in a scientific journal.

The process continues with new insights, initial reflections and the cycle of action research through experience starts again.

McNiff (1992) offered the action-reflection spiral, as a representation of action research, comprising identification of a problem, imagining a solution, implementing the solution, observing the effects, evaluating the outcomes, modifying actions and ideas in the light of the evaluation, re-planning for the next action step.

While every action researcher may have his or her way of conceptualising the action research, actually, all studies have a similar framework which Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) suggest as being:

1. Initial reflection
2. Planning
3. Action
4. Observation and reflection

These stages have been chosen as a framework of this thesis.

### **Initial reflection**

Initial reflection involves an analysis of the literature and critiquing the *state of art* in the field, as well as possible ideas for improvement of the situation. Initial reflection provides the foundation for planning and involves the formulation of *the thematic concern*. It focuses on the here and now, on the background theory or theories that are supporting ideas that are going to be studied and how the subject of study (that is the educational programme) is informed and justified by particular educational theories. It states values and the framework where the research is going to happen. During the initial reflection the action researcher explores the wider context of the theme he or she is going to study and participate in. The biographies of the participants are important and taken into account as a basis of thinking about objective - physical and material, and subjective - psychological and interpersonal contributions to the research.

According to Kolb's cycle, outlined in Chapter One, initial reflection employs reflective observation, which is based on previous concrete experience.

### **Planning**

Action research is a constructed action and it acknowledges that all social action is to some degree unpredictable and therefore risky (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). In the action research the planning stage is similar to planning in social work practice because it has to be flexible enough to be changed during

the action if necessary. In the planning stage possible risks involved in social change are checked and possible constraints recognised. Planning involves discussion by all participants in order to develop a practical and theoretical discourse and direction of the action (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

Discussion about the action that is going to happen is the beginning of the planning phase. At this stage, participants are orienting themselves and discussing the possibilities for improvement. Values and outcomes of the study are discussed at this stage and the Programme is developed.

### **Action**

The action is the central part of the action research. It involves active experimentation of all participants in the particular context and it is this active experimentation which contributes to concrete experience. The action has to be planned by the participants themselves and it is during the action stage that they explore the effects and outcomes of their actions, attempting to link theory, practice and experience.

### **Observation and Reflection**

Reflection on action involves observation and the increased awareness of experiences that are happening or that happened during the action phase. In action research, observation is happening simultaneously with the action or immediately after the action. There are no observers opposed to the observed in that process. All participants are involved in the process of reflection in action in order to learn and improve ways of teaching and learning. Every reflection at the end of one cycle of the spiral of action research is the beginning of a new cycle which begins again with initial reflection. Action research is revolving in a sense of a never-ending spiral where all achieved outcomes are foundations for starting a new action. Reflection on the results is a step forward to the new level of the action research spiral.

The most common techniques for monitoring in action research, described

in the literature (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, Winter, 1989, Zuber-Skerritt, 1992) are: student logs, field notes or journals, anecdotal notes, ecological behavioural descriptions, document analysis, questionnaires, various sociometric methods, interviews and tape or video recordings. Observation techniques are often combined and chosen according to the problem that is studied.

Reflection comprises analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation, the drawing of conclusions and suggestions for further research. Reflection on the results in social sciences is always value laden and it does not aim to justify or prove if performed practice was 'right' or 'wrong'. It tries to present what happened, find possible answers as to why it happened and how the educational practice may be improved from action that has taken place.

Action research provides a valuable context for development of the Contact-Challenge Method. It acknowledges the values, which permeate social work and education and utilises them to improve educational and social work practices.

### **5.9. Conclusion - Rationale for Using Action Research**

Action research is focused on studying educational (and other) practices through action. It involves a spiral of self reflection and cycles of planning action; implementing a plan; monitoring circumstances, processes and consequences of action; reflecting on the evidence gathered; re-planning in the light of reflection; and entering a new phase of action and monitoring (Kemmis and Stake, 1988). It is a never-ending evaluative process.

Action research, which is in essence participatory and evaluative, offers the appropriate methodology for studying experiential learning in social work education and for finding better ways of educating social workers. Thus, action research is the most suitable way to explore possibilities of bridging the gap between theory and practice and of evaluating a method, which seeks to integrate theory, practice and experience.

This thesis proposes to argue that the educational theory, or group of

educational theories, which lie behind the Contact-Challenge Method, have to be assessed according to their practical consequences in a specific setting. The process itself should be self-correcting, enhancing the opportunity for the Contact-Challenge Method to be improved and further developed.

Since the Contact-Challenge Method is an experiential process that actively involves all participants and promotes humanistic values, it would be inappropriate to monitor participants from the standpoint of an “objective” observer. Participants’ involvement, not only in the Programme, but also in its creation and evaluation, is an essential component of the method itself. Students’ involvement and the continual encouragement given to them to research their own learning processes, while participating in the Contact-Challenge Method, helps them to integrate theory, practice and experience, and gives the Contact-Challenge Method the opportunity to maintain its viability through continuous improvement. The following two chapters demonstrate how the research was carried out in two different settings.

## PART THREE – ACTION

### CHAPTER 6

## THE CROATIAN STUDY

*At the heart of teaching is learning.*

*Beulah Rothman*

### 6.1. Introduction

The Croatian study is concentrated on the evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method at the University of Zagreb in Croatia by means of collaborative action research. The size of the sample of participants provided an opportunity to test the method using quantitative methods as well as qualitative. The evaluation, from 89 students and 89 clients who just completed the Programme, 55 students who were at the end of their study and 9 field instructors from various social work settings, helped in the further refinement of the method.

The Croatian study was a project that lasted for four years, with modifications after every evaluation, continuously reflecting the feedback received from the participants. Findings from the first three years of the project are summarised and the major focus of this study is on the year 1993/1994 when the data for the quantitative analysis was obtained. Since the context of the Croatian study is vital, the research, which followed in New Zealand, does not attempt to duplicate findings from Croatia. The individual experience of the participants in the process is unique, and the Croatian study is used as an evaluative study of the method performed in one context. Data obtained in Croatia helped in constructing the Contact-Challenge Programme in the New Zealand context, with care being exercised in appreciating the uniqueness of the new context where the method was adjusted and evaluated again. The Croatian study is presented here because the actual study in New Zealand would not have its present

form without these four years of intensive action and research in Croatia. In order to explore experiential learning processes more thoroughly and its implications to social work education, I have decided to present the Croatian study, in a condensed form and, then to focus on the qualitative action research in New Zealand. The Croatian study presented in this chapter, is one loop in a multidimensional spiral of action research, which aims at improving social work education.

The action research conducted in New Zealand at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University's Albany Campus in Auckland is simply another step in the never-ending process of exploring the effectiveness of teaching learning processes in social work education. It is argued that if the method proves to be effective in two very different contexts, using qualitative and quantitative evaluative methods, it can perhaps be applied anywhere in the world with similarly effective outcomes.

The structure of the chapter:

This chapter will follow the form of action research stages as follows:

1. Initial reflection
2. Planning
3. Action
4. Reflection

## **6.2. Initial Reflection**

*From 1989/1990*

As mentioned in Chapter Four the method was designed by pulling together needs from the social work field, students' needs, and my own needs as a teacher in order to improve social work practice education. Students' evaluations of the course in Croatia showed that they appreciated the theoretical knowledge they were taught but found that it was not linked with practice. They expressed clearly their wish for more fieldwork. While they were much needed in the very

demanding social work field they did not feel that they had the skills and knowledge needed to be competent social workers when they completed the five-year full time programme.

At the beginning of the Croatian study in 1990, I had only a vague idea about the development of what would be a more relevant course and which would promote group and individual experiential learning. At that time, while I was very idealistic, I was also aware that I could not change the whole of social work education in Croatia. I believed nevertheless that I could create a course that would integrate theory, practice and experience within the framework of a paper “Social Work with Individual Systems” that I was teaching at the time. Many questions were on my mind. Through the process called in action research *initial reflection* I retrieved some of them.

I observed that majority of students were passive during lectures and I asked myself:

*How can I encourage students to be responsible and more involved in what they learn?*

I observed that persons with special needs are isolated in Croatian society by physical, mental and societal barriers and I asked my social work colleagues and myself:

*How can students of social work support persons with special needs in their everyday activities, and learn problem-solving methods without practising those methods on persons with special needs?*

I realised that persons with special needs (in the widest sense) and their families are a rich source of wisdom for social work students and I asked them and myself:

*How can I involve persons with special needs in an empowering way, but not in such a way that they will feel like “guinea pigs” for our students practising social work skills?*

I looked at myself as a teacher and I asked my students and myself:

*Do I possess the important qualities which I want my students to have?*

*How can I be certain that students' concept of learning coincides with mine?*

When I clarified mentioned issues I analysed student evaluations of the Bachelor of Social Work course and it became apparent that they wanted to:

1. Learn things that were useful for their future profession
2. Grow and develop and learn how to deal with professional and personal dilemmas in life
3. Be in continuous contact with practice during the course in order to link theory and practice
4. Help people
5. Have the chance to express their creativity
6. Solve some personal issues that may prevent them from being effective social workers.

Thirty interviews with randomly selected students confirmed that these were the issues, which were uppermost in the students' minds.

From a survey and interviews that I conducted as a research project for my Master's thesis and from continuous communication with practitioners in the field we discovered that persons with special needs (in the widest sense):

1. Would like to be in contact with social work students
2. Would like to be supported in their everyday activities
3. See participation in an exchange programme, where they would be invited to participate as experts, as a challenge
4. Believed they can help social work students to become better social workers.

In each of the four client groups, which we planned to involve in the Croatian study (persons with physical difficulties, persons with mental difficulties, children with inadequate parental care and senior citizens placed in nursing homes), interest and willingness to be involved in this type of collaboration was clear.

### ***6.2.1. Analytic Discourse - Exploration of Resources***

#### *Beginning of the year 1990*

Four colleagues working in four different social work settings (with persons with physical difficulties, with persons with mental difficulties, with the elderly, and with the children) and myself used the method named in Sagor's work (1992) *analytic discourse*, in order to thoroughly discuss our understanding of the phenomena we wanted to explore and the practice we wanted to improve. We used the "How to" statements, a technique described in Barnes (1994), which can turn almost any problem into an opportunity. After many hours of formal and informal discussions, I took responsibility for pulling these ideas together in order to create a course that aimed to integrate theory, practice and experience. The aim was to satisfy students' and clients' needs and to maintain the course as a viable, changeable, reflexive and, of course, educative experience

Previous experience showed that many students felt unable to offer professional help to clients during their first fieldwork experience. They also reported that they felt so overwhelmed by theoretical knowledge and recently learned steps in the problem solving process, that they would not be able to establish genuine contact with their clients, a necessary prerequisite for effective intervention. They asked for more contact with clients in order to learn how to establish contact without prejudice and to learn how to apply learned skills in practice.

Data from reflective interviews with potential clients and their families and from students' evaluation reports clearly showed that clients needed students and

students needed clients. The analytic discourse with colleagues in the field showed that they were ready and able to offer quality supervision and to participate in the programme that was starting to take shape.

### **6.3. Planning - Creating the Contact Challenge Method**

*Year 1990*

As described in Chapter Four, the Contact-Challenge Method differs from traditional tertiary methods of teaching. All participants are challenged and continuous contact, dialogue and open communication provides an integrated learning experience for all participants. The structure of the Bachelor of Social Work course offered the opportunity to carry out the method during the whole academic year from the end of September to the end of May and over a four-year period with students on their second year of study.

Incorporating action research methodology into the Contact Challenge Programme created in 1990, offered the opportunity to improve the Contact-Challenge Method continuously through its actual performance. Each year of its performance was improved by suggestions described in the feedback from last year's participants. The "bare bones" (described in detail in Chapter Four under the subheading Essential Features of the Contact-Challenge Method) stayed the same every year, as there was no objection to the basic premises of the method.

The main goal was to support students to experience and challenge social work values and principles in real-life situations, and to integrate these with the theoretical knowledge learned in lectures and from literature.

As mentioned before, the method was performed in the framework of the course called 'Social Work with Individual Systems'. It was a course taught throughout the full academic year, at the second year of the five-year Bachelor of Social Work programme and comprised:

1. Theory - taught through interactive lectures and literature reading - 2 hours per week
2. Skills training workshops - which comprised problem-solving practice - 2 hours per week

3. Contact with clients - being with the client and his or her family - 2 hours per week

4. Supervision - with field instructors - recommended at least once a month plus individual sessions when needed on student's or field instructor's request.

### **6.3.1. Context**

The implementation of the Contact-Challenge Method started in the academic year 1990/91 with 75 students and 75 clients; it continued in 1991/92 with 120 students and 120 clients; in 1992/93 with 125 students and 125 clients; and in 1993/94 with 89 students and 89 clients. The number of students varied because different numbers of students were enrolled each year, due to the provision of government funding and the number of students who satisfied requirements for enrolment. For the first two years six field instructors were involved and later we had to employ three more. All of them were educated in supervision and were experienced professionals. The method survived the war and even the horrible war situation in Croatia at that time was utilised as a challenge and an opportunity to learn from the consequences of the war and the paradoxical situations, which it imposed. Many students were refugees themselves and we had to deal with the grief, anger, personal and professional problems that the war had created.

Second year students were chosen in Croatia, because it was assumed that students needed some general theoretical knowledge about social work before entering the Programme.

### **6.3.2. Reflection on Findings from 1990 to 1993**

#### *Summary of the Data and Findings 1990/91 to 1992/93.*

From the 1990/91 to 1992/93 students, clients and their families were asked to evaluate the Contact-Challenge Programme and share their ideas for improvement at the end of each semester. Questionnaires were mailed to clients and their families and they were asked to return them by reply post. Students answered questionnaires in big groups and questionnaires were anonymous. In the period from 1990 to 1993, evaluation questionnaires were with open-ended questions, and in the academic year 1993/94 the questionnaire with closed questions was constructed on the basis of answers from the previous years.

On the basis of this evaluative process the following improvements were introduced:

1. Students expressed the need for more group and scheduled supervisions with field instructors. In the period from 1990 to 1993 students had group supervision once a month and individual supervision anytime they desired, subject to making an appointment with the supervisor. Students expressed that they did not make appointments with supervisors when they needed to and gave several reasons for this: they felt that the problem they had was not really important, or big enough to bother the supervisor; they expressed their fear of being criticised or rejected; or they stated they had not had time to make an appointment. Small problems at the beginning of the year became huge problems by the end of the year. Students rarely initiated supervision sessions and often regretted that they had not asked for advice earlier.

In the academic year 1993/94 we decided to organise scheduled group supervisions fortnightly and students were still able to initiate individual sessions when needed.

2. Students objected to role playing as a method of skills training and wanted to practice on real-life issues, but also wanted to have the choice to role-play when they considered it relevant. Namely, they wanted to be able to role-play their clients in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the

particular client.

Since the aim of the Contact-Challenge Method is learning not personal therapy of students, students were encouraged to practise problem solving methods with one another on their learning goals and experiential exercises were used to increase awareness of the issues they would like to work on. Students were able to discuss personal issues that might hamper their professional performance, but if the student had a personal problem he or she wanted to work on in more depth, he or she was advised to take counselling sessions or attend student's voluntary support group. It is important to note that in order to avoid dual relationships with course co-ordinator, students practised only with one another in the educational group.

3. Students expressed their concern that they felt that clients had become too attached to them during the whole year of being in contact and suggested that it must be very hard for the clients at the end of the year. We conducted a group brainstorming exercise, and came up with the idea that every student can introduce a new student the following year.

Clients agreed to the idea of the previous students introducing the new students at the beginning of the academic year but interestingly did not agree that they had become too attached to the students. This, they said, was because they considered this relationship as a professional one and that they knew that students would leave at the end of the year. However, clients replied that maybe students became too attached to them and that it must be hard for the students to leave their first clients. This was definitely an interesting issue and I decided to pay special attention (during lectures, discussions and skills training workshops) to the bonding - attachment cycle and to the grieving process.

4. The problem of being assertive appeared to be present for many students. Many of them expressed difficulty in being friendly and assertive at the same time or of being assertive and not aggressive. It was not easy for them to say 'no' to clients, and it was not easy to say 'no' when supervisors directly suggested something with which they did not agree. It was decided then to pay special attention to assertiveness training during the course in 1993.

5. At the beginning of the Programme some students described difficulties in making genuine contact with clients because they felt sorry for them. Some of them described prejudices they were unaware of before they had met their clients. Experiential exercises on exploration of prejudices were introduced in 1993 and these areas were addressed. Students had the chance to experience many exercises on the theme of prejudices and became aware that the unhelpful attitude of feeling sorry for someone was not viable. By the end of the academic year such issues had been addressed and did not arise again. At the time we worked on improvements of the Contact-Challenge Method the war in Croatia was raging and it was extremely useful for students who came from various cultural and political backgrounds and were of three different nationalities (who were fighting against each other in the battle fields around the town) to have the chance to explore their prejudices and learn how to co-operate in spite of the political climate which did not encourage co-operation. It seems that encouraging making contact with persons with special needs followed with group discussions and experiential exercises melted many prejudices.

6. Experiential methods were favoured in comparison with more traditional methods such as ex-cathedra method. This may have been because, according to Kolb (1984) social workers are mainly oriented towards active experimentation and concrete experience, which lead them to accommodative learning styles.

7. Clients and their families supported the Programme and found it very valuable. They expressed their need for more contact with the students than once a week. Although the timetable of the course did not allow more than 50 hours contact per academic year, we suggested the establishment of self-help groups where students could be involved as volunteers or paid workers. Some field instructors found ways to pay students for more work with some clients, and both sides were satisfied. Establishment of the self-help groups on the initiative of parents and clients tells about the empowering nature of the Contact-Challenge Method.

8. All six field instructors involved in the first three years of the project

evaluated the Contact-Challenge as a great success. They emphasised numerous benefits for their clients and their families, for the agency and for themselves personally and professionally. Before the introduction of the Contact-Challenge Method the Department had experienced difficulties in finding placements for such a huge number of students. After only a year of Contact-Challenge Method we started to have a long waiting list of clients who wanted to participate. Field instructors' feedback was very helpful for development of the Programme. After three years of being involved in the Programme some field instructors suggested that their colleagues would like to participate as well which added to the variety of settings for the Contact-Challenge Programme.

Four broad categories (mental health, physical disability, children and elderly) were enriched with more client categories and field instructors. In the 1993 we involved the following participants:

#### **Mental health**

Persons suffering from chronic mental illness  
Persons with intellectual or learning disability  
Social worker working in the mental hospital  
Psychiatrist working in the same hospital  
Social worker working with the intellectually disabled

#### **Physical disability**

Persons with paraplegia, quadriplegia, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy or any chronic illness that binds them to the wheelchair  
Social worker working with persons with cerebral palsy  
Community worker working with persons with multiple sclerosis  
Community worker working with persons with muscular dystrophy

#### **Children**

Children with behavioural or learning difficulties

Children with multiple difficulties

Social worker working with young persons and their families

Social worker working in residential care for children with multiple difficulties

### **Elderly**

Persons living in residential care for elderly without relatives living close

Refugees and displaced persons, elderly placed in residential care because their homes have been destroyed in war

Social worker working in the residential home

9. During early nineties I was very much involved in conducting staff development seminars and I started to introduce ideas that andragogy or Adult Learning Theory and Choice Theory proposed. The idea of using learning contracts seemed to be inherent to the Contact-Challenge Method as well as the idea of self-evaluation. Self-evaluation and the goal attainment scale were introduced in the 1993/94.

The Croatian study that is presented in this thesis is focused on the academic year 1993/94 which was the third year of the performance of the Contact-Challenge Method in Croatia when the method was evaluated again after the introduction of the above mentioned changes.

## **6.4. Action – Implementing the Solution on the Basis of Findings from the Period 1990 to 1993.**

### **The Programme**

#### ***6.4.1. The Aims and the Purpose of the Course***

The aims of the course were to enable students to make use of problem solving skills and to familiarise themselves with a range of social work settings.

During the academic year students were informed about various approaches to problem solving processes and the course was organised through lectures, skills training workshops and fieldwork with supervision. Students were encouraged to learn on three levels simultaneously: theoretical, practical and personal using the Contact-Challenge Method. The aim was to integrate these three levels of learning.

The purpose of this method of teaching and learning was to support the continuous inter-connection of theory, practice and personal experience. It was assumed that social work theory becomes self-corrective when linked with practice and personal experience, as theoretical assumptions were being continuously tested in practice and experience gained from practice recreated and reinvented students' epistemology and theories on which they based their practice. A further purpose was that students should change the perception of themselves - from passive knowledge consumers to active participants in their personal and professional growth and development.

Explicitly, the purposes of the course were that students would:

1. Come to know directly and indirectly various categories of social work clients and the problems they face in the contexts of where they live (directly through contact with one client and his or her family and indirectly through participation in supervision sessions).
2. Practise and test the theoretical assumptions they had learned from literature reviews and from their teachers, through contact with clients and their families, and through practising problem solving processes with one another in skills training workshops.
3. Support persons with special needs in such a way as those persons saw appropriate.
4. Learn how to make genuine contact with persons with special needs, with as little prejudice as possible, and learn about their needs and those of their families.
5. Practise the skill of planning and establishing contracts with clients.
6. Learn about an interdisciplinary approach.

7. Learn how to self-evaluate the quality of their performance.

#### ***6.4.2. Contents of the Programme***

The outline of the Programme, as it was conducted in Croatia, is enclosed in the Appendix 1. It is important to note that the outlined Programme was only a framework and students' input was taken into account and accommodated during the year. Whenever more time was needed for certain topics, or when students wanted to discuss some issues that were not planned, the Programme was adjusted. Skills training workshops followed lectures and were performed in smaller groups. It was intended to practice what was taught during lectures. Students participated in four lectures and four skills training workshops before starting meeting with clients. This introductory period was necessary to present the philosophy of the Contact-Challenge Method and to establish a safe group atmosphere conducive to learning. Students established their learning outcomes at the beginning of the year with expected, less than expected and more than expected levels of achievement. They were offered four broad course outcomes as indicated below and from these they derived their own particular learning outcomes.

1. Establish a good contact with my client and learn from him or her
2. Learn how to conduct a problem solving process
3. Learn about various settings of social work
4. Attain some personal outcomes

The Programme covered *theoretical perspectives* for social work practice, discussion on *values* and on the meaning of the words such as *quality* and *empowerment*, exploration of the *I - Thou relationships*. *Problem solving process* from the *ecological system perspective* was the focus of the *skills training* workshops. The process was analysed in a detailed manner and students practised

with one another on their learning goals. In the second semester the focus was on *comparative analysis* of various approaches in social work, *supervision*, prevention of the *burnout syndrome*, work with *challenging clients*, *assertiveness training*, basics of *attachment theory* and its reflections on social work practice and the role of *preventive* social work. The course also covered specifics of working in *various social work settings*.

*Supervision* was organised fortnightly with field instructors and individually, when needed. These sessions covered problems that arose from individual contact with clients and their families. Some supervision issues were addressed in skills training workshops as well, especially when these offered good opportunities for learning about various social work settings. It was essential that students came prepared to lectures because lectures provided a discussion forum on specific themes. The aim was to encourage students to think critically, and to reflect upon learned theories and social work practicalities.

At the end of the course a closure celebration was organised and all participants were invited.

The planned Programme was underway, and the following outcomes for the Croatian study were set:

1. To discover if the education of social work students, by means of experiential learning with clients and their families, was improved
2. To discover if the quality of life of persons with special needs was improved by participation in the Contact-Challenge Method
3. To evaluate the Contact-Challenge Method of teaching and learning social work practice

## 6.5. Reflection

The Croatian study encompassed quantitative and qualitative data obtained in the 1993/94 period. Qualitative data was obtained from the sample of 86 clients and 144 students involved in the research during this period. At the time the questionnaires were handed to participants, 89 students had just completed their participation in the Programme and 55 had participated in the Programme at its inception in the 1990/91 period. Those 55 students were - what we call in Croatia - “apsolvents”, that is senior students qualified to sit for their degree exams after meeting all formal requirements for a full course of studies. They had completed all their assignments and examinations and were preparing for the written and oral defence of their thesis to complete their degree.

The qualitative part of the Croatian study supported the quantitative data and a sample of twelve pairs (student - person with special needs) was randomly selected by taking every seventh pair from the list. Structured interviews were held with persons with special needs. Qualitative data was obtained from students' logs, evaluation forms with open questions and the *Goal Attainment Follow-up Guide* designed by Kiresuk and Sherman (1968) which was used for assessing the level of achievement of students' outcomes. It proved to be a very effective tool in self-assessment and follow up and also proved to have a motivating effect on students.

In the Croatian study qualitative and quantitative data was analysed to see if outcomes set at the beginning of the study had been achieved. Since the whole study had the shape of a multidimensional spiral it was not easy to arrange the huge amount of data in a clear and easily comprehensible way. This was especially so in the dealing with the qualitative data that was very rich.

Quantitative data was gathered with a researcher-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire for the clients consisted of close-ended questions developed from the questionnaire with open-ended questions handed to the clients at the end of every semester in the academic years 1990/91, 1991/92, 1992/93. This data was then coded and analysed, using Excel and basic descriptive statistical analysis

which is in further detail outlined in section 6.5.1. of this study.

The qualitative data was analysed by the process of triangulation. Data was gathered from student journals, interviews, open ended questionnaires, goal attainment scaling, field instructors' reports and researcher's participant observation. Data from twelve randomly selected client-student pairs was analysed and conclusions were drawn.

### ***6.5.1. Quantitative Data***

Quantitative data was obtained from the questionnaires handed to clients and students at the end of the academic year 1993/94. This was the third year of the Programme when improvements mentioned before had been introduced. Two groups of students were questioned about the Programme: the group who had just completed the Programme (this group will be referred to as the first group) and the group of "absolvents" who attended the Programme two years before and who were by that stage ready to start writing their final theses (this group will be referred to as the second group). Four groups of clients were asked to fill in the questionnaires: persons with mental difficulties, persons with physical difficulties, children and the elderly. Some of the clients were in the Programme from its beginning in 1990 and some joined later. 'Veterans' and 'newcomers' were treated equally in this research. All but two participants filled and returned the questionnaires: one who died (a client aged 92) and one who left the country (a student) before completing the Programme.

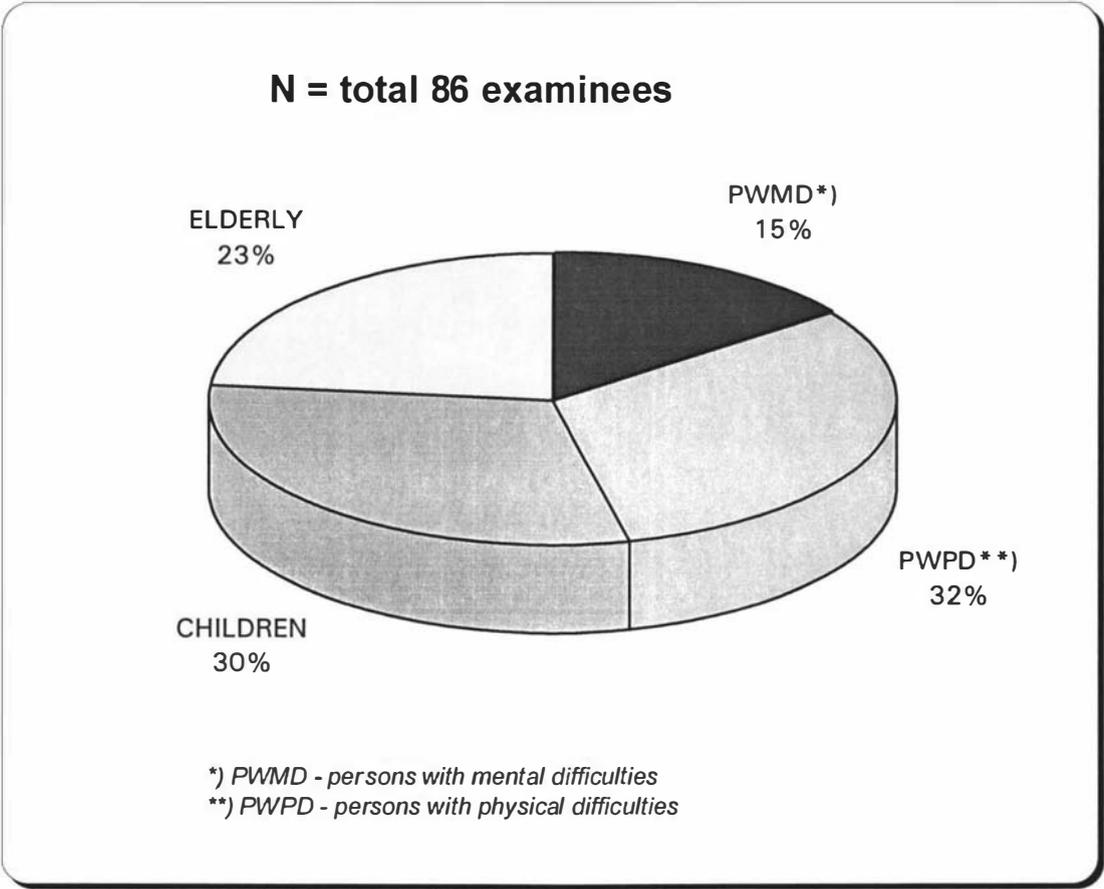
The following is a summary of the Croatian study conducted in the academic year 1993/94 with tables and presentation of the quantitative data.

#### ***6.5.1.1. Structure of the Sample - Clients***

The Croatian study involved 86 clients (Graph 1). Some of them were in the Programme from its beginning in 1990, and some joined in the following years. They are classified into four groups for the sake of clarity; although some of

Graph 1.

**STRUCTURE OF SAMPLE**  
*clients - persons with special needs*



them placed in the same group had very different diagnoses and/or difficulties and lived in very different situations.

The abbreviation in the tables PWMD encompasses persons with mental difficulties. This group relates to the persons with intellectual disabilities, autism, and persons diagnosed as having chronic mental illnesses like schizophrenia or manic-depression. Some of them lived with their families; some were placed in institutions; and some were getting ready to live in Independent Living Communities or on their own after 10 or more years of life in an institution.

Three field instructors supervised students in this setting: a social worker working in the community with persons with intellectual disabilities and autism, and their families; a social worker working in the psychiatric hospital and in charge of organising independent living in the community; and a psychiatrist. All persons with intellectual disabilities lived with their families, and all persons suffering from mental illnesses were in institutions but were in the process of learning or re-learning skills to live independently in the community. This group comprised 15% of the sample.

The group of clients labelled with the abbreviation PWPD - persons with physical difficulties, encompassed persons with difficulties in mobility, regardless of the reason of this immobility (accident, multiple sclerosis, polio, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, amputation or war). Some of them lived with their families, some lived independently and some of them were placed in residential care for the elderly because there was no other place for them to live. Some of them were in their early thirties living in an institution just because they did not have a pair of usable legs, nor jobs to provide income.

Three supervisors were assigned for this group: one for the field of multiple sclerosis; one for the cerebral palsy; and one for the students who worked with sufferers from traffic accidents, amputation, war, muscular dystrophy and polio. All were social or community workers and two of them were in wheelchairs themselves. This group made 32% of the sample.

The third group, labelled as the elderly, comprised 23% of the sample. These were persons placed in residential homes. One social worker supervised

students and nurses were sometimes invited to be guests on supervisions. The youngest client in this group was sixty years old and the oldest was ninety-eight. Some of them were refugees and were placed in residential care because there was no other place for them to go after the war destroyed their houses; some were without any relatives or children to visit them; and some just wanted to participate in the Programme because they wanted to share their wisdom with the students.

The group labelled as children comprised 30% of the sample, and encompassed children with behavioural difficulties and children with multiple difficulties, usually in mobility or suffering from chronic diseases. Some of them were living in their homes or foster homes, and some of them were in a social welfare institution for children with multiple difficulties. Some of them lacked basic social skills due to neglect and life in the institution. The youngest child in the sample was seven years old and the oldest was thirteen. Two field instructors were assigned for the purposes of supervision: one for children living in their homes or foster homes, and one for children placed in the institution.

#### *6.5.1.2. Clients' Assessment of their Satisfaction with the Programme, its Usefulness, Impact on their Lives and their Willingness for further Participation*

When appraising their satisfaction with the Programme from the total of 86 clients, 84 answered that they liked it, and 2 answered that 'it was all the same to them'. Nobody answered that they did not like the Programme nor that it was harmful. Ninety three percent of clients assessed collaboration with students as being useful for them, and 7% assessed it as neither useful nor harmful (Table 1 and 2 and Graph 2).

Such a positive assessment may have been the result of careful planning and responding to the clients' feedback from the previous years. It may be also have resulted from clients feeling empowered, being able to create their time with students, and by taking responsibility for realising goals set at the beginning of the year. Only two clients, who responded that 'it was all the same to them' to be in the Programme, chose not to continue to participate in the following year.

Table 1.

**CONTENTMENT  
WITH THE PROGRAMME**

1. How did you like associating with students?

1. I liked it
2. it was all the same to me
3. I didn't like it

	QUESTION 1.			
	they liked it	it was all the same to them	they didn't like it	Total No. of answers
	1.	2.	3.	
PWMD*)	13	0	0	13
PWPD**)	27	0	0	27
CHILDREN	24	2	0	26
ELDERLY	20	0	0	20
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>86</b>
	Structure (in %)			
	1.	2.	3.	Total
PWMD*)	100	0	0	15
PWPD**)	100	0	0	31
CHILDREN	92	8	0	30
ELDERLY	100	0	0	23
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

\*) PWMD - persons with mental difficulties

\*\*\*) PWPD - persons with physical difficulties

Table 2.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**

2. *Do you think that this kind of collaboration was useful to you?*

1. *it was useful*
2. *it wasn't useful nor harmful*
3. *it was harmful*

	QUESTION 2.			
	it was useful	neither useful nor harmful	it was harmful	Total No.of answers
	1.	2.	3.	
PWMD*)	13	0	0	13
PWPD**)	24	3	0	27
CHILDREN	25	1	0	26
ELDERLY	18	2	0	20
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>86</b>
	Structure (in %)			
	1.	2.	3.	Total
PWMD*)	100	0	0	15
PWPD**)	89	11	0	31
CHILDREN	96	4	0	30
ELDERLY	90	10	0	23
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

\*) PWMD - persons with mental difficulties

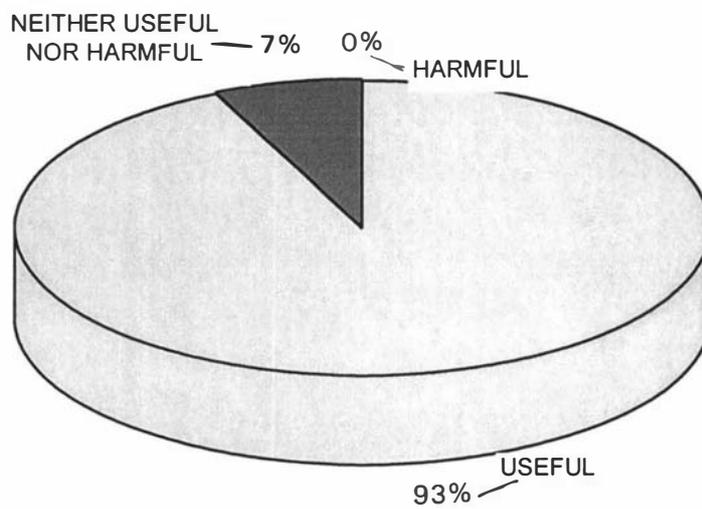
\*\*\*) PWPD - persons with physical difficulties

Graph 2.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**

2. Do you think that this kind of collaboration was useful to you?

1. it was useful
2. it wasn't useful nor harmful
3. it was harmful



Our aim was to improve the quality of life of persons with special needs and their families, or at least not to do any harm. 64% answered that their life had improved, and 35% stated that it had not changed (Table 3). Only one client stated that her life had deteriorated, but noted on the reverse page of the questionnaire that her marriage was falling apart at the beginning of the year and that she had now decided to divorce. In an interview she stated that she actually did not know if this was an improvement or deterioration but that she felt horrible and uncertain about her future. She took her student's advice and went for counselling together with her husband. She decided to stay in the Programme in the following year as well.

A very high percentage of clients (86%) decided to participate in the Programme in the following year. 12% were uncertain and 2% decided not to participate. It is indicative that these 2% were the same clients who answered that they were indifferent to their participation in the Programme (Table 4).

The other indicative fact was that clients who had not been a part of the Programme started to call to express their wish to participate, because they had heard about it from their friends and colleagues. After four years of continuing the Contact-Challenge Programme it was difficult to find as many students as were needed in the field. It was clear that we were offering something to persons with special needs, but we wanted to discover if they were really meeting their needs and how we could improve the Programme.

#### *6.5.1.3. Clients' Assessment of the Nature of Realised Services*

This was a question for which it was possible to select more than one answer, and 86 clients produced 335 answers (Table 5 and Graph 3). Thirty-three claimed that they were helped in some concrete tasks, 57 answered that students offered them conversation when they needed it, 48 claimed that their student had understood their problems, and 57 noted that students had offered them pleasant moments. It is interesting that only 21 clients answered that students helped them to broaden their knowledge, while **all** interviewed students said that clients helped

Table 3.

**IMPACT ON CLIENT'S  
EVERYDAY LIFE**

3. *How did associating with students affect your life and life of your family?*
1. *it has improved*
  2. *it didn't change*
  3. *it has deteriorated*

	QUESTION 3.			
	has improved	didn't change	has deteriorated	Total No. of answers
	1.	2.	3.	
PWMD*)	11	2	0	13
PWPD**)	15	11	1	27
CHILDREN	17	9	0	26
ELDERLY	12	8	0	20
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>86</b>
	Structure (in %)			
	1.	2.	3.	Total
PWMD*)	85	15	0	15
PWPD**)	56	41	4	31
CHILDREN	65	35	0	30
ELDERLY	60	40	0	23
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100</b>

\*) *PWMD - persons with mental difficulties*

\*\*\*) *PWPD - persons with physical difficulties*

Table 4.

**WILLINGNESS FOR FURTHER PARTICIPATION  
IN THE PROGRAMME**

4. *Do you want to participate in this program next year?*
1. *yes*
  2. *I don't know*
  3. *no*

	QUESTION 4.			
	Willingness for further participation:			Total No.of answers
	want 1.	don't know 2.	don't want 3.	
PWMD*)	12	1	0	13
PWPD**)	24	3	0	27
CHILDREN	22	2	2	26
ELDERLY	16	4	0	20
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>86</b>
	Structure (in %)			
	1.	2.	3.	Total
PWMD*)	92	8	0	15
PWPD**)	89	11	0	31
CHILDREN	85	8	8	30
ELDERLY	80	20	0	23
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	100

\*) PWMD - persons with mental difficulties

\*\*\*) PWPD - persons with physical difficulties

Table 5.

**NATURE OF REALISED SERVICES**

5. *What did the student offer you?*  
 (you may select more than one answer)
1. *help in some concrete tasks*
  2. *conversation when I needed it*
  3. *he/she had understood my problems*
  4. *pleasant moments*
  5. *he/she helped me to broaden my knowledge*
  6. *he/she provided a support to me*
  7. *it was fun*
  8. *he/she provided opportunity to realise some of my wishes*
  9. *nothing*

	QUESTION 5.									
	help	conver-	under-	pleasant	broad of	support	fun	fulfilment	nothing	Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	No. of answers
PWMD*)	5	10	11	9	3	7	6	4	0	55
PWPD**)	9	15	13	19	5	12	13	8	0	94
CHILDREN	11	15	8	10	7	6	19	9	0	85
ELDERLY	8	17	16	19	6	12	16	7	0	101
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>335</b>
	Structure (in %)									
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	Total
PWMD*)	9	18	20	16	5	13	11	7	0	16
PWPD**)	10	16	14	20	5	13	14	9	0	28
CHILDREN	13	18	9	12	8	7	22	11	0	25
ELDERLY	8	17	16	19	6	12	16	7	0	30
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

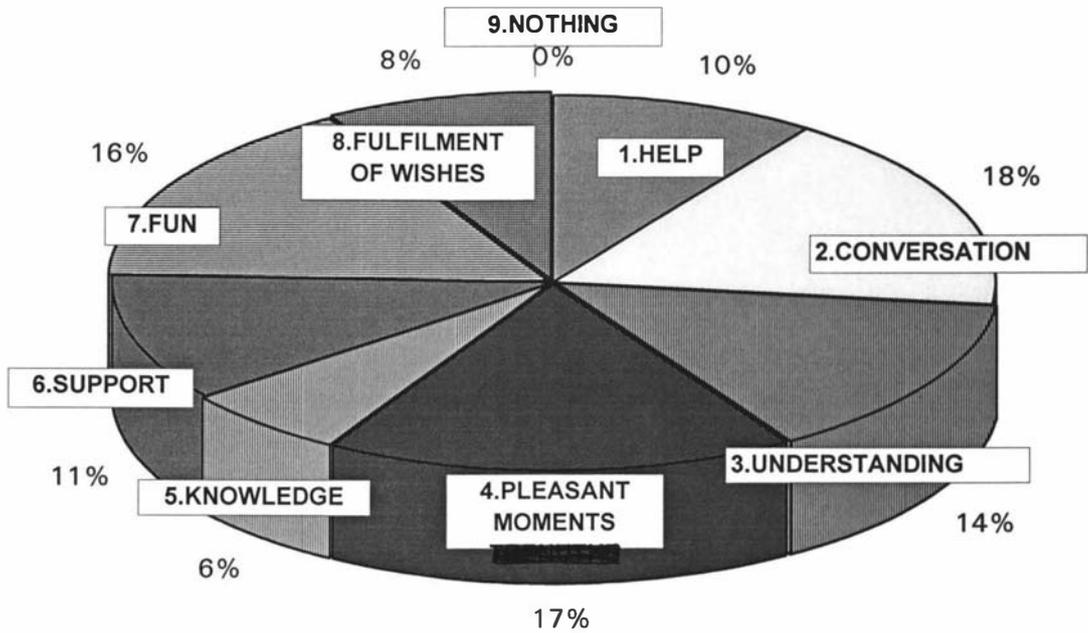
\*) PWMD - persons with mental difficulties

\*\*\*) PWPD - persons with physical difficulties

Graph 3.

**NATURE OF REALISED SERVICES**

5. *What did the student offer you?*  
 (you may select more than one answer)
1. *help in some concrete tasks*
  2. *conversation when I needed it*
  3. *he/she had understood my problems*
  4. *pleasant moments*
  5. *he/she helped me to broaden my knowledge*
  6. *he/she provided a support to me*
  7. *it was fun*
  8. *he/she provided opportunity to realize some of my wishes*
  9. *nothing*



them to broaden their knowledge. This may prove again that clients were empowered in this Programme and accepted support yet offered their experience and knowledge about their conditions to students. Thirty-seven clients claimed that students offered them support, and 54 said that being in contact with the student was fun. Twenty-eight clients said that a student provided the opportunity for them to realise some of their wishes. None of the clients answered that students have not offered anything to them. In detailed qualitative analysis of the client-student pairs, the quality of relationships has been explored in more detail. Even though this question, with several options to choose from, was derived from clients' evaluations with open ended questions from the previous years, it still offers a limited scope on the multiplicity of activities and services offered from students.

#### *6.5.1.4. Clients' Assessment of Students' Abilities*

Students' self-evaluation of their theoretical knowledge, engagement in the fieldwork and expression of that knowledge in the oral examination situation were taken into account for their final assessment, which also significantly included field instructors' reports, course co-ordinator's opinion and clients' viewpoints. Clients were told that the marks they were giving to the students would not be final but that they will be seriously considered. As may be seen, clients were very generous with 79% of them signifying students' abilities as "excellent" and 19% signifying them as "very good". Only one client marked his or her student as "average" and one as "poor" (Table 6). It has to be noted here that clients involved in Contact-Challenge in Croatia had some very bad experiences with social workers in the past, and they initially decided to participate because they wanted to influence social work education. Such high marks may have been influenced by good and friendly contact with the client and by the students' ability to end the relationship in a satisfactory manner, because a special emphasis was put on these two issues during skills training workshops with students. It may be assumed that

Table 6.

**CLIENTS' ASSESSMENT OF  
STUDENT ABILITIES**

6. *If you would assess your student's abilities for his/her future job how would you assess him/her?*

*Mark from 1 to 5 (1 being the worst; and 5 being the best)*

- 1. *mark 1*
- 2. *mark 2*
- 3. *mark 3*
- 4. *mark 4*
- 5. *mark 5*

	QUESTION 6.					
	Mark					Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	No.of answers
PWMD*)	0	0	0	0	13	13
PWPD**)	0	0	1	10	16	27
CHILDREN	0	1	0	4	21	26
ELDERLY	0	0	0	2	18	20
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>
	Structure (in %)					
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Total
PWMD*)	0	0	0	0	100	15
PWPD**)	0	0	4	37	59	31
CHILDREN	0	4	0	15	81	30
ELDERLY	0	0	0	10	90	23
<b>CLIENTS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>

\*) PWMD - persons with mental difficulties

\*\*\*) PWPD - persons with physical difficulties

they found ways to transfer learned skills from the classroom to the field. Since clients were asked to help students become better social workers, this assessment may also be interpreted as clients having actually graded their own ability to support students to become better social workers. This shows another empowering element of the Programme. Not only did clients feel good about being in contact with the students but they felt useful too.

#### *6.5.1.5. Comparison of Four Groups of Clients*

The elderly and persons with mental difficulties assessed the Programme slightly better than did children and persons with physical difficulties. Only two clients (mentioned before) expressed their dissatisfaction with the Programme and decided not to participate in the following year. It became clear in the process of responding to their wish that those two young boys were reluctant to participate in the Programme because their parents did not want them to participate. The parents tried to boycott the Programme in various ways, not allowing their children to go out with students and by trying to prevent contact with students. The field instructor tried to involve the parents but right up to the end of the year his efforts were not effective. It was discovered later that there was a serious case of abuse in both families, and parents experienced students as intruders and as a threat for the homeostasis of their family. The same field instructor convinced three other families to be part of the Programme, who were reluctant at the beginning, and these three families achieved their goals and assessed the Programme as being very useful for them. It was very interesting to explore why those three clients accepted the Programme in which they were not keen to participate at the beginning. Analysing these three pairs of students and clients, it was discovered that those three were in contact with three exceptional students. These students did not want to give up, regardless of clients' rejections. They put in an extra effort; participated in school meetings; met clients' friends; talked to parents; and spent more time than was required. In the closure celebration, at the end of the year, all

three clients said that they had appreciated the students' showing genuine care for them. The dilemma of social work as a tool of social control or social change may engender a huge debate here. Even though three families stated that they benefited from the Programme, coercing clients to participate does not seem to be useful for developing a trusting atmosphere necessary for effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method. After this event the Contact-Challenge Programmes did not involve clients without their written consent and in the case of children without their parents consent as well. Again, the individual approach seems to be necessary for this kind of work. Permanent adjustments and discussions about the problems which arise along the way are essential for the effectiveness of the experiential programmes.

Eighty-five percent of persons with mental difficulties, 65% of children, 60% of elderly and 56% of persons with physical difficulties, claimed that their life was improved due to association with the students. Again, persons with mental difficulties claim the most benefit. It must be said that supervision sessions for students, who were meeting their clients at the chronic ward of the mental hospitals, were very carefully planned and that they had two supervisors (one was a psychiatrist and the other a social worker – both were psychotherapists). The students also had easy access to individual supervision and used it more often than did students in other settings. Clients participated in group and individual psychotherapy sessions while in the Programme and field instructors led these sessions.

On the other hand, in the group of children, supervisions were also very carefully planned. Individual and group work was organised for all children, and from five who had not wanted to participate in the Programme, two did not wholeheartedly accept it to the end and did not want to take part in it in the following year.

Overall, there was no significant difference between the four groups and it seems that the Programme was suitable for all cases when clients' participation was voluntary.

#### *6.5.1.6. Structure of the Sample - Students*

The quantitative study covered a total of 144 students. Sixty two percent of the sample were students, at the end of their second year of study, who had just completed participation in the Programme; and 38% were “apsolvents” who had participated in the Contact-Challenge Method two years earlier (Graph 4). One of the aims was to see if there would be a significant difference between the two groups. It was also interesting to find out how the students assessed the method at the end of their study, when they could do so with the perspective of the whole Bachelor of Social Work education, assessing its value for education and professional training, as well as personal growth and development. The “closed” questionnaire was developed from “open-ended” questionnaires from the previous years.

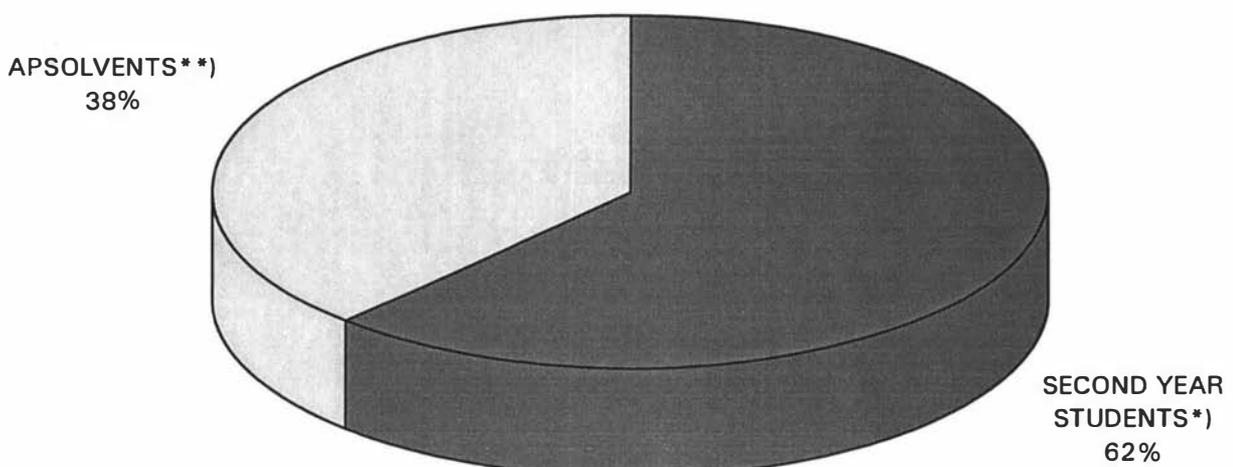
#### *6.5.1.7. Assessment of Personal and Professional Gains*

The total number of answers from 144 students came to 625. Compared to “apsolvents”, second year students declared more gains, and five of them stated that they gained everything listed in the questionnaire. The only significant difference between the two groups was in item 4 of the questionnaire where the gain was stated as follows: “I started to like social work”, 10% of second year students selected that answer; and only 4% of the “apsolvents”. A significant number of students declared that they became familiar with various settings of social work and that they made satisfactory contact with the person with whom they were associating. A significant number of students stated that they had reduced their prejudices and realised that they should not impose ready-made solutions on people. The total number of answers showed that after improvements had been made, students gained more (Table 7). This stresses again the importance of the continuous improvement in social work education. Continual work on participant’s feedback continuously improved the Programme.

Graph 4.

**STRUCTURE OF SAMPLE**  
*students*

**N = total 144 examinees**



\*) students who just completed their participation in the "Contact-Challenge Program"

\*\*\*) senior students qualified to sit for their degree exams after meeting all formal requirements for a full course of studies, they participated in the "Contact-Challenge Program" two years ago

Table 7.

**ASSESSMENT OF THE PERSONAL  
AND PROFESSIONAL GAINS**

1. *What did you achieve in the Contact-Challenge Programme (personally and professionally)?*  
(you may select more than one answer)
1. *I have learned how to lead the problem solving process*
  2. *I became familiar with various settings for social work practice*
  3. *I made satisfactory contact with the person with whom I was associating*
  4. *I started to like social work*
  5. *I acquired insight and confidence in my abilities*
  6. *I became more highly motivated for learning social work*
  7. *I realized that I shouldn't impose standard or ready made solutions on people*
  8. *I learned how come to closure in the relationship with a client*
  9. *I reduced my prejudices*
  10. *I realized some personal benefits*
  11. *everything listed above*
  12. *nothing listed above*

	QUESTION 1.												Total No. of answers
	Answer No.												
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	27	67	69	47	38	36	51	20	49	56	5	0	465
APSOLVENTS	10	19	25	6	15	9	20	14	20	21	1	0	160
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>625</b>
	Structure (in %)												Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	6	14	15	10	8	8	11	4	11	12	1	0	74
APSOLVENTS	6	12	16	4	9	6	13	9	13	13	1	0	26
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

#### *6.5.1.8. Assessment of Improved Skills*

From the total number of answers (572), 2% of the second year students and the same percentage of the “apsolvents” asserted that they had improved in all the skills listed in the questionnaire. The second year students stated the total of 404 skills, and the “apsolvents” gave 168 as the total answer. Even though the total number of “apsolvents” was smaller, it is obvious how the continuous work on students’ feedback improved the Programme.

A significantly high number of students stated that they improved their skill at making good contact with a client (100), which was actually the main goal of the Programme. All other skills were expected to be developed more in the third and fourth year of study when students were expected to work independently with clients (Table 8).

#### *6.5.1.9. Assessment of Usefulness of the Programme for Students’ Professional and Personal Development*

On a scale of five, from being very useful to being very harmful for their professional development, 52% assessed it as being “very useful”, 43 % as “useful”, 4% as “neither useful nor harmful” and only one student from the second year stated that the Programme was “harmful”. No students stated that the Programme was “very harmful” for them. (Table 9 and Graph 5).

Regarding personal growth and development, 53 % of students assessed it as “very useful”, 41% assessed it as “useful”, and 6% assessed it as “neither harmful nor useful”. Nobody assessed it as “harmful” or even “very harmful” (Table 10).

The high percentage of students stating that the Programme was useful for them professionally as well as personally reflected the continuous work on their feedback and the resulting improvement of the Programme. Experiential programmes at tertiary level do have the potential of “doing harm” in terms of starting a process with a student and not completing it. The possibility of referring

Table 8.

**ASSESSMENT OF  
IMPROVED SKILLS**

2. Which skills did you improve during the Contact-Challenge Programme?  
(you may select more than one answer)
1. creating a good atmosphere in work
  2. making a good contact with a client
  3. interviewing
  4. defining a problem
  5. setting goals
  6. assessment
  7. contracting
  8. negotiating
  9. evaluation of my own work
  10. closing a relationship with a client
  11. in all skills mentioned above
  12. in none of the mentioned skills

	QUESTION 2.												Total No.of answers
	Answer No.												
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	65	63	57	41	33	27	31	28	32	18	9	0	<b>404</b>
APSOLVENTS	23	37	12	10	16	17	10	17	11	12	3	0	<b>168</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>572</b>

	Structure (in %)												Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	16	16	14	10	8	7	8	7	8	4	2	0	<b>71</b>
APSOLVENTS	14	22	7	6	10	10	6	10	7	7	2	0	<b>29</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 9.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**  
*\* for student's professional development*

3. Please, assess the usefulness of this programme for your professional development.
1. very useful
  2. useful
  3. neither useful nor harmful
  4. harmful
  5. very harmful

	<b>QUESTION 3.</b>					
	Answer No.					Total
	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>	No.of answers
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	50	35	3	1	0	<b>89</b>
APSOLVENTS	25	27	3	0	0	<b>55</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>144</b>
	<b>Structure (in %)</b>					
	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>	Total
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	56	39	3	1	0	<b>62</b>
APSOLVENTS	45	49	5	0	0	<b>38</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

Graph 5.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**  
*\* for student's professional development*

3. Please, assess the usefulness of this programme for your professional development.

1. very useful
2. useful
3. neither useful nor harmful
4. harmful
5. very harmful

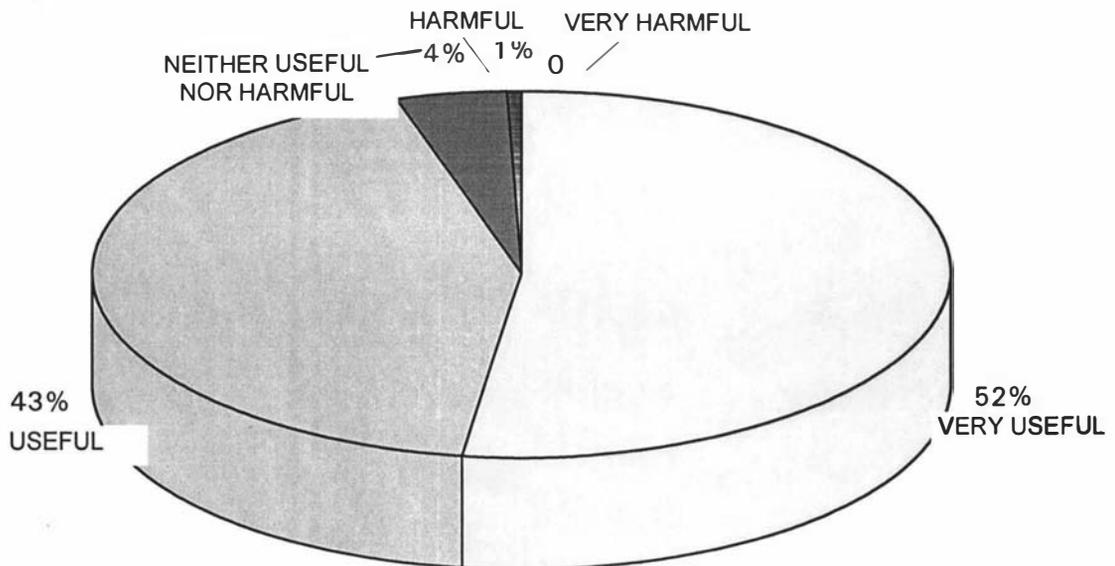


Table 10.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**  
*\* for student's personal development*

4. Please, assess the usefulness of this programme for your personal development.
1. very useful
  2. useful
  3. neither useful nor harmful
  4. harmful
  5. very harmful

	<b>QUESTION 4.</b>					
	Answer No.					Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	No.of answers
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	45	38	6	0	0	<b>89</b>
APSOLVENTS	31	21	3	0	0	<b>55</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>144</b>
	<b>Structure (in %)</b>					
						Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	51	43	7	0	0	<b>62</b>
APSOLVENTS	56	38	5	0	0	<b>38</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

students to counselling if necessary, as well as continuous contact with field instructors and the Programme co-ordinator successfully prevented this from happening.

#### *6.5.1.10. Student Assessment of the Usefulness of the Programme for Clients*

Answers to this question should be compared with answers to the same question posed to the clients (Table 2 on page 227). Clients experienced it as far more useful for them than students stated. Three percent of the total student sample assessed it as “very useful” for the client, 58% assessed it as “useful” and 10% as “neither useful nor harmful”. Nobody assessed it as “harmful” or “very harmful” (Table 11 and Graph 6). Either were students unaware of the usefulness of their services or they were just modest.

#### *6.5.1.11. Assessment of the Skills which Students Believed they Needed to Improve*

The total number of answers came to 308, with 3% of students in the second year and 5% of “apsolvents” stating that they did not think they needed to improve any skills in order to become effective social workers. Believing that the process of learning is a never-ending process, it is difficult to conclude whether or not those students were aware of the skills they still needed to improve; or whether or not they considered the Programme to be so complete that it covered all skills needed for competence. It must be noted that the aim of the Programme was not to teach students all necessary skills for competent practice rather the aim was to support them in becoming aware of what skills they still had to improve on in the following two years. The focus of the Programme was on creating a good atmosphere and on making good contact with a client. The data show that significantly more students (34%) of the second year thought they needed to improve skills in setting goals and assessment (Table 12). Only 12% of the “apsolvents” stated that they needed to improve skills in setting goals, and 14% of assessment.

Table 11.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**  
*\* for the client*

5. Please, assess the usefulness of this programme for the person with whom you were associating during the year.

1. very useful
2. useful
3. neither useful nor harmful
4. harmful
5. very harmful

	<b>QUESTION 5.</b>					
	Answer No.					Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	No.of answers
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	22	58	9	0	0	<b>89</b>
APSOLVENTS	23	26	6	0	0	<b>55</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>144</b>
	<b>Structure (in %)</b>					
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Total
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	25	65	10	0	0	<b>62</b>
APSOLVENTS	42	47	11	0	0	<b>38</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

Graph 6.

**USEFULNESS OF  
THE PROGRAMME**  
*\* for the client*

5. Please, assess the usefulness of this programme for the person with whom you were associating during the year.
1. very useful
  2. useful
  3. neither useful nor harmful
  4. harmful
  5. very harmful

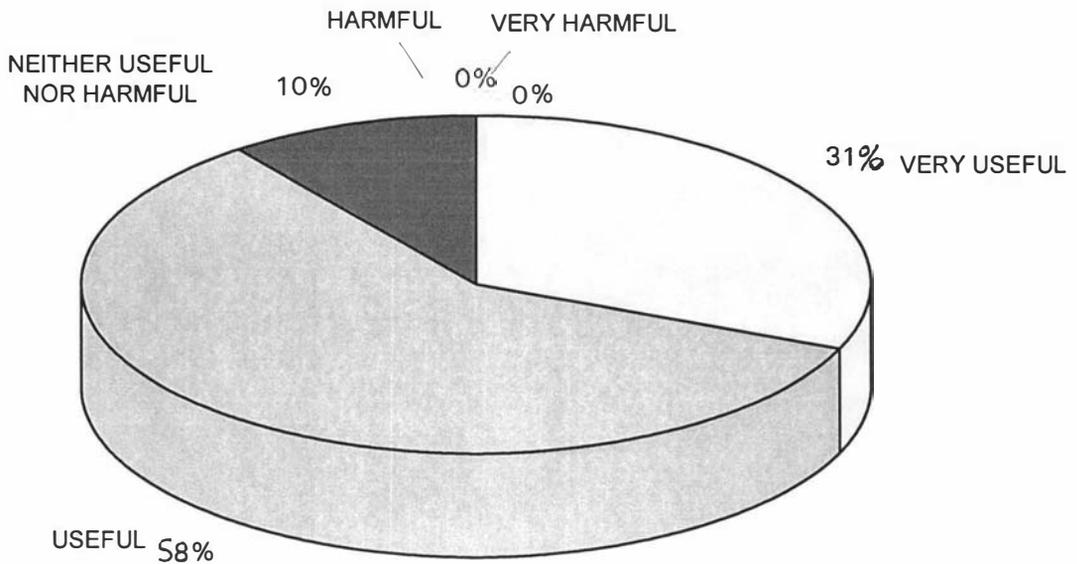


Table 12.

**SKILLS WHICH NEED  
TO BE IMPROVED**

6. Which skills do you need to improve to become an effective social worker?  
(you may select more than one answer)
1. interviewing
  2. creating a good atmosphere in work
  3. making a good contact with a client
  4. defining a problem
  5. setting goals
  6. assessment
  7. contracting
  8. negotiating
  9. evaluation of my own work
  10. closing a relationship with a client
  11. in none of the mentioned skills

	QUESTION 6.											Total No.of answers
	Answer No.											
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	15	2	7	23	34	34	23	28	16	23	6	<b>211</b>
APSOLVENTS	6	4	5	6	12	14	7	6	17	15	5	<b>97</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>308</b>
	Structure (in %)											Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	7	1	3	11	16	16	11	13	8	11	3	<b>69</b>
APSOLVENTS	6	4	5	6	12	14	7	6	18	15	5	<b>31</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>

It may be concluded that the Programme set a foundation on which to build during the following years of study.

#### *6.5.1.12. Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method in Comparison with Traditional Methods*

Students' assessment of effectiveness of the method shows that 60% of second year students and 44% of "absolvents" perceived it as being much more effective than the traditional approach. Thirty seven percent of second year students and 49% of "absolvents" perceived it as more effective. Only 2% of the second years and 7% of those at the end of their study perceived it as equally effective as traditional methods and only one student perceived it as less effective than the 'classical approach'. No one perceived it as much less effective than the 'classical approach'. Such support for the Contact - Challenge Method was to be expected because of the two learning styles predominating in social work students (accommodative and divergent learning styles - both being inclined to use concrete experience as a basis for learning). Most of the teaching at the University of Zagreb was organised in the traditional way and students experienced the Contact - Challenge Method as something new and challenging. Students' answers, followed by an analysis of students' progress during the performance of the method, support the hypothesis that experiential methods and an integrative approach are more appropriate for social work education than the traditional 'talk and chalk' method as well as being more appropriate than the academic approach to fieldwork (Table 13 and Graph 7). The following section attempts to explore this issue in more detail.

Table 13.

***EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTACT-CHALLENGE METHOD***

7. *How do you assess the effectiveness of this approach in a comparison to the classical approach?*
1. *much more effective than a classical approach*
  2. *more effective than a classical approach*
  3. *there is no difference in effectiveness of the classical and the "Contact-Challenge" approach*
  4. *less effective than the classical approach*
  5. *much less effective than the classical approach*

	QUESTION 7.					
	Answer No.					Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	No.of answers
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	53	33	2	1	0	<b>89</b>
APSOLVENTS	24	27	4	0	0	<b>55</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>144</b>
	<b>Structure (in %)</b>					
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Total
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	60	37	2	1	0	<b>62</b>
APSOLVENTS	44	49	7	0	0	<b>38</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	100

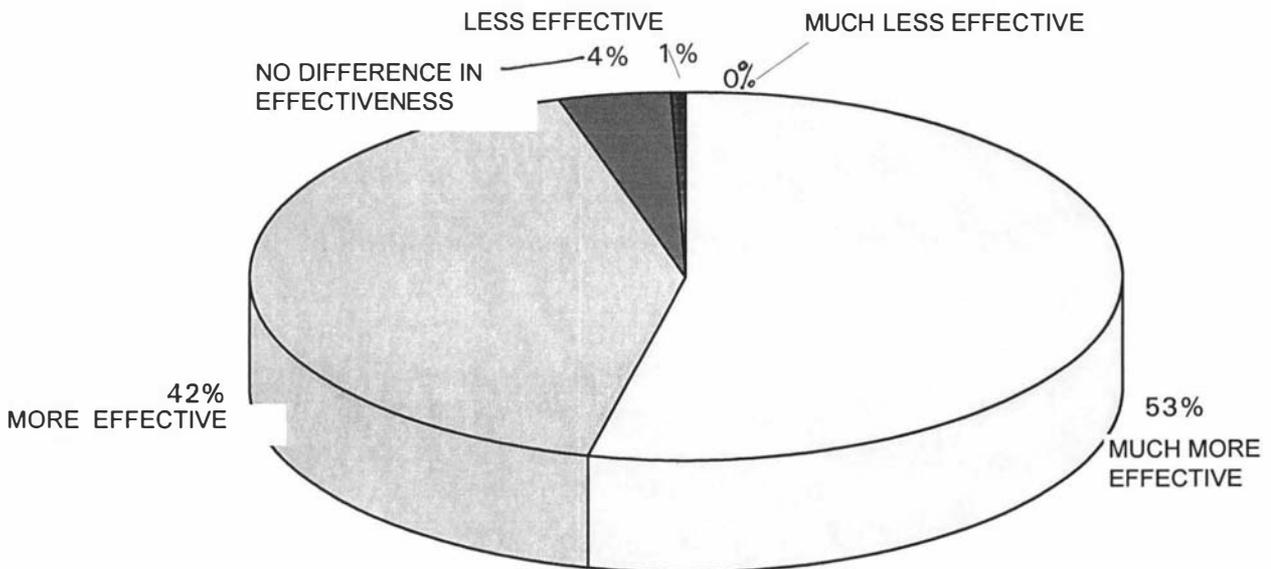
Graph 7.

**EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTACT-CHALLENGE METHOD**

7. How do you assess the effectiveness of this approach in a comparison to the classical approach?

1. much more effective than a classical approach
2. more effective than a classical approach
3. there is no difference in effectiveness of the classical and the "Contact-Challenge" approach
4. less effective than the classical approach
5. much less effective than the classical approach

CONTACT-CHALLENGE IN COMPARISON WITH CLASSICAL APPROACH IS:



#### *6.5.1.13. Estimation of the Advantages of the Contact-Challenge Method*

Students selected a total of 1040 answers, with an average of seven “advantages” per student. No one selected the option that there were “no advantages”. There was no significant difference between the two groups of students. All advantages that were offered for students’ selection were derived from students’ answers to open-ended questions in the previous years. Answers clearly show students’ appreciation of the Contact-Challenge Method, and of the advantages they have perceived. These answers explain why students think this method is more appropriate for social work practice education than the traditional methods (Table 14). Their feedback was astonishing.

#### *6.5.1.14. Estimation of the Disadvantages of the Contact-Challenge Method*

Offered answers were again derived from students’ open-ended questionnaires for Programme evaluation in the period from 1990 to 1993. Five students in the first group and four in the second group answered that there were no disadvantages. All together, there were 335 “disadvantages” selected by both groups. There was no significant difference in comparison between the two groups. The most “disadvantages” selected were the ones related to the emotional bonding with the client. These were answers no. 2, 5 and 6 (Table 15). On the other hand, only 6 students in the first group and 3 in the second group considered this kind of work emotionally too exhausting, and they found it personally to be ‘too much’. There is a significant difference, regarding answer no. 7, between the two groups - 33 students found it as a disadvantage that they were meeting with only one client, but only 7 “apsolvents” perceived it as a disadvantage. The reason may be that “apsolvents” had the chance to meet and work with other clients in the following two years of their study, and they had the chance to compensate that disadvantage doing a variety of placements on their third and fourth year. “Apsolvents” were also able to see the method in the larger context and a two-year distance adds to the relevance of their answers. On the other hand, quite a high

Table 14.

**ADVANTAGES OF  
THE CONTACT-CHALLENGE METHOD**

8. *What do you think are the main advantages of this approach in the comparison with the classical approach?  
(you may select more than one answer)*
1. *we are in the direct contact with persons with special needs and we can determine the effectiveness of the theories we have learned listening to lectures and reading literature*
  2. *we are responsible for our learning*
  3. *while we are associating with one person during the year we may get to know their strenghts and needs very well*
  4. *we are getting to know social problems in the "real" world*
  5. *we are getting to know various ways of thinking and various reactions of people with special needs*
  6. *we are gaing first-hand experiences through this immediate contact*
  7. *nobody is expecting us to be skilful social workers because our task is only to associate with persons with special needs*
  8. *we better understand the problems of persons with special needs*
  9. *we are gaining the skills we must have for our future job much faster*
  10. *we have created by ourselves the work plan and this enables us to gain insight into our personal capabilities*
  11. *we diminish our prejudices about our client's disabilities*
  12. *this kind of work is very interesting*
  13. *this kind of work may be necessary for the education of every social worker*
  14. *there are no advantages*

	QUESTION 8.														Total No.of answers
	Answer No.														
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	66	43	39	67	63	65	31	40	47	68	55	56	62	0	702
APSOLVENTS	34	17	19	30	29	36	6	21	27	32	25	28	34	0	338
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,040</b>
	Structure (in %)														Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	9	6	6	10	9	9	4	6	7	10	8	8	9	0	68
APSOLVENTS	10	5	6	9	9	11	2	6	8	9	7	8	10	0	33
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 15.

**DISADVANTAGES OF THE  
THE CONTACT-CHALLENGE METHOD**

9. *What do you see as disadvantages of this kind of learning?  
(you may select more than one answer)*
1. *we don't have enough theoretical knowledge to work with clients*
  2. *this kind of work emotionally engages me too much to maintain a professional distance*
  3. *it is frustrating to associate with someone for two hours a week because you must do it*
  4. *too much responsibility is on our shoulders*
  5. *we are emotionally bonding with the person and at the end of the year we have to close the relationship*
  6. *the person with special needs is bonding with us and the contact is over by the end of school year*
  7. *we are meeting only one client*
  8. *exercises are done in groups that are too large*
  9. *the classical approach is more acceptable to me*
  10. *emotionally, this kind of work is exhausting, and personally I find it to be too much!*
  11. *there is not enough supervision and consultation with field instructors*
  12. *this kind of work can't be considered as professional work, it is only an unusual way of learning practical skills*
  13. *there are no disadvantages*

	QUESTION 9.													Total No.of answers
	Answer No.													
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	17	26	2	3	29	46	28	33	2	6	13	16	5	226
APSOLVENTS	11	13	3	3	16	36	7	5	0	3	12	5	4	118
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>344</b>
	Structure (in %)													Total
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	
2nd YEAR STUDENTS	8	12	1	1	13	20	12	15	1	3	6	7	2	66
APSOLVENTS	9	11	3	3	14	31	6	4	0	3	10	4	3	34
<b>STUDENTS</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	100

number of students (58) perceived the same fact (meeting only one client over a longer period of time) as an advantage ( Table 14). Not one “apsolvent” stated that the classical approach was more acceptable for him or her and only one student in the first group stated so.

The problem of bonding was addressed in the skills training workshops and these answers stressed the importance of practising skills which enabled students to go through the attachment-bonding cycle and to help clients to do so as easily as possible.

The data showed also the need for more discussions about professionalism in the Programme - that is - what the professional help is and what is not. The need for stating with greater clarity, goals and outcomes of the Programme as well as student roles became obvious, although it was thought that goals, outcomes and roles had been stated clearly enough. The need for organising skills training workshops in smaller groups was clear to all, but in terms of organisation and working space it was impossible to do much about it. The three groups were split in two and some of the skills training workshops were conducted in groups of 15 students. Sometimes, because of the lack of space, we were not able to do so, and we had skills training workshops in groups of 30 students - obviously too many.

### **6.5.2. *Qualitative data***

The best way of presenting qualitative data would be in the form of twelve case studies. For the purposes of this thesis findings from twelve case studies will be summarised in order to present a clear and succinct account of the Croatian study. A detailed description of the twelve case studies used in the Croatian study will be housed in a separate article. Twelve student - client pairs were randomly selected (every seventh student-client pair from the list was taken) and the case study of their mutual learning was developed on the basis of:

1. Students' experiences described in journals, goal attainment scales, open-ended questionnaires and interviews

2. Clients' experiences described in interviews and open-ended questionnaires
3. Field instructors' experiences described in reports and in interviews
4. Course co-ordinator's experiences grasped during participant observation.

Course aims, individual outcomes of all participants, course activities and teaching methods, by which those activities were organised, were analysed and explored. Suggestions, insights and proposals for the future from all participants had been accepted and utilised as a basis for the New Zealand study and as a foundation for further development of the method. The data showed that the method was very useful for all participants. Specific benefits<sup>1</sup> stated by participants were as follows:

1. Students found it useful to plan their own way of learning social work practice, to utilise their learning styles, to set outcomes and to be responsible for their realisation.

I like to be in charge for my learning. I learned much more than I would have learned if experiential methods were not used (Ana, second year student, Evaluation Questionnaire).

2. Students appreciated that they had the chance to work on their prejudices and personal problems; and to develop, examine and discuss social work values.

I was not aware of my prejudices. Having an opportunity to explore them using experiential exercises was very valuable, not only for me, but also for my colleagues of different nationalities. I think that minority students started to feel more belonging in the group, and also it was important for us to bond and to relate to one another without prejudices. It was not easy for many people, some of them had horrible experiences with soldiers "from the other side", but it was important for us to learn not to generalise and to start making contacts with one another. We also became aware that we have a long way to go to heal all the wounds from the war (Nina, second year student, Evaluation Questionnaire).

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<sup>1</sup>Participants' quotations were translated by the author and all names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

3. Students appreciated that they were in real contact with clients, and had had enough time to get to know the client's family, social network, and agencies that had offered support.

Oh, what did I learn from my client? I cannot fit it in few lines. I really admire my client. In spite of so many difficulties on her journey she managed to accomplish so much. Together with many other things about persons with special needs I learned about the importance of the supportive family and about uselessness of social welfare system in our country. I asked myself often this year: "Do you really want to be a social worker?" And my answer is: "Yes, but I will never be a bureaucratic social worker who cannot see a client's face and who is hidden behind a pile of papers. I want to be an effective social worker who will contribute to democracy in this country and who will always find time to address every client as an unique individual" (Maja, "apsolvent", Evaluation Questionnaire).

4. Most students realised goals established with persons with special needs at the beginning of the year, and they both felt empowered. Even in the cases when the Sherman and Kiresuk goal attainment scale did not show that goals were attained, students admitted that they had learnt substantially from the process of goal attainment follow-up.

I achieved my learning outcomes, but actually I learned much more. I learned more from the whole process. I learned about respect, making contact and what does it really mean to be a professional social worker. I learned more than I am able to put into words now (Petar, second year student, reflection on his Goal Attainment Scale).

5. Just by being in contact with social work clients with severe problems (intellectual or physical disability, chronic mental illness, age-related illnesses or multiple difficulties of children), students learnt about the nature of these conditions without any pressure to solve the problems immediately.

There was NO PRESSURE during this course imposed from outside. The only pressure was coming from our wish to learn more and do something good and useful. My client is a wonderful person and probably this fact contributed to my satisfaction with the course. She told me that I helped

her a lot, I don't know, I was just being myself. It was professionally easy, but personally challenging, because we are so used to perform and my major learning was that I can be who I am and still offer professional help (Branka, "apsolvent", Evaluation Questionnaire).

6. By attending supervision sessions and while discussing with other students the problems they had faced in a particular field, students had the chance to learn about problems in various fields of social work, and to participate in finding possible solutions for them.

I learned that there are some social work settings where I cannot work. I also discovered what is my favourite field and where I would like to work (Esma, second year student, Journal).

7. By sharing experiences, students had the chance to learn from one another.

We spent the whole first year of our studies not really knowing each other. We finally met during "Contact-Challenge". I learned a lot from my colleagues. I am sure many of us will stay in touch. Thank you! (Misel, second year student, Journal).

8. By participating in skills training workshops and by practising problem solving processes with one another, students were simultaneously practising problem solving skills and experiencing all facets of the role of a client. They also had the chance to test on themselves the effectiveness of the problem solving methods taught in the course. Since they were together in a group for a certain period of time, they were able to follow up the effectiveness of their interventions.

It was useful to test social work methods "on my own skin". Problem solving process worked for me and I feel confident to help my future clients to learn how to use it, I just have to practice, practice and practice... (Boris, second year student, reflection on his Goal Attainment Scale).

9. Since skills training was exercised under the contract of confidentiality and several other contracts, students had the chance to practise contracting skills important for their future.

At the beginning of the year I thought that constructing and signing a confidentiality contract was a silly exercise, but later on, I realised how important it was. I will never do any group work without few contracts at the beginning. It helped us to focus and to feel safe (Mirjana, second year student, Evaluation Questionnaire).

10. Since meeting with clients provided many challenges for the students, social work values were constantly tested. Supervision and skills training sessions offered the chance to discuss these issues.

I love to come to supervision sessions; it is not at all as if someone is controlling me. It is more about mutual support and discussion. My supervisor is approachable and friendly. Today's session was excellent, we discussed some really tricky issues and I learned heaps! (Alisa, "apsolvent", Journal).

11. Clients appreciated that they had had a chance to share with students their previous experiences with social workers, and also suggested how they would like to be helped by social workers. Students had the chance to offer their views on the problem. This sharing and discussing of the role of the social worker in specific settings resulted in the improvement of understanding the problems faced by persons with special needs and their families.

My student was shocked when I told him my story. I am sure he will never do the same mistake my social worker did. By telling him my story, I completed my healing journey, I am less bitter towards social workers – some of them are humans too! I really enjoyed having Ivan around – I hope he enjoyed it as much as I did (Tomislav, client, Evaluation Questionnaire).

12. Clients were empowered by being participants in the process of educating social workers.

It was very empowering for all clients. Now all my clients want to participate! I hope you will send more students next year (Sanja, field instructor, Evaluation Questionnaire).

13. Clients were encouraged to use the students' help in realising their outcomes.

I was on the rock concert for the first time after my accident (6 years ago). We both enjoyed it (Branko, client, Evaluation Questionnaire).

14. Agencies benefited and field instructors were helped in their everyday work and they claimed that, through student participation, they had learned more about clients' potentials and how these might be utilised.

The Programme was useful for the Centre where I work because clients' picture of the Centre for Social Work as a place where social workers just sit and drink coffee was changed with a more acceptable picture of social work students keen to do something useful (Bobi, field instructor, a Report).

I learned a lot about my clients and about their needs and goals. Students were a great help! I can accommodate at least ten more next year! (Marko, field instructor, a Report)

15. Field instructors were empowered by having a direct impact on social work education. The link between University and fieldwork agencies was strengthened.

I always wanted to be able to influence social work education. If teachers are not social workers who work in practice they need us - people from practice. I am looking forward to participate in workshops that the University will offer. I think also that they should come more often to us and use our experiences. The Contact-Challenge Programme is a good start (Melita, field instructor, a Report).

16. Field instructors were permanently in contact with the University and, therefore, professional development was encouraged. As a result of that Programme, some field instructors started new programmes in their agencies, and some decided to continue their own education.

Two mums whose children were involved in the Programme would like to start a self-help group. I am looking forward to help them and include students who are now on their third year in that project! It was great to get to know these students during this year because I can really trust them now

that they will do a good job. It would be great if they would like to do their graduation thesis on this theme (Vlasta, field instructor, a Report).

17. The University benefited from being in contact with practice, and its programmes continued to develop in accordance with needs in the field.

The learning was mutual and this is the best thing in the whole Programme. Students learned, clients learned, and field instructors learned, agencies benefited and the department benefited from continuous contact with practice (Kaja, assistant in the Programme, a Report).

18. Students claimed that they had learnt about the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in social work.

Today, I became aware of importance of other helping professions as well and about the importance of co-operating with them and knowing what is my job and what is not. Mental hospital was a perfect place to learn that (Jana, "apsolvent", Journal).

19. Self-evaluation proved to be an effective tool to assess students' achievements combined with goal attainment scale and Programme co-ordinator's assessment. A different attitude towards the examination process was developed.

I did not want to sit my oral exam before I read all required readings, and I came well prepared. This was the only exam during my studies that I enjoyed and during which I learned something new. Self-evaluation was good because we learned how to self-evaluate our achievements during the course, so examination was actually, just a formality at the end. I appreciated the clarity also, I knew what I wanted and I set my own standards - my standards were in accordance with course standards (Melita, "apsolvent", Evaluation Questionnaire).

20. Parents and families of clients involved in the Programme claimed that they had benefited from the Programme in many ways: they had the chance to go out, do the shopping or visit friends knowing that their member with special needs was safe. They appreciated students' help and support, they claimed that they had

learnt a lot from students, they liked the spontaneous, relaxed but still very responsible way students had approached their tasks and they appreciated that they had been able to influence the way the Programme was conducted.

Thank you! My son benefited a lot from the Programme. I hope you will be able to find a student for him next year. The presence of the student influenced our family; we talked more. By remembering our experiences we kind of bonded again. Alisa was reliable and safe. It is not easy to find a safe person to leave our son with for few hours. We had some bad experiences in the past, but Alisa “destroyed” our prejudices towards social workers (Sanja, parent, Evaluation Questionnaire).

## 6.6. Conclusions

The Programme proved to be equally useful for clients and for students and as suitable for mature students who were at the beginning of their tertiary studies. Experiential contact with the practice in the second year of social work study proved to be useful, because the Contact-Challenge Method in the second year gave students an opportunity to be involved in the social work field without any pressure to offer professional help to clients. It provided them with the opportunity to work on personal problems that they believed might hamper their professional performance and to practise problem-solving skills in a safe laboratory environment while working with each other. It also enabled them to offer some practical help and support to people who really needed it, in the way they needed it, and in the way students were able to give it. The Croatian study showed also that the Contact-Challenge Method prepared students for placements in agencies during their third year of study, when more professionalism and skills were required of them.

As one field instructor noted:

The Contact-Challenge method was equally useful for students, clients, their families, field instructors and the Department. We all enjoyed interactions with students and clients’ feedback was most positive. These

ladies (clients) have spent 10-20 years in the mental hospital and the student's input was extremely valuable for their re-integration in the society. I think that every social work student should experience benefits from the Contact-Challenge Method. During this year I really enjoyed working with my clients and with students. They added a great value to our hospital. I am looking forward to take third years students as well; especially the ones who want to specialise in mental health (Karmen, field instructor, social worker in the Mental Hospital).

And very similar was feedback from another field instructor:

Persons with special needs are often marginalised and isolated in our society. Weekly visits helped them to realise some of their dreams. They had the chance to share their experience and to break prejudices that exist even among social workers. As a physically disabled person myself I loved to share my knowledge with students and to supervise their work. I was impressed with clients' and students' readiness to openly discuss every obstacle that came in the way of being effective in their relationship and to learn from each other (Marija, president of the Association of Persons with Muscular Dystrophy).

*Evaluation of improvements introduced in the 1993/94 period*

1. Regularly scheduled supervision sessions improved contact between students and field instructors. Students started to report problems when they occurred and with the support from field instructors they were on most occasions easily solved.
2. Accepting student suggestions that role-playing by itself does not teach them how to handle real life situations proved to be useful, students became more keen to participate in skills training workshops and the opportunity to practise with one another improved the group dynamics.
3. The problem of "clients becoming attached too much" was addressed with clients and with students. Learning about attachment theory helped students to understand the process and they became more open and relaxed to discuss these issues with their clients.

4. Assertiveness training introduced in 1993/94 was very well accepted from students and clear guidelines for establishing a contract or agreement with clients helped students to be clear about their expectations and support that they were prepared to offer.

5. Workshops on exploration of prejudices were very challenging and extremely useful for students. Sixty-nine students stated that they reduced their prejudices. Some students realised that feeling sorry for someone is a prejudice as well and that it does not contribute to becoming an effective professional. These workshops were very useful for developing a safe and non-coercive environment, especially because the war was raging in the country.

6. We continued with experiential methods because they were so well accepted by students, but continuous links to all aspects of the learning cycle was essential. Focusing only on the experiential component would diminish the quality of the Programme.

7. Clients' suggestion to increase the number of hours was not accepted because of the other responsibilities students had during the course. However, some parents became involved in organising self-help groups where students had their input as well, and some clients managed to develop a whole network of students around them after four years of being in the Programme.

8. The introduction of three more field instructors enriched the Programme, it also offered more placements for students and more clients keen to participate.

9. In the year 1993/94 self-evaluation was applied for the first time and it proved to have an incredibly motivating influence on students. In their final oral examination which was intended to be a group discussion on integration of theory and practice in social work, students were asked to self-evaluate and give

themselves three marks: for their understanding of social work theories, for their involvement in field work and for the way they expressed their ability to present their knowledge in the examining situation. At the same time the Programme coordinator and her assistant did the same for each student. The marks matched in most situations. Some students underestimated themselves according to our criteria, but nobody overestimated his or her knowledge. Stating learning goals and following their accomplishment was educative in itself. It helped students to stay focused and to learn from various sources. This empowering approach encouraged students to become active and responsible learners.

It is important to note that all field instructors were educated in supervision and were devoted professionals striving for excellence. Therefore, careful selection of the field instructors is essential. The amount of education necessary for participation in the Programme should be related to field instructor's previous knowledge and experience.

Before meeting with clients, in the Croatian study, students attended four workshops designed to help students acquire necessary skills and solve possible personal dilemmas and concerns about their participation. These workshops were necessary for setting the stage for effective performance of the Contact-Challenge Method.

Continuous contact with field instructors was maintained throughout the whole academic year and it proved to be essential for the effectiveness of the Programme.

Since clients' participation is the key element of the Programme, it is important that they see benefits from their participation. When clients were selected, the field instructor's task was to talk to clients and discuss their expectations and what was expected from them. Client's consent is essential.

Clients' keen interest (and family's as well when relevant) is essential for the effectiveness of the Programme. Without motivation and willingness to participate from all participants, challenges will not be created and mutual learning cannot take place. Clients and their families have to see the benefit of

participating in the Programme in advance. Students should not to be used as social agency's spies in the family or as tools for social control.

Because of the integration of theory, practice and experience, students have to meet with clients during the academic year, not between semesters or separately from learning theory and skills training workshops.

It is important that students are active participants in lectures. They are supposed to interrupt, give their examples and discuss the content of the lectures.

Students should practise problem-solving skills with one another in skills training sessions, not with clients. Even though students practise problem-solving techniques on their personal issues, the focus in skills training sessions is on learning not on personal therapy. In cases when students are not able to solve those issues while working with one another, counselling services should be available for them.

When the Contact-Challenge Method is in action, social work theories learned in the classroom are continuously tested in real life situations. Therefore, theoretical assumptions, values and principles of social work are challenged through field experience.

The Croatian study showed that the integration of the theory, practice and experience occurred, and that all participants benefited from the Programme.

The three broad outcomes set at the beginning of the study were achieved as presented below:

**1. To discover if the education of social work students by means of experiential learning with clients and their families was improved.**

This outcome was achieved, and it was discovered that their education had been improved, and that they had learned much from participating in the Contact-Challenge Method. They also adopted an empowering approach where they treated clients as equal partners in problem solving processes. The experiential

part of education, where students were in the role of the clients, working on their learning outcomes and professional and personal issues, proved to be effective for their well-being and for developing a trusting group atmosphere where many students became friends and continued empowering each other when the course ended. Other teachers reported that after participating in the Contact-Challenge Method, students became more responsible for their learning, asking many questions during lectures and starting to undertake voluntary activities. Students' satisfaction with the Programme was outstanding. They reported that they felt empowered, responsible for their learning, and challenged. Students also claimed that the method itself provided interesting situations, which were not always pleasant, but that they were certainly never bored.

## **2. To discover if the quality of life of persons with special needs was improved by participation in the Contact - Challenge Method.**

This outcome was achieved as well. According to clients' evaluations and a number of phone calls from clients and their families, and according to the fact that after three years of conducting the Programme field instructors developed a long waiting list of clients who wanted to participate in the Programme, it is apparent that clients' quality of life has been improved.

## **3. To evaluate the Contact - Challenge Method of teaching and learning social work practice.**

This outcome was achieved as well, as described in this chapter and it pushed me across the oceans to explore if the Contact-Challenge Method is effective in other parts of the world.

Quantitative and qualitative data proved the effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method in Croatia and the New Zealand study is the next challenge for

ascertaining whether the method is effective in other environments. Was the method effective only because it was reflecting Croatian reality, or would it be effective in other parts of the world? What adjustments are necessary to make a method viable in the new context? The New Zealand study attempts to find answers on these questions.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE AOTEAROA - NEW ZEALAND STUDY

*The two greatest days of your life were the day you were born ...  
and the day you found out why!*

*Pat Mesiti*

#### **7.1. Introduction**

After undertaking an extensive process of initial reflection and exploration of the New Zealand context with regard to the possible application of the Contact-Challenge Method, I focused on exploring what was already happening at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University – Albany and how the Contact Challenge Programme could be incorporated into the existing curriculum. It was important to clarify the aims of the research, to specify the Programme, define potential participants and to gauge modifications that would be required of the original method for the New Zealand study. Ethical issues became apparent and approval from the Human Ethics Committee was sought and granted.

The “first loop” of the action research spiral in this chapter focuses on planning the Aotearoa-New Zealand study and outlines the framework for participative evaluation as well as for its elaboration and implementation. The “second loop” of the action research spiral presented in this chapter focuses on the Aotearoa-New Zealand study itself, after the Contact-Challenge Method has been challenged in the new context and its viability tested. The report on the New Zealand study that follows is in the form of a case study which reflects on the process of teaching social work practice using the Contact-Challenge Method. The

interplay between the many voices of those who have participated is then structured, presented and reflected upon.

The New Zealand study was structured according to themes, which had emerged from the collaborative action research process in Aotearoa-New Zealand. The aim was to encourage students to integrate theory, practice and experience and to learn according to their individual learning styles in order to achieve their own individual learning outcomes. Self-evaluation was encouraged during the course and mutual learning of all participants was facilitated. Each problem that occurred during the process was considered a challenge and special focus was put on creating an atmosphere conducive to learning. All students were encouraged to be self-directive in creating and achieving their learning outcomes through co-operation with clients and their families and by utilising available resources. Names of agencies, students, field instructors and clients, as well as details that may reveal the identity of participants, have been altered to protect confidentiality.

## **7.2. Initial Reflection – the Context**

The Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University, (Albany) provides a positive atmosphere for experiential learning. Radical and ecological systems orientations underpin most papers, which makes the context very much in accordance with the ideas that permeate the Contact-Challenge Method. It was suggested that the Master of Social Work Applied (henceforth referred to as MSW Applied) course would be the most appropriate for testing the Contact-Challenge Method in the New Zealand context. MSW (Applied) students were required to complete 120 days of supervised fieldwork practice in two different settings during their course. Theory was taught in the Social and Community Work Practice paper and skills were practised in skills training groups, which followed this particular paper. Skills training sessions included working with individuals, working with groups and working with families over a

period of 18 two-hour sessions. On reflection it seemed that students in the first year of the MSW (Applied) programme would benefit the most from the Contact-Challenge Method, given that it had already proved to be effective for students' first contact with practice in the Croatian study. The Contact-Challenge Method had proved very useful in preparing students for more advanced fieldwork practice in the following years of their study when more professional skills were expected of them. All students on this course came with degrees in various humanistic fields but not in social work. It was decided that with a little modification, the existing MSW (Applied) programme was likely to provide a context suitable for testing the Contact-Challenge Method in Aotearoa-New Zealand. The Programme was therefore attached to the paper Social and Community Work Theory and Practice and to Fieldwork in the first year of the MSW (Applied) course.

In 1996 the Contact Challenge Method was presented to the Social Work Practice Team in the Department, issues of possible concern were discussed with supervisors, and the method was presented to those field instructors who had indicated an interest in being involved in the Programme. Major planning was carried out during 1996 in order to ensure that the action phase planned for 1997 could proceed smoothly. Orientation workshops for all participants were conducted at the beginning of the 1997-year.

The Contact-Challenge Method introduced one-to-one contact with clients and their families and group supervision with the field instructors. The intention in doing this was to improve the manner of first contact with clients in order to encourage quality interaction and communication, and an integrated view of practice. An additional nine-session block of skills training was introduced in order to improve the students' skills and to maintain continuous contact with them while on placement. During the skills training workshops, students had the opportunity to reflect on the theories presented in lectures on Social and Community Work Practice. Instead of the usual role-play situations in skills training workshops students were encouraged to work on their learning goals; to help one another in the achievement of these and to work with one another using

problem-solving methods to improve their communication skills or to clarify personal or professional issues arising from intensive contact with clients. Experiential exercises were used to enhance awareness. Students were encouraged to continuously reflect on the theories presented during the course, to link them with their personal experiences and learning goals and make sense of them accordingly. In addition to fifty hours of contact with clients and their families, students were required to spend forty-eight days working full time in the agency, which provided services to the client with whom the student was associating.

### **7.3. Structuring the Aotearoa-New Zealand Study**

During the planning phase a series of issues were considered such as: the aims of the research; the subject of the evaluation and the focus of the research; modifications of the Croatian Programme so that it accommodated New Zealand conditions; the participants; and the logistics of carrying out an evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method in New Zealand.

**The aims of the research** in the Aotearoa - New Zealand study were the same as the general aims of the Contact-Challenge Programme performed in Croatia. These were:

1. To encourage students to integrate social work theory and practice, and to utilise their personal experience in order to become effective practitioners.
2. To facilitate the process of exploring individual learning styles, prejudices and values.
3. To improve the quality of life of persons with special needs and their families by offering support and help in a way they see appropriate.
4. To further develop the Contact-Challenge Method of teaching and learning social work practice by means of evaluative action research.

The subject of the evaluation was a particular programme of teaching social work practice based on the Contact-Challenge Method. It was intended not only to assess the students' achievements but also to evaluate the effectiveness of providing specific circumstances that encourage integrative learning. This evaluative action research sought to show the interconnectedness of all participants in the study. Their experiences were seen to be most relevant for the evaluation of the method.

The focus of the research was on the effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method, using individually tailored programmes where students, field instructors, clients and Programme co-ordinators are equal participants in a process of mutual learning.

### ***7.3.1. Ethical Issues***

The formal consent of both clients and students was required for participation in the Programme. Since three children were involved in the method their parents' consent was also sought. The Contact-Challenge Method was explained in detail to the potential clients, as well as their role and responsibilities. It was essential that the clients saw the benefit of participating in the Programme. Confidentiality contracts were entered into with all participants and the research results were made available to them. Names and any details that might have breached confidentiality and the privacy of participants were kept confidential.

Approval was sought and granted by the Human Ethics Committee at Massey University and ethical issues were discussed with colleagues and supervisors.

### ***7.3.2. Preparation***

Education for the field instructors was provided before the commencement of the Programme and the length of the introductory workshop was related to their

knowledge bases and experience in supervision.

Since the clients' participation in the Programme was voluntary, it was essential that they understood how they could benefit from participation in the Programme and at the same time appreciate the value of their engagement in social work education. As clients were selected, field instructors talked with them and discussed any concerns regarding their participation in the Programme. As the Programme co-ordinator I met with every potential client who showed an interest in being involved in the Programme and, together with field instructors, explained the clients' role in the Contact-Challenge Method.

Prior to meeting with the clients, the students participated in four two-hour workshops where the Contact-Challenge Method was presented to them. Students were given the choice of participating in the Contact-Challenge or in the usual fieldwork and skills training programme offered at the Department. Students with no previous social work experience were advised to choose the Contact-Challenge Programme as it had proved to be effective for students' first contact with practice in Croatia. They were also informed that the Programme involved extra skills training (9 workshops) and that role-playing would be substituted with the work on real-life issues. During the first four introductory sessions students had the chance to meet one another and to develop an atmosphere conducive to learning. These first four workshops focused on students' expectations, values they held dear and social work values and principles followed with the discussion on basic terms such as empowerment, responsibility and contact.

Contracts of confidentiality and activity were agreed upon and field instructors were invited to come to the fourth workshop with the students. Students were then given the opportunity to express their concerns, to define their learning goals and to explore their learning styles. The task centred model of practice was presented to them and they had the chance to practice this method with one another when developing their learning outcomes. Students participated in four lectures on social work theory and had the opportunity to explore settings for social work practice before deciding which field would be most suitable for

them to achieve their learning goals. Students were told that they would be responsible for creating their learning contracts, for achieving their outcomes and for self-evaluation at the end of the course.

As a Programme co-ordinator I maintained continuous contact with the field instructors who were also available for individual sessions with students at the student's request.

All students stated that they had chosen to participate in the Contact-Challenge because they lacked social work experience.

I'm quite apprehensive about the placement but it also made me feel quite excited. I can see that no matter how bad or how good my placement is; I know I will learn a lot regardless.

I also think that because I have no direct social work experience, I can see that whatever agency I end up with there will be things for me to learn. I think I will do the Contact-Challenge Method. That will mean I won't get as much choice with my placement, but like I said, there will always be things to learn. I like the idea of being introduced to social work by having a single client the whole year. I can also see the benefits in then working in the agency that the client comes from and seeing both how the client sees the agency and what goes on at the agency that affects the client (Maya, Journal, 25.2.1997).

All participants stated that the information given at the beginning of the Programme was sufficient. They all stated that they felt well prepared and ready to participate in the Programme.

### ***7.3.3. Research Instruments***

The following research instruments were used in the action research performed in New Zealand and combined in a process of triangulation. A combination of the following tools was used:

- ◆ Each student wrote a case study of his or her learning processes based on Lewin's experiential learning cycle where they observed and reflected on their

learning in terms of integrating theory, practice and personal experience.

- ◆ Each student observed and reflected upon his or her concrete experience with the client and worked to form abstract concepts and generalisations, which were compared and integrated with current theories presented in the curriculum. These concepts were then tested in the skills training workshops and in their contact with clients. Students were encouraged to write a journal based on the action research and experiential learning cycle. This cycle was reflected in the following subheadings: Initial Reflection, Planning, Action and Reflective Observation. When students did not find these subheadings helpful, they expressed their ideas in the way they considered to be the most appropriate and in accordance with their learning style.
  
- ◆ Students were advised to plan their experience according to the following steps of action research:

*Initial reflection*

- a) Analysis of the problem - definition of learning needs
- b) Definition of client's needs and wishes

*Planning*

- a) Establishing 50 hours of quality time with the client
- b) Discussion of the plan with the field instructor
- c) Development of the learning contract

*Action*

- a) Realisation of the plan
- b) Development of flexibility to change the plan if necessary
- c) Learning how to notice obstacles and opportunities
- d) Focusing on challenges, personal and professional

*Observation and reflection*

- a) Evaluation of the process
- b) Self-evaluation

- c) Discussion on dilemmas with the field instructor, Programme co-ordinator and the client
  - d) Identification of the skills that were already well established;
  - e) Stating which skills needed to be further developed
  - f) Identification of the new learning goals and planning how to realise these in the future
  - g) Writing a report
- ◆ Every student completed the *Goal Attainment Follow Up Guide* at the beginning of the Programme, and evaluated it at the end of the year.

Possible learning outcomes were discussed with students. They all stated at least four learning outcomes and they all agreed that their outcomes fitted the following framework:

- \* Improving problem solving skills
- \* Learning about the specific field of social work which the student had chosen for fieldwork
- \* Learning about other fields of social work practice through participating in skills training workshops and supervision sessions
- \* Developing a good relationship with the client
- \* Working on some personal issues during skills training workshops or attaining some personal goals.

Students stated their outcomes in their own words specifying 'more than expected level' of attaining them, 'expected level' and 'less than expected level' of attaining their goals. As students stated later, the process of setting outcomes and expected levels for their realisation was educative in itself. At the end of the Programme, outcomes were reviewed and discussed with each student. Students also undertook a self-evaluation of the attainment of their goals.

- ◆ Every student compiled a case study of their client with the client's help. Each case study was reviewed by a client and/or his or her family.
- ◆ Evaluation questionnaires were handed to all participants at the end of the Programme.
- ◆ Two evaluative group interviews were conducted, one with students and one with all participants.

The themes that offer the structure for the Aotearoa-New Zealand study were selected after reading, listening and analysing qualitative material from all participants. Any theme that emerged for more than four times in qualitative material obtained from participants was considered important and used as a sub-heading in data analysis.

#### **7.4. The Programme in Action**

The Contact-Challenge Method was offered as an alternative to the regular skills training and placement in agencies. Students were informed that by deciding for the Contact-Challenge option they were going to have nine extra skills training workshops while on placement (Module Two - Skills Training) and 25 extra hours scheduled for group supervision instead of the six sessions of consultant supervision which would be offered in the regular Programme. They were informed that they would meet regularly throughout the academic year with one client and that they would be placed in the agency that provided services for that client. An outline of the Programme was given to students and they were given two weeks to decide if they wished to participate. Theory was to be taught during lectures, with the practical part being provided through the contact with clients and their families, placement in the agency and supervision. The skills training

workshops were to be used for the experiential part of the learning process, together with the “learning from clients” part of the Programme, and for integrating theory, practice and personal experience. As mentioned earlier these workshops were conducted in four modules: Working with Individuals; Additional Skills Training; Working with Families and Working with Groups.

The detailed outline of the Programme as was performed in 1997 with the Master of Social Work (Applied) students is presented in Appendix 2.

Continual linkages were made between theory and practice with dialogue and discussion being used as the main means of providing a challenging and at the same time safe context for learning. The ideal situation would have been to have the skill training workshops following the lectures so that students could reflect immediately on the content of the lecture and practise the skills which they had learned, however this was not able to be done. Skills training groups were on Mondays and lectures were on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and it was not possible to change the timetable. Efforts were made to link theory and practice as much as possible during the skills training groups.

The students facilitated the *Working with Groups Module* under the Programme co-ordinator’s supervision. They were advised to choose either topics or themes, which they thought would be useful for their learning with regard to the groups or topics offered in the outline of the Programme. Students showed their readiness to facilitate the group and to learn from the feedback of their colleagues. In these sessions they demonstrated their skills in leading the group and they addressed the following topics: consensus making, conflict resolution, discussion of opinions on assumptions about human relations training, how to conduct the closure session, the use of creative media in group work and development of leadership skills. Each student had the chance to experience how to conduct a group in a non-threatening atmosphere and to learn from that experience.

At the end of the Programme a Closure Celebration was organised where Certificates of Participation were handed to all the clients.

## **7.5. Planing for Reflection**

Reflection was not a separate stage to be performed solely at the end of the Programme. It was a continuous process, which happened throughout the Programme. During the Contact-Challenge process, checking whether activities were educational was based on evidence that supported students' effectiveness. Checks were regularly made and evidence sought in order to ensure that all activities undertaken were educational.

The aim of this research was to find effective ways of educating social workers relevant to the Aotearoa-New Zealand context and to present a way of so doing. The overall reflection that comprised reflections gathered from all participants aimed to demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of the Contact-Challenge Method. Reflection comprised analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation and the drawing of conclusions and suggestions for further research and practical use of the method. All participants contributed in an evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Programme. The expectation was that this would result in a step forward to a new level of the action research spiral and improvement of the method. As a reflection process is inevitably value-laden, the goal was not to see if performed practice was 'right' or 'wrong', but rather to present, as accurately as possible, what happened, how it happened and to seek possible answers as to why it happened in that way.

## **7.6. Participants**

### ***7.6.1. Agencies***

#### **“Sunshine Valley School”**

Sunshine Valley School is a Primary School with an Intermediate level and a roll of 800 children. The emphasis of the programmes is on quality. It is one of the largest schools of its type in New Zealand. It is the first school outside

North America to be accepted to the “Quality School Consortium” and was one of only two Apple computer site schools in Auckland at the time of the study.

The school has several special features including a unit for gifted children and another unit for children with physical disabilities. Sunshine Valley offers a mix of socio-economic and racial groups and the staff is committed to cater for all of them valuing all cultures equally.

Sunshine Valley is a rather different school, and deliberately so. It has a well-developed philosophy built upon a strong ethical base with a very broad curriculum built around creativity and practical skills seen as essential for future. In addition to high achievement in literacy and mathematics, it fosters an appreciation of art and music, advanced technological and scientific skills, foreign languages and outdoor/leisure skills. They are striving to be a particularly caring school fostering true excellence and self-discipline within clearly defined boundaries. Teachers are continuously being trained to a high level in the skills of self discipline and quality relationships using Choice Theory. Children are treated as individuals with acceleration and enrichment provided for those children who can learn at a faster rate and a comprehensive remedial programme is in place for slower learners.<sup>1</sup>

### **“Unique Capabilities”**

Unique Capabilities is a social and recreational organisation designed to help persons with special needs to live a full and enjoyable life. It was set up because people with special needs are people with many and varied Unique Capabilities. The agency endeavours to work in partnership with the client and their support systems (parental, social and recreational) and therefore truly empowering the client. Hence, the prime objective of “Unique Capabilities” is to open new doors in both: personal life and the community. “Unique Capabilities” increases opportunities of persons with special needs by exploring all avenues available within the community. It helps with recreational planning and budget

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the Sunshine Valley Parent Guide, written by the Principal.

planning; it increases self-esteem of its clients by counselling and practical application of skills. Professional and friendly staff offers assistance in dealing with Income Support Services, educational, medical and other local and national bodies. They also offer advice to parents of young children with impairments on how to prevent disablement and consultation on all social issues. One of the focuses of the agency is to offer support for people affected by de-institutionalisation. The educative role of the agency is performed through seminars on the prevention of disablement within the environment and community settings and seminars on the teaching of swimming to people with special needs<sup>2</sup>.

### ***7.6.2. Field Instructors***

#### **Linda Geppetto**

Linda Geppetto is Associate Principal at Sunshine Valley School. She is responsible for curriculum development and monitoring assessment and achievement in the school. All her teaching career has been spent in Auckland schools as a classroom teacher where she has developed an interest in what motivates children to learn and how she, as a teacher, can influence them and make a difference in their lives.

Her reading and questioning led her into the works of William Glasser and as her knowledge in Choice Theory and the methods that accompany it grew, she gained confidence in applying these principles to the management of children in the classroom environment. Linda is an all-round classroom practitioner with a particular interest in written language, social studies, education outside the classroom, drama and helping children to develop critical thinking skills. She strongly believes that the relationship between teacher and student is key to helping children feel success and motivation. She also believes that helping children to meet their needs in a positive, constructive way, empathising with them, showing an interest in them both as unique individuals and as learners, is vital to children feeling successful.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the "Unique Capabilities" leaflet.

**Dianne Swan**

Dianne is a social worker with many years of experience and a wealth of expertise in working with people with special needs. She has completed diplomas in social work, professional swimming instruction, speech and drama, recreation and sport and is continuing a post graduate diploma in Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University.

In recent years she has organised many camps for people of all age groups and abilities. Dianne also instructs teachers of people with special needs in swimming and the techniques for aqua-sports. She manages the “Unique Capabilities” agency and is devoted to the utilisation of abilities rather than focusing on impairments. The empowering manner in which her agency is conceptualised reflects her empowering attitude towards persons with special needs.

**7.6.3. Clients and Students – Profiles**

The profiles of clients and students were constructed from the student’s CVs, Goal Attainment Scales, case studies students they have written with the help of their clients and student’s reports on their own learning.

**Maria and Sharon**

At the time of the study Maria was 12 years old. She lived with her father and three siblings in a three-bedroom state house sharing a room with her younger sister. She was put forward for the Programme by the school because of her and her family’s history, and her current learning and social needs. While the family was living in another town, Dolly, Maria’s now deceased mother had problems relating to her own childhood and was receiving counselling for childhood sexual abuse. She became involved with her female counsellor. John, Maria’s father and

her husband reported that when the children lived with their mother, her partner was unpleasant to the children and his daughters indicated that they have been physically abused. They had bruising from this abuse which they showed to John. It was also suggested, by the Deputy Principal from Maria's Primary School, that he had been told that some of the girls had experienced sexual abuse. John has since confirmed this with reference to his youngest daughter only. He told the student that the perpetrator was his wife's partner/counsellor, and that she had not been charged with any wrongdoing.

Maria's mother committed suicide four years ago and John shifted his family from the town where they used to live, to a bigger city for the support he felt he needed from his extended family.

John established a valuable link with Presbyterian Support Counselling Services and both he and his oldest daughter were seeing a counsellor there during the Programme. John was generally not in favour of social workers given the experiences surrounding his wife, however, he agreed for Maria to be involved in the Programme as he felt she, and the other girls required a female role model. He wanted someone such as a buddy type person, who was available and willing to listen to their questions, who could answer questions about issues concerning their mother and deal with common adolescent questions. Maria was keen to participate in the Programme as well.

John's full time job was raising the girls. He seemed very open to support, help and advice and seemed to want the best for his daughters. He encouraged them to speak openly about their mother in the student's presence. John was then on Domestic Purposes Benefit and was dependent on the Income Support Service and other supporting agencies. Although the family budget was tight, he was able to buy a car and repair it, which increased his feeling of independence and enabled him to show the girls around the town and to go on holiday. The girls all seemed well fed, healthy and had sufficient clothes. Although Maria needed to wear glasses for some schoolwork, she generally only required them for the language programme.

Because of her learning needs Maria did not remain in the class for the full day. From Tuesday to Friday students regrouped into classes for appropriate level maths teaching. Maria was in a class at the lower ability level where she received some assistance. She also went to a separate language class suited to her abilities from Tuesday to Friday, where class numbers were smaller and where a teacher aide was available. Maria was also taking part in the Rainbow Reading Programme.

On Monday afternoons Maria attended a communication group made up of a range of children with the school's occupational therapist. The group focused on awareness and building of communication skills. On Tuesday afternoons Maria attended a gross motor group with the school's physiotherapist for monitoring and developing her gross motor skills. On Wednesday afternoons Maria attended a 'girls' group which entailed a wide range of activities including practical home skills, personal hygiene and provided a good forum for relationship building between the girls. Some weeks she attended a Dinner Club where students brought ingredients and made a meal together, practising skills and gaining new ideas for themselves and their families.

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Sharon, a student, twenty-three years old at the time of the study had a Bachelor Degree of Social Sciences with majors in education and psychology. She lacked practical social working experience before joining the Programme although she possessed some relevant and transferable skills.

At the beginning of the study she stated that she was interested in becoming a social worker for a number of reasons but mainly because of her dislike of injustices that some people face in everyday life. She stated that she was very keen to work in a preventative manner with children and young people.

I am very keen to work preventatively, with children or young people; as I believe there is a sincere need to change the practice of catching them as they fall. I would like to work in the framework of empowering individuals and groups so that falls may be avoided or caught by someone or something more appropriate and successful than current structures allow

or offer. I willingly admit to a lack of experience and knowledge but also, to a genuine wish to learn from the environment of the placement, the staff and practitioners offering supervision and guidance; and most importantly from the individual in need (Sharon, an excerpt from her Curriculum Vitae, presented at the beginning of the course).

The aims of Sharon's encounters with Maria were to provide a female role model for Maria, to talk with her about her goals in life and eventually help her with some schoolwork. She spent two hours a week with the family and focused activities around Maria's needs. Sharon's role was to learn from John and his family about the dissatisfactory experiences they had encountered with social services and to explore with them better and more effective ways of social work. She was also involved in work at Maria's school where she explored the various services, which the school offered. Sharon was initially placed in Maria's class where she acted as teacher aide, but then changed to another classroom where there was a greater need for her. She continued meeting with Maria and her family outside of school hours, once a week for two hours, as required by the Programme.

Sharon set her learning goals before starting her involvement with Maria.

These included:

- \* To learn, to practice and to test theories.
- \* To learn how to make genuine contact with all clients.
- \* To gain knowledge of various groups of clients.
- \* To be empowering.

(Sharon, Goal Attainment Scale, 24.3.1997)

Although students were advised not to do therapy or counselling with clients but simply to be in contact with them and to learn from that experience, Sharon could not resist the temptation to practice and test theories during her work with Maria. She hoped that she would be able to use the Task Centred Model that had been taught in lectures prior to placement. On her first meeting with Maria and her family, Sharon set about establishing trust building, which seemed to go

quite smoothly. Maria and her family were open and honest about the complex issues surrounding the family.

Although relationships developed well and the contract was formulated, Maria did not feel the need to move into problem specification and treated Sharon more as a mentor or friend than as a social worker. Sharon stated that she attempted at various times to engage Maria in problem specification but she seemed not to want to discuss any concerns about her mother and her death, the lack of having a mother, or any issues at school. So Sharon's attempt to put the Task Centred Model into practice and to follow it through to resolution was stunted and remained like that till the end of the Programme.

During skills training workshops students learned how to work with non-voluntary or referred clients. They were advised to try to enter the *quality world*<sup>3</sup> of the client, finding out what the client really wanted. Sharon was able to test some of the learned skills with Maria. The process of entering Maria's *quality world* was a useful learning experience for Sharon. By simply exploring Maria's needs and wants, and by sharing her pictures and ideas from her *quality world*, Sharon became a good role model for Maria. Sharon believed that Maria was indecisive, but actually Maria was not into solving any problems; she just needed company and a good female role model in order to develop her identity. She could not become more decisive before developing her identity and finding out what she really wanted. By being indecisive, she kept reminding Sharon to "slow down" and to follow her and accompany her in her own journey towards growth and development. Sharon's major learning was the realisation of how impossible it is to "frame" a client, or to do "an intervention to the client" without the client's willingness to make a change. Sharon's attempts were well meant but at that stage Maria had no need of them. Maria needed a person to talk to, a mentor and a friend and that is what she accepted from Sharon. Maria tailored their relationship that gave her the power and the strength she needed at that stage.

Halfway through the Programme Sharon felt disempowered and stated that

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<sup>3</sup>The term was described to students as it is referred to it in Chapter One. Since they were in the Sunshine Valley School that adopted Quality Schools Programme and Choice Theory as an underlying philosophy, they were familiar with Dr Glasser's terminology.

her potential was not adequately used. However, later she realised the value of offering support to Maria in an unobtrusive way and the value of developing the skill of following a client at her pace. In spite of Sharon's initial dissatisfaction with her impact the improvements in Maria's behaviour were obvious to Maria's teachers and her family. Maria's father's prejudices about social workers diminished and he agreed to open his door to the "Barnardo's"<sup>4</sup> social worker that took over when Sharon's involvement came to an end. Contacts with Sharon encouraged Maria to be more confident and friendly. "Girl talks" helped her to develop social skills that she had lacked at the beginning of the Programme. Maria's engagement in a variety of programmes that school offered, the involvement of her teacher and Sharon's input made a significant difference and helped Maria to improve her quality of life. During that process Sharon met her learning goals and managed to learn about the importance of an interdisciplinary approach.

In her learning journal Sharon noted that she achieved her learning goals by using the skills training workshops to practice problem-solving skills and to test theories throughout the Programme. She gained valuable experience making genuine contact with clients from a different background from her own. She learned about the real meaning of the word "empowerment" and that she had been empowering not only with regard to Maria but also with regard to other members of her family. Sharon made up for any disadvantage in having her placement at a school rather than in a social work agency by organising visits to a number of social work agencies. During the Contact-Challenge Programme she became so motivated that she spent her study break with a friend who was working as a social worker in the Children and Young Persons Service in another town. Sharon shadowed her friend at work and reported in her journal how she managed to integrate that experience with the theories and skills learned during the course.

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<sup>4</sup>Family Support Agency.

## **Holly and Mark**

Holly was thirty-three at the time of the study and has suffered from cerebral palsy. She was renting a house on her own, but was actively looking for another house so that she could be closer to family and friends. She had two sisters whom she does not see as often as she would like. Her father died eleven years ago and her mother has been diagnosed as suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Holly is confined to a wheelchair, non-verbal and can hardly move her arms. She communicates via a "Light writer" or a "Word book". She operates these devices using a head-pointer which is used to push a key or point to a word (with a paintbrush attached she also uses it to paint) because she cannot use her hands. Because of her lack of fine motor movement she needs assistance in feeding, dressing and personal hygiene. A consequence of cerebral palsy is that Holly also often gets colds throughout the winter and has mild asthma.

At the time of the study Holly was unemployed and received various entitlements from Income Support, which is sometimes supplemented by money from the sale of her paintings. Transportation is a financial problem for her as she is dependent on taxis. At the time of the study, there were only two kneeling buses in Auckland.

Holly's schooling was very different from the usual. When she was one year old she was placed in an institution for children with special needs. School for her was being placed in a room with ten other people and she reported that she has not really been taught anything. She was unable to communicate (her wordbook and head-pointer were made for her when she was twenty-one) and consequently she was treated as though she was intellectually disabled.

When she was fifteen years old she was moved to a more open living situation where she met a nurse who told her that she had to start doing things for herself. This was a complete change for Holly as in the former institution everything had been done for her, as it was not considered that she could do

anything for herself. She met another nurse who made her a head-pointer and wordbook when she was twenty-one. It was when these tools were made accessible; that Holly's real schooling took place. Holly has since participated in adult literacy programmes, education bridging courses through the A.I.T., she is considering enrolling in an art course next year, and is currently being privately tutored in painting for two hours a week.

Holly's interests include swimming, painting and boccia (a form of bowling). Holly holds several swimming records (backstroke) despite initial barriers of people telling her that certain swimming feats could not be done. Holly also paints in watercolours and has held several art exhibitions.

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Mark was at the time of the study twenty-two years old and was flatting with four other males. He had been living away from home since he started his tertiary education, three years ago. Mark holds an undergraduate degree in social sciences, majoring in psychology and education.

He considered himself to be a quiet, humble person who listens and follows instructions well. He described himself as a responsible, patient and conscientious person who attacked problems in a logical, pragmatic fashion. He tended to control his expression of emotions, which allowed him to maintain a calm disposition in stressful events. However he stated that he found it difficult to get in touch with his own and other people's feelings.

At the time of study, Mark was a full time University student and received student allowance, a student loan and worked part time as a caregiver in a house with four disabled males.

His interests revolved around sporting activities though he also liked to draw pictures and to go fishing with friends.

At the beginning of the academic year, while Mark's career objective was to work with children and youth, he also wanted to develop a wide knowledge base in dealing with a diverse range of people.

The purpose Mark's meetings with Holly was for Holly to improve her

quality of life by having a person who would come once a week and help her in a manner which she considered appropriate and for Mark to learn from Holly what 'good' social working was and to achieve his learning goals:

- \* To establish a good contact
- \* To develop good communication skills
- \* To become more assertive privately
- \* To become professionally more assertive (Mark, Goal Attainment Scale, 24.3.1997).

Good contact was made when working with Holly which Mark felt he was able to achieve by being friendly, open and respectful of Holly as a person. He used the skills training workshops to improve his communication skills by practising clarity and then asking for feedback from the group. Holly has been a good role model for him because in spite of her physical disability she is very communicative, active and precise in expressing her thoughts. Further his communication with Holly had to be very straightforward and clear because, even though her level of understanding is very high it took time for her to articulate her responses because of her physical difficulties. Mark's major learning from Holly was to communicate in a clear and respectful way. When evaluating his learning goals Mark stated that there were still times when his communication was not as clear as he would like, but at the end of the course he stated that he knew how to improve it further.

Since being with Holly, Mark found it easy to be assertive for her, that is, assertively advocating for her rights. Throughout their relationship Mark has acted on her behalf in such things as acquiring a tutor, getting pictures framed, booking taxis and getting her wheel-chair fixed. In his own life Mark has made a conscious effort to be assertive. This had positive results except on a couple of occasions where he had either been apprehensive of the consequences or had not wanted to do something which had to be done because there was no enjoyment in it. He

became aware of the situations when he chooses to be unassertive and as a consequence, he started to make conscious efforts to be assertive in situations when he assessed that being assertive would be useful for him or for his client. Overall, Mark was satisfied with his learning outcomes and how they were achieved. He seemed to overcome problems by simply becoming more aware of them, and then follow this by a conscious effort to do something about it. During the Programme Mark decided to start to respond more quickly when he became aware of the problem, to change what could be changed and as reinforcement for himself to set short term achievable goals.

He changed his attitude toward disabilities by learning to focus on the person. The person became paramount rather than disability. He stated that for him the most valuable learning feature was to competently decide when to enable and when to help and, most importantly, never to assume and to always ask what the person wanted. Being with Holly he said that he never thought of himself as being more than a voice and workable set of limbs through which he could do certain jobs for her. By this he did not mean that he was just used for those components or felt that that was all there was to him, rather, he took that position because he experienced Holly as a person with such a strong character and so able to do things herself that only limited intervention was needed on her behalf. He also communicated that this was not to say that he did not benefit from this, quite the opposite. In his own words:

Seeing such a character despite some negative past experiences is reward enough from this experience. It is important when, and when not, to intervene, and in this case intervention was not necessary and would disempower the client, doing more harm than good (Mark, Case study on his learning process, 20.8.1997).

### **Selina and Emma**

Selina, ten years old at the time of the study, was living with her father and older sister. Her parents were divorced and her mother was soon to re-marry.

Selina and her sister had regular contact with their mother. Selina attended primary school and was of average ability in most subject areas. She was included in the Programme because the school was concerned about her behavioural problems, in particular swearing, stealing, smoking and general rudeness and obnoxious behaviour. Her main interests were horses, drawing and roller-skating.

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Emma, a twenty-two years old student, at the time of the study lived with her parents and younger brother. She had a degree in Social Science and Psychology and at the time of the study she was working part time. Her interests were working with children, especially those with behavioural and learning problems. She described herself as articulate, confident and enthusiastic with a great sense of humour and exceptional organisational skills.

The aim of Emma's encounters with Selina was to learn from her and to help her improve her confidence just by being in contact with her and sharing a genuine interest in her.

At the beginning of the year Emma set the following learning outcomes for herself:

- \* To practice and successfully implement learned theories, integrated practice theory and the task centred model.
- \* To learn and take on-board new theories and modes of practice for example Glasser's Choice Theory and the Quality Schools model.
- \* To establish a good relationship with a client, to build good rapport and to maintain a supportive and trusting relationship with her.
- \* To assist a client in improving her 'fit' in her 'environment' in a manner that she finds appropriate.
- \* To be actively anti-racist and anti-discriminating in practice (Emma, Goal Attainment Scale, 10.4.1997).

At the same time Selina set the following outcomes for her personal development:

- \* To feel better about myself.

- \* To get good remarks on my work and school report.
- \* To complete my work when I am supposed to and not leave it till the last minute.
- \* To have a good attitude towards other people.
- \* To help Emma to learn (Selina, Goal Attainment Scale, 14.4.1997).

At the beginning Emma established what the school's expectations were of the contact between herself and Selina and learnt that this was aimed at seeing a general improvement in Selina's behaviour as well as her reintegration into the school environment. Selina's parents' also desired that there should be a general improvement in their daughter's behaviour, that she be reintegrated into the school environment and wished for the return of "the happy child she used to be".

Emma introduced Selina to an extra curriculum activity that she really wanted to do - horse riding. This activity helped Selina to create her sense of her own self and identity as well as improved her confidence in her abilities and skills at building relationships with other adults. In a parallel process Emma improved her confidence in her abilities as a social worker by establishing good contact with Selina and through being able to persuade her to choose more acceptable behaviours to get what she wanted.

Emma spoke to the school support staff and to Selina's classroom teacher about Selina's self esteem and confidence problem. Following Emma's contact with the school-support staff Selina was referred to the self-esteem course, which was run via the Special Needs Unit.

Emma's approachability, her sense of humour and active approach helped Selina to become more confident and to improve her behaviour. Both parents noticed a considerable change in Selina's behaviour and attitudes. After the completion of the Programme Selina continued horse riding.

Emma achieved all of her learning goals and stated that she had learned more than she expected. She also became more aware that she needed to practice self-censorship with her actions and opinions. As she stated in her self-evaluation, she needed to learn to look before she leaped. She also learned how to handle

stressful situations in a more professional manner and of the necessity to consult with colleagues who may be directly or indirectly influenced by her actions.

### **Nick and Maya**

Nick was six years old at the time of the study and lived with his parents and older sister. The family situation seemed very good, stable and loving. The family was quite outwardly affectionate and spent considerable quality time together as a family. Both parents put a lot of effort into their children and were very aware of the need for them as parents to participate in the children's education and of the importance of the kinds of things they allowed the children to do.

Nick started attending kindergarten when he was four. He was initially very difficult for the teachers to handle and there was talk of having him removed. After about a month however he adjusted to the new environment and started to settle down. When Nick turned five he began Primary school where his teacher had great difficulties with his disruptive behaviour. Nick would not do as instructed, generally did as he liked and got away with it. The teacher found the situation very stressful. Nick was in the new entrant and year one class when Maya met him.

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Maya, aged twenty-three, stated at the beginning of the year that she was very interested in the social work and social policy field and that she had always been interested in helping and empowering people. She was very keen to learn more practical social work skills, communication and problem-solving as well as further learning about the integration of theory and practice. She stressed that she was very interested in working with children and families. She had completed a BA in English and Politics with major interests in law, psychology, sociology and women's studies. Very involved in her Church she taught the Sunday school programme in the 6-9 year old age group. She was also active in Amnesty

International writing letters for their urgent action network.

One of the aims of Maya's work with Nick was to help the teacher by giving Nick some extra attention in the classroom to enable the teacher to concentrate on work with other children. The goal was not to encourage Nick to continue with his attention seeking behaviours but to find more appropriate ways of satisfying his needs. Since the Contact-Challenge Programme is envisaged as an exchange programme - where students learn from clients, having such a young "teacher/client" was a challenge for Maya and for the Programme as well. Maya's maturity and ability to learn from difficult situations, the parents' involvement and the support from the school made the encounters a success for both, Maya and Nick. The main challenge was to make these encounters a good learning experience for Maya without burdening young Nick with too much responsibility for providing that learning experience for Maya.

Maya's learning goals were:

- \* To develop good communication skills.
- \* To learn more about different agencies.
- \* To learn how to make, maintain and end good contact with clients.
- \* To learn how to integrate theory into practice (Maya, Goal Attainment Scale, 24.3.1997).

Maya met all of her learning goals. The change in Nick's behaviour was surprising to all. It is difficult to know the extent of Maya's influence on his behaviour and what was attributable to the process of simply growing up and becoming mature enough to follow the school programme, but parents and teachers believed that Maya had a great and very positive impact on Nick.

## **Moni and Tania**

Moni was twenty-nine years old at the time of the study and lived independently with a flatmate. Despite the fact that her quality of life was limited by cerebral palsy she was a very independent and autonomous woman managing on her own with only some part-time home help. She had many friends, a very active social life and interests that kept her busy. She kept regular contact with some family members and met them about once a month. Although Moni can read and write and she attended secondary school until she was seventeen and although she would very much like to work, especially in the field of performing arts and television, she was unemployed. Her cerebral palsy prevented her from successful control of her movements and she was non-verbal. She communicated via a "Light writer" that spoke out aloud what she typed into it. She can also manage some basic words but depends on the "Light writer" for communication.

Moni loves to dance and was involved in a mixed abilities dance group who were practising to put on a live performance during the Contact-Challenge Programme. At the end of the year they had an opening night at the theatre which was a major success for Moni and for the dance group she belonged to. During the Programme Moni was involved in rehearsals which took up much of her time and energy. She also swims and plays boccia and has been involved in the Special Olympics travelling overseas to compete. Moni reads for pleasure, enjoys watching movies and going out with her friends.

\*

Tania was twenty-three years old at the time of the study and lived with her father and his partner. Education has always been highly valued in her family and she obtained her BA in Social Sciences completing a double major in Sociology and Anthropology.

At the beginning of the Programme she said that her health had not always been good and that she has a history of depression for which she was on medication. Tania also said that she did not have many problems unless she was

under extreme stress. She was aware that she tended to work too hard and to get carried away and use up all her energy she then sometimes becomes lethargic, low in energy and suffers from fatigue. Academically Tania has been very successful achieving scholarships and awards that have enabled her to go to University. Her association with a person as optimistic and energetic as Moni, was a valuable learning experience for her. She and Moni spent much time together and very often more than the two obligatory hours. She treated Moni with the utmost respect considering her as an equal and often commented that Moni was leaping and bounding ahead of her in many ways with respect to personal development, life satisfaction, coming to terms with her disability demands and in her maturity. The companionship and friendship of these two women made this relationship special and transcended the client/social worker role. They learnt from each other using their creative abilities to overcome the limitations that the special needs of each imposed.

Tania's outcomes were:

- \* To become competent within the specialised field of social work with persons with special needs.
- \* To be comfortable with clients and to be free from bias and prejudice when working with people with impairments.
- \* To learn and grow psycho-socially.
- \* To establish a routine and gain experience at Unique Capabilities, get a feel for the agency and be actively involved in the day to day running of the agency.
- \* To be able to work within an empowerment model and to achieve some small level of change or support in clients lives.
- \* To enhance my range of experiences and increase my level of personal responsibility and assertiveness in the social work sphere.
- \* To gain practical experience of social work.

\* Develop the ability to express warmth and feeling in appropriate ways, without fear, to develop assertiveness skills and sensitivity.

\* Develop the ability to develop a personal relationship with another human being, being able to assist, empower and help another person (Tania, Goal Attainment Scale, 24.3.1997).

Although Tania was advised to state her learning goals in a more focused way so that she would be able to evaluate them at the end of the year, she decided to work on all of them as stated at the beginning of the Programme. She managed to achieve all of them in various degrees. At the end of the Programme she restated some of the goals so that she could continue to work on them in the future. Tania focused on lowering expectations on herself in order to become more effective in her academic achievements, she also decided to focus on small, focused and achievable goals. She also took counselling sessions during the Programme to help her sort out obstacles that were preventing her from becoming an effective social worker.

Moni asked Tania to assist her in practical ways with tasks she found difficult and she wanted to benefit from being in contact with a student social worker who would know her reasonably well to attend to any of her needs. She was also open to share her knowledge and experiences with Tania and to help her become an affective practitioner. Moni also wanted Tania to be available as a companion at those times when it was difficult for Moni to get out and about and to interact with people.

The “Unique Capabilities” Agency expectations of Tania were to provide a service by “being there” for Moni in a way that Moni required and which she saw as being appropriate and needed.

### **7.7. Establishing an Atmosphere which is Conducive to Learning and Creating a Group Contract**

For the effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method, establishing an atmosphere conducive to learning is essential. This is not a task that can be performed only at the beginning of the Programme, but more an attitude that permeates all components of the Method. This section attempts to present main characteristics of the context conducive to learning, essential for effective teaching and learning.

Getting to know the students and letting them get to know me helped us establish an atmosphere conducive to learning, which is required for the effective implementation of the Contact-Challenge Method. By participating as an equal participant with the students in all experiential exercises, my aim was to cross the teacher-student barrier and to develop an atmosphere of mutual learning. However, I was still available for them to share my knowledge and to provide information, guidelines and suggestions as needed.

At the first session a group contract was developed with students, which covered the following issues: duration, frequency, venue and time, group members' commitment, confidentiality, punctuality and work towards building a safe atmosphere so that all could share aspects of themselves without fear of criticism by other members. In the group contract we addressed activity and responsibility for learning, self-evaluation, provision of opportunity for everyone to speak, the right not to answer any question which might be too personal, the right to share with the group only what they felt comfortable sharing and discussion of problems first within the group (Appendix 3). The aims of the Programme were also shared with the students. All students participated in the construction of the contract. This was a very strong process where the theory that lies behind making contracts in groups was discussed, together with practicalities about how to make an effective contract with the client. The aims were to teach students how to develop a contract; to link the experience of participating in the

creation of the group contract with social work theories, and to let students experience the process of committing their time and effort in the creation of an atmosphere conducive to learning. The aim was also that students would adopt the process as their own because they had contributed in its development. As a result of this student motivation increased:

We had our first lab this week and got to know each other, which was good. Hopefully having such a small group will mean we all get to know each other even better and we'll all feel comfortable sharing. We discussed our expectations in the group and wrote up a contract. I can see that having a confidentiality contract will be important when we talk about our clients later on but also for ourselves when we are discussing personal matters. I suppose it is also good practice, because contracting would be important in social work (Maya, Journal, 6.3.1997).

Sharon immediately linked the material that was covered with real life situations and her personal experiences of learning. By sharing this ability with her colleagues she helped them to learn how to integrate theory, practice and personal experience.

We discussed and formed contracts, and generally got to know each other a little better. I am pleased we are a small group, I think it will be a more comfortable forum to bring up problems and be confident of confidentiality. This lab and the Contact-Challenge Method seem to be the one place in this course I am feeling slightly confident with; it seems to recognise we are at the beginning, and don't mind admitting we can do with all the help we can get! The other courses seem to be a bombardment of information I have had no involvement with before. I hope I have the time and the brainpower to take everything on - the placement seems very close. We also talked about learning styles. I thought I liked to have some information, and then to go out and then have some practical involvement. I learn best by doing - although I find it helpful to work alongside a knowledgeable person who can say - "Hey, you doing so and so and for it to click with me that I am applying theory with practical (Sharon, Journal, 7.3.1997).

Confidence was an important issue for all students since they were new to the field of social work. I decided to take a very supportive approach, encouraging students to express their thoughts and feelings freely. Quite a lot of group time

was spent creating a supportive and trusting atmosphere in the group.

Feelings of insecurity - "I can't do it" - that given my background I will fail - that I cannot possibly succeed and that I am unable to help others. A steady flow of "I can't do it" thoughts, and then occasionally a glimmer of hope - of flipping back the nasty thoughts - and the good strong positive mood shines through (Tania, Journal, 13.3.1997).

Having students from various educational backgrounds, it was important to do activities which would enable the group to get to know one another, and which would contribute to the development of an atmosphere for learning where they could learn from one another. As expressed in students' journals, these efforts were useful:

I've heard all the people around the class talk a little about where they are coming from and why; makes me think "what a special bunch of people" - with obvious skills and a variety of backgrounds. This helps me feel as if I have a rewarding contribution to make also, although I am very nervous when speaking (Tania, Journal, 16.3.1997).

In the interviews conducted at the end of the Programme all students commented that they did not feel that any specific way of doing or learning things was imposed on them. All expressed that they had not felt pressured by being involved in the Contact-Challenge Method.

One student noted on her evaluation questionnaire that she had particularly enjoyed the intimate interaction with other members of the group and that it had been a pleasure to get to know her client. Development of an atmosphere conducive to learning was essential so that students were able to accept knowledge in an integrative way. Glasser's (1998) idea that the learning should be fun, need fulfilling and add to a learner's quality of life was complemented with the idea that learning should be challenging and, as well provide a safe atmosphere where students would feel free to take risks and experience the complete learning circle.

All students confirmed that an atmosphere conducive to learning was

established and that they felt free to express their thoughts and feelings at all times.

It proved to be very useful that students themselves created the group contract and that it was not imposed on them. Students appreciated that they were encouraged to have an impact on the Programme and linked theory with practice when they experienced one of the possible ways of creating a group contract. The more input from students at this early stage the more likely it is that their motivation will increase and that they will be more involved in the Programme. Principles proposed by Adult Learning Theory were applied and students embraced these wholeheartedly.

### **7.8. Introducing Field Instructors to Students**

In order to introduce students to their placement, field instructors were invited to participate in one of skills training sessions. They told students about the clients and how both students and clients could benefit from such contact. As an ice-breaking activity the “Unfinished Sentences” exercise was used and everybody participated including field-instructors and a former consumer of services from “Unique Capabilities”, at that time employed in the agency.

Met with supervisors, made to feel good to know they are keen for us to work with them. Don't want to feel like a burden, won't take chance to learn as much if felt like that.

Played game with card sentence beginners, quite thought provoking. It got people saying things they wouldn't have otherwise.

At end when discussing what we were hoping to gain from placement I said I was looking forward to placement, working with a client and learning from that encounter. As I am hoping to help making changes and help to empower them a supervisor from “Unique Capabilities” questioned my notion of empowerment, as I know someone would as soon as I had made the comment. I want to get in and help, to do all I can to make positive changes. But I need to learn to hold myself back, as my changes might not be what they really want or need. I need to recognise their human agency and my oppressive tendencies however well meaning (Sharon, Journal, 10.3.1997).

“Unfinished sentences” proved to be an excellent involvement activity. The discussion that developed was very rich and fruitful and students discussed social work values in a very practical way. Partnership, co-operation and learning from clients were demonstrated early in the Programme. Careful planning of appropriate activities to encourage participation was essential at this early stage.

It was particularly useful to introduce all field instructors to all students at the beginning. Having a former user of “Unique Capabilities” services was very useful in terms of students becoming aware of how much they can learn from clients’ experiences. It would be good, in the future, to introduce several clients, experienced in Contact-Challenge, at this stage. Students reported that they appreciated that the field instructors came to “their territory” first and openly shared their experiences and expectations of the students.

### **7.9. Setting Learning Outcomes**

After establishing an atmosphere conducive to learning the group focused on establishing learning outcomes. The aims of the Aotearoa-New Zealand study were shared with students as well as the importance of their involvement and their frank feedback. The focus was on establishing clear learning outcomes and on providing the context where students would be able to self-evaluate their achievements at the end of the year. My hypothesis was that if the students set the goals by themselves, they would be more committed and motivated to achieve them. All students agreed that their learning goals were covered by the four categories consistent with the Croatian study. Students individualised these broad learning goals and outlined their specific outcomes for each category. They kept reassessing them throughout the year to see how they changed, whether they met them or not, and how this was achieved.

It has been good to start lectures and I can see that some of what we do will be completely new and some of it I have already done. But even the stuff I’ve done will be within a social working framework so that will be

good. This course really looks like what I was after. Something that will involve theory and social policy but also with a large fieldwork, experience, skills based aspect, and the practical outworking of applying that theory in practice. That is one aspect I really want to learn: how to take all these theories and ideas that I learnt in my undergraduate degree and apply them in practical sense. I also want to learn some real, practical skills for social working, such as communication and listening skills, networking skills, problem solving. I want to know how to help empower people with skills, confidence, support and resources, so that they can solve problems for themselves long term (Maya, Journal, 25.2.1997).

Some students needed help in identifying activities to reach their learning goals. They were encouraged to help one another in defining tasks and activities as well as ways of evaluating goal achievement at the end of the year. This co-operative brainstorming exercise further developed group cohesion.

Our task today was planning. The Programme co-ordinator and colleagues helped me to plan what I would do to achieve one of my learning goals. I am going to find out some names and phone numbers of social work agencies so that I can achieve my goal of learning more about different agencies. It was useful to set a task to go about achieving a goal (Maya, Journal, 21.4.1997).

When we talked about attaining these outcomes, the outcome of learning about various social work settings seemed to be difficult to achieve through the Contact-Challenge Method because students were placed in only two settings, one of which was not a social work setting at all. After a brainstorming exercise it was decided that each student would organise at least one field visit to a place of professional interest and that all members of the group will be informed about it.

From interviews conducted with the students at the end of the Programme it became apparent that the majority of students had found it very useful to plan their own way of learning and associating with clients. One of the students said:

Yes, it was very useful to plan according to my learning style and interests, because ultimately you really know what you need to learn and you learn best when you do it for yourself (Maya, Interview, 7.10.1997).

Another student noted that even though she planned a lot at the beginning of the year, she found it useful that she was allowed to modify her initial plan, so that learning from her client happened very naturally. She described her process of learning as follows: she learns something from her client, would observe and reflect on this and then plan to modify her own actions accordingly. Even though she occasionally gave up her plan, on reflection she discovered that she met her goals by finding an alternative plan, which better reflected her client's needs and her own learning needs. She described that she learned from that process, enjoyed the freedom of learning and the challenge of trying new ways. This example shows the usefulness of the Kolb's Experiential Learning Model which respects the student's own learning style. It also shows the practical implications of Choice Theory which states that students learn better if they enjoy the process of learning and, if they have the freedom to learn in a way which they see as being appropriate.

All students expressed that setting learning outcomes was useful for them. One student remarked that setting learning outcomes helped to be more focused, and another student answered:

Definitely, very useful, although you learn things you did not know you needed to in the beginning (Anonymous student, Feedback for Module Three).

The intention at that early stage of the Programme was to put as much responsibility as possible on the students but to still be there for them as a source of information and to lead and guide as required. The aim was to encourage them to become keen and passionate about achieving their own learning outcomes. The hypothesis was that if they could relate these to improvement of quality of their lives or lives of their clients they would become more motivated to achieve their learning outcomes. According to Glasser:

Education is the process through which we discover that learning adds quality to our lives. Until it happens, students have little incentive to learn

anything more than they already know. If students when you are trying to teach are learning a great deal, you can be certain that what they are learning is adding quality to their lives. If they are having difficulty learning, you can be equally certain that what you are trying to teach them is not adding quality to their lives (William Glasser in Greene, 1989).

Students reflected on the practical usefulness of setting learning goals and of finding ways to achieve them. Achievement of their learning goals was not experienced only as an academic exercise. At the same time, as a Programme coordinator I was also aware of a parallel process that was happening. I wanted to experience the process of working on my PhD as challenging and useful, but not only as an academic exercise. My aim was to further develop a method and not only to prove if it was effective in the Aotearoa - New Zealand context.

It was also important to balance personal and professional outcomes putting more emphasis on professional ones, but encouraging students to solve personal issues which may stand in the way of achieving professional ones.

My unsatisfactory behaviour or bad habit is that I am impatient and in true A-type personality form. I finish other people's sentences. I imagine that this is a way of satisfying my need for power but it has the negative side effect of making me seem unfeeling, selfish, pushy and bossy. I realise that it is unfair on others and I need to practice the virtue of patience (Emma, Journal, 18.8.1997).

It was rewarding to see students changing and becoming more effective and professional as they achieved their learning and personal outcomes. This fine link between personal and professional was nicely described in Emma's journal.

Most of all I feel that I learnt patience. Patience is one of the most needed tools when working with the very young. Often they do not have the words to say what they want to so it takes them longer to say it. If you rush a child they will shut down, lock up and not tell you anything. It is far better if you slow down and listen to them as they tell their story at whatever pace they see fit. The best way I can think to sum it up is in the same words used by Time magazine in their advertising slogan

*“The best thing you can give to your children is time.”*

In order to give them this time you first have to be willing to spare the time and have the patience to wait out as long as it takes (Emma, Journal, Final Reflection).

Setting learning outcomes was an essential part of the Contact-Challenge Method. It is also important to set criteria and standards for evaluating attainment of outcomes at the end of the course. Some students immediately transferred the skill of defining outcomes by discussing and establishing goals with their clients. The possibility of re-negotiating learning outcomes was very important because when teaching-learning processes are so dynamic, goals change along the way. In Contact-Challenge programmes difficulties are seen as challenges and although students may change their learning outcomes during the Programme, when they experience difficulties in attaining them, they are encouraged to stay focused on their learning outcome, not to give up and see what can they learn from that experience. The efforts to attain the outcomes are equally valuable as their achievement.

Once I identified my learning outcomes and strategies I am going to use, it was relatively easy to achieve them. I can easily use the same method with my clients in the future (Tania, Evaluation Questionnaire for the Second Block).

Clarity of standards for self-evaluation and assessment contributed to the transparency of the learning process and encouraged students to be fully involved in the process.

All students achieved their learning outcomes either on a *much more than the expected level, more than the expected level or expected level* of attainment. Nobody's goals were achieved on *less than the expected levels or much less than the expected levels*. It is also important to note that students were not assessed according to achievement of their outcomes. Therefore, they focused on achieving their outcomes not to get good marks, but because of their internal motivation to become effective professionals. It was also impressive to see how students did not

mind spending extra hours with clients when necessary and regularly coming to field visits and informing colleagues about upcoming events. They never complained about extra skills training and although some of them worked part-time at the time of the study they would always find time for any additional activity they had chosen to do which had a potential to enhance their learning.

### **7.10. Meeting Clients and their Families**

This section focuses on first contacts of students with clients and their families. This was a very exciting time for all participants. All participants handled this situation in their unique ways.

I am still feeling excited about being involved in the Contact-Challenge Method and I can't wait until we finally meet our clients (Maya, Journal, 6.3.1997).

After four interactive lectures, four skills training sessions and after meeting field instructors, students were introduced to clients and their families.

I went to Nick's house after school and we just played games, read books, he showed me things. I didn't want to structure this time too much, especially at the early stages. It really seems like a relationship building stage, especially because we are so different, we do not kind of "naturally" relate to each other. This is definitely part of me learning good communication skills because there are so many things I have to think about when talking and relating to him (Maya, Journal, 20.5.1997).

Some students created contracts with their clients, immediately using skills learnt during skills training workshops and lectures. One student took another approach, just befriending a client, reflecting on that experience and learning from these reflections and discussing them with her client. Each process was unique, but the action research approach (initial reflection-planning-action-reflection-planning) made the process always meaningful. All participants (students, clients and parents) expressed that these contacts were very useful for them.

For a first meeting things went OK. Using the book was hard; it will be better when the computer will be fixed. I will not have to hover over her with the book then; it will give her more independence from me. The hardest part of the contact was leaving. I think this was because Holly can't talk or wave, whereas I'm used to people saying "see you later". I was there longer than expected the rest of helpers thought we were there for the day. I have to be more assertive if there is a conflict of interest (Mark, Journal, 17.4.1997).

At the beginning of the course, Mark stated that he would like to be more assertive. The Contact-Challenge Method provides a framework where personal characteristics that may hamper student's professional performance are very often challenged. Students either work on these "problematic" issues as learning outcomes or they learn from contact with clients that they need to change in order to be effective. Support from supervisors, peer group and the Programme co-ordinator is essential for complete achievement of such learning outcomes.

Students were encouraged to express their fears. When they expressed them and discussed them, and when they saw that they were not alone and that their feelings were not unusual, they helped one another, simultaneously practising problem solving processes. By helping in the development of a friendly and genuine contact, clients played an important role in "melting" students' fears and prejudices.

Initially I was rather afraid of the task before me. I had not had much contact with people with disabilities before and I wasn't sure what to expect. I was especially concerned that I might be capable of being awfully insensitive or damaging in some ways as I suppose I perceived disabled people as being special if not somehow fragile. I wanted initially to work with the children in the school, as that seemed a much safer bet. It was the fact that we were told that the "disabled" clients would be appreciative of our efforts and that we could actually be reasonably useful that made me change my mind. When I first met Moni all my fears were dispelled (Tania, Case study, 5.8.1997).

Clarity is essential for effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method. Even when clients and students choose not to make a contract about their

encounters, or when it is not possible to make one (due to the age or disability of the client), it is essential to discuss the roles, goals and the meaning of these contacts. When children are involved it is essential to involve parents and teachers in the planning process. Information given to clients was clear and precise. All of them, as well as parents involved, knew what was their role and by making that clear the initial contacts with students were facilitated.

### **7.11. Introduction to the Placement**

The placement period started in May and while on placement, students continued meeting with clients, attending skills training workshops weekly and group supervision sessions every fortnight as well as individual supervision sessions when needed. Continuous contact with the Programme co-ordinator and the peer group during skills training workshops was one of the main differences from the regular fieldwork programme. All students appreciated this continuous contact which allowed them to talk about problems and challenges that contact with clients and placement offered. At the beginning of the placement they created a learning contract with their field instructors.

Making a contract was relatively easy, especially because Linda is just so good about stuff like that; she is really open to whatever we want. Sharon and Emma were talking about the personal contracts they are writing with their clients, which is a bit hard for me to do with Nick because of his age. He and I can still built up expectations for each other but I don't know about formalising it into a written contract. I could do it more with his parents but then, Nick is my client not his parents, and I am there to serve his needs. I will talk to Programme co-ordinator about this (Maya, Journal, 15.5.1997).

Continuous contact helped in solving small problems at the beginning that if not solved could cause unsatisfactory placement. Integration between theory and practice was encouraged by additional skills training workshops while students were on placement. It was observed that they were most active during that block of teaching and that major integration of theory, practice and experience happened

during this period. Students continuously drew examples from practice and asked for additional explanations. They were also keen to learn new skills and apply them immediately on their placement. Continuous contact with the Department of Social Policy and Social Work and the peer group while on placement and encouragement of reflection on learned theories and their possible application in practice was one of the major factors that contributed to integration and students increased motivation.

We looked around and they showed us all the different aspects of the school. They have a great number of very varied facilities to help all kind of different children, which was very impressive. I am looking forward to working in a number of those areas if it's possible. All the features and the principles were very helpful and it was quite nice to feel welcome and wanted not just some student they had to take on. Linda especially seems very easy to talk to and I'm sure I'll have a lot to learn from her. Linda took us into the three classrooms where the children we will be working were. The middle class (about 10 year olds) just about broke into riots when we came in, but the kids were just very excited and very talkative. The 5-year olds were being very industrious and the teacher seems really good. This is the class I will be working in with Nick. I can see it will be very challenging (Maya, Journal, 2.5.1997).

Placement in the school was quite different than placement in the Unique Capabilities. In the school students were acting as teacher aides, sometimes helping in special needs areas or in the "Thinking Room" with pupils who had behavioural problems, while in the "Unique Capabilities" students followed their field instructor, observing or doing what a social worker would do.

We went to the pools to demonstrate to a caregiver how to teach swimming. Bob was severely physically disabled. I've never seen anyone like that. It was quite scary but he loved being in the water. I am not sure how I feel after meeting Bob, but it hasn't scared me away from social work (Mark, Journal, 5.5.1997).

It would be much better to have a wide range of agencies available for placement because then, during supervision sessions students would be able to learn about a wider range of social work settings. Sunshine Valley School's

variety of social programmes and links with community programmes offered a good opportunity for students to learn what agencies offer support to children and are linked to the school. A full driving licence should be a requirement for the course. Both students placed in “Unique Capabilities” did not have a full driving licence and they were not able to do any independent work. On the other hand students commented on that as an advantage, because they had their field instructor with them in the field at all times so they were able to see what effective social work looks like. In the interviews all students reported that they felt that they had learned some valuable skills they will be able to use on their next placement.

### **7.12. Managing the Family Situation and Learning about Boundaries**

Contact with clients and their families helped students to link material taught during the Working with Families module with real life situations. They were supported to link their personal experience of being a part of the family with the developmental stages of families and as well as to understand patterns that occur when there is a problem in the family and how families cope. Students were immersed in situations where their theoretical knowledge was continuously tested in practice.

I think everyone is looking for someone to blame because no one can explain his behaviour (Maya, Journal, 14.6.1997).

The integration of theory, practice and experience was continually encouraged. Students reported that the experiential approach that was used was very beneficial for them and that made the application of the theories very practical.

Major learning occurred when students had to set relationship boundaries. They succeeded in developing a collegial relationship of mutual learning with

their clients, which is different from the professional social worker-client relationship and from friendship. By developing the collegial relationship they were able to discuss with their clients what makes an effective social worker-client relationship. Students who worked with children experienced that they needed more time than was scheduled at the beginning of the Programme. While some students spent more time than it was scheduled some continued with the prescribed two hours per week and exercised their assertiveness in setting boundaries for the relationship.

Maria brought me an old craft book of her mothers today - a gift. I didn't accept it and told her she should hold on to it in case she wanted to do something out of it. It has been a good move doing craft things; and it also shows she has enjoyed the stuff we have been doing. Obviously her mother was interested in it, it could be a line in for discussion or just something that she would have done with the girls - hopefully a positive female bonding thing (Sharon, Journal, 5.6. 1997).

A potential disadvantage of the Contact-Challenge Method is that boundaries may become unclear. In the Croatian study, students stated that they were afraid that clients became too attached to them and that at the end of the year felt disappointed when the student left. However, when clients, their families and field instructors were asked if this was the case, they said that they were quite clear right from the beginning of their contact that it would finish at the end of the school year. They took a very professional approach. Their role was clear to them - they were there to help students to become better social workers. Clients expressed the view that probably the students became too attached and were unable to cope with this. Further, they suggested that students were not really as empowering, as they may have thought, because they felt sorry for clients without any apparent reason. However, regardless of who becomes "too attached" and who "takes it professionally", it is essential to set clear boundaries.

Teaching students about attachment theory and the stages of grief helped them to understand the process and to find ways to conclude the relationship in an appropriate manner.

After school I took Nick and his sister Maggie to my parents house. I wasn't sure whether to take Maggie or not, but Nick's parents said it was completely up to me. It is good to get that interaction between Maggie and Nick, so that we can work on sharing. I also don't want Maggie to feel left out, as she knows I'm there to work with Nick and that I am in his class. It would be awful if she thought she had to play up to get attention like Nick. My mother breeds miniature horses, so they are very little and safe for children. The kids seemed to enjoy running around the paddocks and leading the horses around. Nick didn't listen to anything Mum said and just had everyone doing what he wanted. This is something he gets away with a bit too often, and is something I will have to watch with myself (Maya, Journal, 6.6.1997).

Students were tempted to take clients home and sometimes this was a good experience, but on some occasions it was not.

Through an unavoidable circumstance Maria came to my home one day. We had people staying with us, who of course wanted to know who she was. I really felt for me this crossed my privacy/home line and would avoid it at all costs in the future. I don't want to have to fend off questions from friends about stuff they don't need to know. And I really didn't want to have to bring Maria into my social life! In future I would have changed the plans altogether to avoid the situation, I would rather have cancelled (Sharon, Reflection on learning goals).

Being in such a close contact raised many questions about boundaries and about intruding in somebody's life even with the best of intentions. Students realised that there is no recipe for doing social work effectively, but that being involved and truly interested helps. All students reported that they learnt how to respect their clients and how to develop an empowering relationship. They also had the chance to experience the fine line between being professional and friendly and being a personal friend. The right to intrude in someone's life was discussed as was the clients' right for self-determination and the social worker's right for self-determination.

Now that the kids are getting more used to me, I can see I shall have to be careful not to become too friendly so that they won't listen to me. You don't like to be too tough, and really you want to help them to think for themselves about why certain types of behaviour aren't acceptable, not just

out of obedience to you. This process is the same with Nick. Hopefully this is a skill I can work on (Maya, Journal, 9.5.1997).

During skills training workshops one of the themes that was discussed were the values as being internal, not as being imposed from outside. We discussed values in very practical terms and possible ways of reaching the children's *quality world* instead of imposing ready-made rules of behaviour were also explored.

I took Nick out of class this morning to do some writing, which went fine. I got thinking about how he usually gets his own way. He is a very strong willed child and likes to do things his way, it is not that he won't do what you ask; it's just that he won't do it the way you asked but in his own way. I wonder sometimes how far to let this go. You want him to learn to do as he's told and that he can't always have everything his way, but I also think to a certain degree he should be allowed to do things his own way, that it is just his personality and why should I tell him off for that? Just because he is only five, why shouldn't he have some choices and independence? Something to think about anyway (Maya, Journal, 9.6.1997).

A special emphasis was put on talking with children about the use of good manners, of being friendly to others and the pay off for such behaviour. Involvement with clients was reflected in their attachment to them.

I felt frustrated and depressed though because you want to help and yet all I can do is so limited in the long term. I know my contact with Nick is only for a few more months and that he will get help from others over the years, but I have grown very attached to him and I care about what happens to him, especially now that I feel like I've put some input in his life. I was tempted to promise to help out more next term but I stopped myself because it is not really a commitment I can make next term (Maya, Journal, 18.6.1997).

Students were warned not to make any promises that they were not absolutely sure that they could fulfil after the completion of their contact with clients. They were given the chance to practice being clear about their intentions and to act responsibly. After reading clients' and parents' feedback it became clear that all students managed not to cross the professional boundary and yet were able

to be empowering with their clients and act in a friendly manner.

During labs we did a task that involved listing what is Program co-ordinator's job, what is not her job, what is my job as a student, and what is not my job. This is a good idea to do with Holly (Mark, Journal, 28.4.1997).

Intensive skills training workshops contributed to learning how to set clear boundaries and to negotiate the contract. Experiential exercises were carefully chosen in such a way that students were able to transfer learned skills to practice without imposing on clients or practising social work skills on them.

We also talked about the importance of social networks, what is good and what can be bad about them. We talked a lot about people's networks, what kind of support they have around them, but it is also important to recognise where some networks can be a source or the perpetuation of a problem (Maya, Journal, 21.4.1997).

Physical boundaries were also explored, in terms of what was acceptable for students to do for clients and how to help people in an empowering way.

Moni had an accident in the toilet so I was glad I was there to help out. One of the drawbacks of being physically impaired - it makes you vulnerable to situations like that. I have learned the practical implications of working with disabled people, e.g. toileting and dressing. I am quite embarrassed for the client sometimes as it seems to be an awfully powerless situation to be in (Tania, Journal, 25.5.1997).

Clarity of roles, expectations and aims of the Contact-Challenge Method are essential for effective performance of the method. Incorporating Bowlby's Attachment Theory and accompanying this with related experiential exercises during the skills training workshops prevented the possibility of having unclear boundaries and of being disappointed at the end because of unclear expectations. Continuous linkage of theory, practice and experience was encouraged with experiential exercises being transferable to their field experience.

### 7.13. Usefulness of Skills Training Workshops (Labs)

The Programme offered a valuable framework for skills training workshops with students' ideas and input being accepted whenever possible. The students asked for one whole day workshop instead of coming every week for two hours during the last three weeks of their placement period. Having a whole day to devote to Attachment Theory, grieving and negotiation processes proved to be an advantage.

Today we had lab that ran from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. I actually really enjoyed this "workshop" type environment and learnt a lot this way (Emma, Journal, 21.7.1997).

The students very much appreciated the extra skills training and a whole day workshop was evaluated from students as excellent. Even though the Contact-Challenge group had nine more sessions than did the other MSW Applied group, the students never complained about the extra hours claiming that they needed more skills training - which was rewarded only by having more opportunities to learn. Block training proved to be beneficial for the students, as was the continuous contact with them throughout the Programme.

We also had a lab this afternoon where we did a listening exercise where we had to remember correctly what the other person told us and report it back. I could see how distortions and additions could get added in when the social worker had decided what the problem/issues are and hears things through his framework, or if they did everything by certain theory or model (Maya, Journal, 5.5.1997).

Reflection was an integral part of the laboratory teaching. Together with continuous reflections in their journals, at the end of every module students were asked to state what they had learnt during that period and what learning they would still like to achieve. Since students' feedback on the whole day workshop was so positive, and blocking was never tried in the Croatian study, whole day intensive workshops should be considered as a possible option for the future

application of the Contact-Challenge Method. However, the right balance of whole day workshops and continuous contact with students during the year is essential for the method to be effective.

On placement I learned through experience, in class I benefited most from being in the role of a social worker and being able to talk openly about problems (Tania, Feed-back for the Module Two).

Continuous reflection provided the possibility to re-evaluate learning goals and to set new ones when needed.

I would still like to be more efficient and on the ball. I'd also like to be more assertive. My early resolutions still stand firm. I'd like ideally more practical experience but in a different field. I'd like to know practical things such as how to work more efficiently within social welfare. I would also like to develop simple emotional assets such as patience, compassion and enthusiasm, which seem very important (Tania, feedback for the Module Two).

Tania's wish to have experience in a different field was almost realised by "swapping placements" for two weeks with a student in the school. In that case she would stay in contact with Moni and would not work at "Unique Capabilities" but at the "Sunshine Valley School" for two weeks. A student in the school placement agreed and was keen to do so, but after discussion it was decided that they should stay in their agencies and look for a placement in a different field in the following year. Swapping placements for two weeks however would not have disturbed the effectiveness of the method. Such a small group of students enabled more flexibility whereas in a larger group such changes could potentially create confusion for participants.

The students' reflections on the way skills training laboratories were conducted were very positive. They appreciated the opportunity of negotiating the contents of these sessions. Being only a small group was also seen as an advantage.

I enjoyed working in the small group environment as this gives me more individual attention. I enjoyed the “mind-opening” exercises that we did as a group as these made me re-evaluate my beliefs and myself as a person (made me realise I am human) (Emma, Feedback for the Module One).

Questioned on what skills they thought they had developed all the students gave a long list and their improvements were easily observable. An experiential approach to learning and a supportive atmosphere allowed them the freedom to experiment with one another. The freedom to make mistakes and openly share their concerns proved to be conducive to learning social work skills.

All of the skills have developed since the beginning of the skills training labs. I was quite confused about the model simply because it was too simple I think, I wanted it to be more confusing! Problem identification, establishing a trusting relationship, being culturally safe, interviewing skills, attending, listening, responding, and reflection have all improved (Tania, Feedback for the Module Two).

In answer to the question “What skills do you still need to improve?” the same student responded:

Restating, summarising and paraphrasing did not come naturally. Learning to repeat client’s words and carefully reflecting on what has been said needs to be improved upon. I tended to look on it as a somewhat usual but more intimate conversation without using these more “artificial” social work tools. (Tania, Feedback for the Module Three).

Students were also asked to evaluate the clarity of the skills training sessions and the relevance of the themes.

Clearly presented. It was especially good to link up and discuss problems on placement and keep in touch with others in similar situations. I still feel a little unsure of the task centred model, but mostly I understand everything in class reasonably easily. The labs on being able to pull yourself away from it all emotionally and the lab on stress management were particularly useful and helpful (Tania, Feedback for the Module Two).

In their interviews all the students stated that skills training workshops were very useful for them and even though they practised problem-solving skills on their professional and sometimes personal problems, they stated that they never experienced these sessions as being personal therapy. They also communicated that some interactions with their colleagues were personally very beneficial. It was essential to emphasise at the beginning of the course that the focus would be on learning and not on personal therapy, however some useful real-life situations would be utilised in the practice of problem solving. One student was advised to take counselling to explore in more depth some personal issues. All students stated that they preferred working on personal and professional issues while practising problem solving rather than through role-playing, but still they found role-playing useful when practising work with “difficult” clients ( for example aggressive, referred, clients who want to change everybody else but themselves).

Operating in a small group was an advantage, but sometimes just having five students was too small. Twelve students would have been an ideal group for effective skills training. The content proved to be very relevant and having established a clear contract at the beginning prevented the possibility of slipping into conducting personal therapy sessions with the students. Work on real-life issues improved the group dynamics and the students’ involvement. Continuous reflection on placements and interaction with clients facilitated the process of making sense of the skills learned during skills training sessions.

The combination of role playing for exercising specific skills and working on achievement of learning goals or on some personal outcomes proved also to be very useful. Exclusive role-playing or exclusive work on personal outcomes would not have been as effective.

Flexibility of the method is also essential. The Contact-Challenge has to be responsive to the students’ needs even though the Programme has to be carefully and precisely structured at the same time.

#### 7.14. Learning about Groups

As a part of learning about Social Work with Groups, the students had to be responsible for leading a two-hour session on a theme they chose.

I really think the most learning, over this time of us leading the group, happened for me when I took the group. There were valuable little insights seeing how each of us would do it differently - but actually having to “run” the show was a big learning experience (Maya, Journal, 20.5.1997).

All did so in their own unique way in accordance with their learning styles and fields of interest. It was astonishing to see how much they did learn about leading the group from just participating and observing me leading skills training workshops in first three modules. The skills learned in first two modules were apparently transferable and so the students were able to easily apply them in a different situation.

Four students out of five, found that being in charge of facilitating one session was a very useful experience. Only one student found it to be artificial but when she was leading the group, two of the students were at a funeral and one was late. While she had carefully planned an activity for six people having only three at the beginning, did seem artificial, but she managed to alter her plan, and her group processing was at the end a rich experience. This session provided major learning material about how to modify a planned agenda according to the needs of the group.

The students indicated that they needed more theoretical background about groups than they had received. The provision of interactive lectures on group theories prior to allowing students lead a group is a necessity. The experience of taking responsibility for the group was very valuable and should be utilised again in the future. Also allowing the students to choose the theme of the group sessions they facilitated was useful in two ways. They had the chance to introduce theoretical and practical material, which they still felt they needed to know more about and, they learnt how is it to be responsible to lead a group. After every

group session, all the students and the Programme co-ordinator gave feedback to the student who was in charge. They all found the group feedback to be very valuable.

### **7.15. Exploring Prejudices, Values and Initial Fears**

At the skills training workshops it was stressed that we all have prejudices, and although it is sometimes impossible to be prejudice-free, becoming aware of them is the first step. Allowing students to express their prejudices enabled them to work on them. They also became aware of the meaning of the word empowerment and of the value of self-determination. The meaning of the word empowerment was discussed, as were practical situations of when to offer help and when to let a client do things for him or herself. The students became aware of how important it is to continuously check with clients on how would they like to be supported. The students' readiness to discuss their biases meant that the context was safe enough to discuss these issues.

I am a little nervous about what I am going to be doing with my client. Since she is wheelchair bound we won't be able to do anything physical. I suppose it is not just that. I am a bit worried about what to do during our sessions. I don't want them to be 2 hours of watching TV; the relationship has to go on for six months. I'm also worried about my prejudices. I do not think that I have any discriminatory prejudices about people who are disabled but I am worried that when working with someone disabled I may be prejudiced in some way (Mark, Journal, 24.3.1997).

Bearing the responsibility of organising their own learning and at the same time learning from their clients supporting them in an appropriate manner, was not an easy task for the students. One skills training session was spent exploring initial fears and potential prejudices prior to meeting with clients. Fifty hours of contact allowed students to plan short term and long term how to achieve their learning goals and how to support their clients.

At the beginning of the Programme the students expressed that their main fears were their limited social work background, the fact that two of the clients were severely physically disabled and non-verbal, and some were apprehensive about how to fill in the time by doing something useful for them and for their clients. Later in the Programme they stated that they found that they did not have enough time to do everything they wanted with their clients! Those students who were placed in the school were afraid about not getting on well with child's family or the child, of having unrealistic expectations from them and feeling intimidated by the family's problems. All these fears melted after their first contact with the clients and their families, where was once again stated that the students were there to learn from the clients and to give them support in ways they saw as appropriate.

Firstly, you are put in a position of responsibility and power, which can be willingly or unknowingly abused. Lack of experience, age, lack of confidence and the expectation that may be placed on you as a more than human problem-solver (Tania, Journal, 1.4.1997).

All the students acknowledged that they had the chance to work on or to become aware of their biases. Some were even surprised that they had biases. Overcoming the anti-disability bias was shown when students started to feel comfortable with people with disabilities. This is not to say that they were very biased when they started the course, but rather that they had the opportunity to explore their own values further by being in contact with those who were different from their usual social network. Three students who worked with children in families explored their own value base and the way they thought about issues and relationships.

It is important to note that Programme co-ordinator's approach to each student was on an individual basis. After reading the students' journals, recommendations were made for activities that might help the students' learning or further challenge them. Experiential exercises were related to the issue that the student was struggling with and suggestions or advice given as to how they might explore in more depth some issues that seemed to be relevant for more effective

professional practice. When Maya expressed concern that her personal beliefs might prevent her from working effectively with some clients, the following took place:

Ksenija asked me to do a reflection about my value system and how I am going to work through this in social work. This is something I have thought a lot about because there are often issues that come up especially in just everyday conversation that make me think about what I believe for that situation.

I have my particular views due to my Christian beliefs about what is right and wrong, about human nature, about people's problems and the solutions to those problems. While I would never advocate pushing my ideas onto anyone else, it does mean there are fundamental things that I think people are basically wrong about. This of course is where the conflict begins. I respect people's right to hold their own opinion and their own beliefs and I would never invade upon this. However, what do I do when client's beliefs are completely antithetical to mine? I am not going to do anything that goes against my beliefs, but I suppose I would just have to let a client do whatever they thought they should. I can't pretend to be "value-free" and "objective" though because I'm not and I never could be. At which point will I be inflicting my values though? I suppose one solution is to be constantly reflective myself and aware all the time of where I'm coming from, and also be very honest with my clients and ask them if they feel like I'm afflicting anything on them and to tell me if I am.

The other difficulty is how I fit my beliefs into that of the agency. This could cause difficulties because I will have to justify my actions and my reasoning.

I think I will also have to recognise some areas and some situations where I will not be able to work. I found it very interesting to read the chapter in "Social Work in Action" about abortion counselling and how she believed that anyone who was against abortion should not get involved in abortion counselling because they will not be able to honestly present all options to the woman. I thought this was a problematic argument but highlighted my own dilemmas because I am of course against abortion. While I could understand what she was saying, because I know that even if I tried to be "objective" and give both sides of the argument if I was involved in abortion counselling my own views would still come through to the client consciously or subconsciously through my body language, verbal language etc. Is someone who is pro-abortion any better at presenting both sides of the argument though? If I am against divorce in most circumstances, should I also not ever get involved with a couple with marital problems as a client? How far does this argument go? Wouldn't it apply to everyone

with certain beliefs in one direction?

Why do I have to fit my ideas into what is considered politically correct, enlightened or a mainstream thought?

But to come back to my initial thought, there will be areas where I will have to recognise I can't comfortably let a client do something that I disagree with so I will either have to not get involved in the first place or refer them on. It would be bad social work practice to impose my views. I will probably never get involved in abortion counselling for this reason!

It is because of my Christian beliefs that I am doing social work though, so there must be some correlation (Maya, Journal, 29.9.1997).

It would not make any difference if the student were a Buddhist, atheist or feminist. The nature of the Programme is that values and belief systems are challenged in order to develop a broad, embracing and non-judgmental attitude towards all clients, regardless of race, religion or (dis) ability. It was great to see this process of challenging values and beliefs and the students' active struggles to clarify issues in order to become more effective practitioners. Students developed a critical attitude and became able to discuss ethical issues as well as to listen and accept each other's world-view without criticism. They also challenged each other's attitudes asking for clarification and explanation.

Another "values in practice" issue came up during placement:

Basically what came up was that they believe that one of the teachers is lesbian. It wasn't nasty gossip just that a lesbian friend of someone's knew her - blah, blah, blah. They all really like her and everything. And I'm not writing this here to be a gossip or mean or anything. In fact, I wish to reflect on my response and feelings concerning the situation. Say for example that she was. I think I can use this to realise that in fact when I say I am open-minded, that in fact I am achieving it. Having had no real experience or social interaction with gay people, I know what I feel and when faced with it in a real life situation I found that I have responded and feel exactly as I expected. It really isn't an issue. She is really a nice lady, extremely professional, good at what she does, etc. And whether she is gay or not really does not have any effect on that what so ever. I feel that by writing about it maybe I am making it into a big deal - but I really don't want to. I am just glad that I was able to feel and respond exactly as I hoped to. Whether she is or not is beside the point it is all really a mind exercise which I feel I have come through successfully (Sharon, Journal, 27.7.1997).

The issue of cultural awareness was explored in depth and here follows Maya's reflection:

We talked about culture and it was quite reassuring to learn that people are quite willing to answer the questions about themselves and their culture if you come with humility and respect (Maya, Journal, 12.5.1997).

Emma's reflection was more personal:

Our culture is a very important part of us; it provides us with identity, with direction, with belief, with a value and moral base. Each of us is fully immersed in our own culture. I believe strongly in the culture of women. I call myself a feminist and I have been brought up in a strong feminist household with strong feminist beliefs. As a result of this strength within my cultural background I know I am as fully capable as any man (if not more so). Being a feminist is not to say (as it has been voiced in society over time) that I am a lesbian nor is it a claim to hating all men. Being a feminist is to say that I believe in the power of women, that I believe them to be entitled to the same rights as their male counterparts (Emma, Journal, 12.5.1997).

The issue of cultural awareness was first explored using personal examples from the group, and then integrated into the professional social work when students arranged a visit to the Refugee Resettlement Agency.

There is just so much to think about when settling a family of one culture into another. There are so many simple things that we take for granted, like how to set up a bank account, shopping etc., that for someone coming from a country where it's done so differently, it can become a huge issue. They seem to do absolutely fabulous work on scarce resources. I really like the idea of an agency too that is government funded but is not run by the government. They deal with all the refugees that come into NZ but they write their own policy (Maya, Journal, 30.6.1997).

There are many ways of learning about cultural awareness. One way for instance, may be to learn by observation of how not to be culturally appropriate and to become aware of the impact insensitive behaviour has on children. Students had the chance to learn about cultural awareness on their placements.

I have seen signs of culturally insensitive behaviour in the class where I am. The teacher demands that children look at her directly in her eyes while she is talking to them. She does not come down to their level while telling them off but rather stands over them and forces them to look up at her, as she is not a small woman this is very intimidating for the children and only serves to reinforce their fear of her (Emma, Journal, 26.5.1997).

It was wonderful to see how the process of learning was mutual. This is best expressed in the following quotation:

Ultimately I have learned that life is there to be lived, no matter how disabled you are, and I believe that being disabled is very much a frame of mind and there are many seemingly healthy “normal” people out there who are handicapped by their attitudes and the limitations they place on themselves rather than their physical lot in life. Moni has a lot of dignity and warmth, indeed she has many special gifts, as do all of the “disabled” people I have interacted with. It is very important to be natural and real and to be unafraid of the “difference”. It is being able to take someone to the toilet with respect and kindness. It is realising what huge, huge battles and barriers these people face and overcome, and how groundless and cowardly so many of your own personal fears are. It is also learning about having a relationship with someone in which you expect nothing back, although you often reap rich personal rewards, but the reality is that you are giving of yourself unconditionally (Tania, Case study, 5.8.1997).

It seems that from contact with clients, students directly learnt about the essence of social work. These encounters gave them a firm foundation on which they can build social work skills and techniques in order to become effective professionals. If effective education produces change in attitudes, knowledge and skills, as was stated in the Chapter Three – then the change in attitudes – although the most complex - has to come first because it opens student’s mind to new learning. At the same time, since the learning process is not linear but circular, in order to change values and attitudes students need to gain knowledge and to develop relevant skills in order to achieve that change. Thus, an ecological approach, which simultaneously works on knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, can help students on their journey to become effective practitioners.

Students were encouraged to continue working on these challenging

issues, and were and are all aware that this is a never-ending process. They were asked in which ways they would continue to check out their personal value base.

One of them replied:

It comes from questioning your value system all the time, to be open and willing to be challenged by colleagues. It comes about by being aware that no one is value free and by evaluating your experience base, your deeply imbedded assumptions, by attending anti-racist, anti-sexist workshops and being critical of where you are coming from (Tania, Journal, 20.8.1997).

Exploration of social work values was continuously happening.

Discussions, exercises and reflections on practice were used. Social work values were modelled during the course encouraging empowering practices in learning and in social working. Work on values and cultural awareness is essential to the Contact-Challenge Method and for the achievement of learning outcomes of the Programme.

#### **7.16. The Balance in Flexibility of the Programme and Setting Clear Guidelines**

Students created their own learning plans and it was important to have enough structure in the Programme in order to stay focused. The structure was more in the sense of guidelines the suitability of which was continuously checked with students.

It is such a relief to have a guideline for writing case studies because I had no real idea on how to begin to complete this part of our assessment. With the “Effective social workers have” list I feel that I have all of these skills at my command, however, I also feel that I need to improve on them all. Hopefully, these skills will become second nature with experience (Emma, 26.5. 1997).

In order to encourage students to use their own resources it was essential to be flexible and encourage them take responsibility for their learning. Although

each skills training workshop was carefully prepared, it was necessary to be ready to give up a plan if the group needed something else. I would usually share my plan at the beginning of every session with the students and quickly check what they thought about it and what would they like added or changed. They also had a written outline of all skills training sessions and were encouraged to come prepared so that we could discuss what they had read or heard in lectures.

I dropped my plan for this lab, because it seemed to me too ex-cathedra. I planned to talk for twenty minutes about social work values and then discuss with the students situations when these values may be challenged. I asked students about it and they told me that they already knew about it so I asked them for their values. We listed the values they held dear and checked if they matched with values in the Code of Ethics. We talked about virtues and how to practise them in real life situations. This personalised approach to values proved to be very useful. The value of virtues became something internal and essential for effective practice not something imposed by the Code of Ethics (Programme co-ordinator's, Process recording, 10.3.1997).

This interactive way of carrying out skills training proved to be very effective. The collaborative approach increased students' motivation because their input was valued and taken into account. They reported that they transferred the same attitude to their work with clients.

Dealing with conflict on placement was an issue when a balance between flexibility and clear guidelines was needed. After Emma shared her criticism about the teaching style of the teacher in whose classroom she was, the teacher replied that Emma's absence for the three days (she was sick) had proved to be a real eye-opener for her, as it appeared that she was a disruptive influence in the classroom.

This conversation was more or less directed to my supervisor not myself and I felt as if they were talking over me, about me. Mortified, I felt like a naughty little child whose actions were being discussed without them, guilty without a trial (Emma, Journal, 16.6.1997).

Emma spent another day in that classroom and after a discussion about

Emma's contributions and teacher's expectations it was decided that Emma could benefit more by being in somebody else's classroom. While we discussed the issue during supervision it was up to Emma to decide what she would do till the end of her placement.

I decided that I don't really want to return to that classroom after last week so I spent the majority of my time in year 4/5 class taught by another teacher. In this room I was pretty much left to my own devices. I walked about talking to kids, helping them with their work, doing my own work and generally enjoying the different ambience in this classroom. This teacher's teaching style is very different to the first teacher's and in the three days I spent with him and his children not once did I hear him raise his voice at a child and only once did a child get sent to the "Thinking room" and then it was for not completing a task that he had been requested to do for homework three weeks ago. The opportunity to go to the "Thinking Room" gave this boy the chance to complete a task without the distraction from other kids rather than being the punishment it was in H.'s class. The contrasts between the styles between these are incredible. For instance at least 2 children a day in H.'s class are sent to the "Thinking room" and yelling and screaming at the children is the norm (Emma, Journal, 23.6.1997).

Emma later returned to H.'s class when H. asked her if she could return, as she was needed to help in hearing children's speeches.

On thinking about it further: no one else can handle these children as well as H. does, for her they are frequently naughty and loud, but for anyone else they climb the walls and hang from the light fittings (Emma, Journal, 27.6.1997).

Supervision proved to be really useful for this situation. Emma had the chance to explore the conflict from the personal and professional position, to draw some good conclusions reflecting on her learning goals, and to assess how she could utilise this difficult situation to meet them. She also became aware of how feelings and attitudes may colour perception.

Friday night as I lay awake, I thought about the different children whom I worked with in H.'s class, the conversations we had, the work we did and I wondered how I had touched their lives, what changes had I made in them

and their life paths. Somewhere between being awake and asleep the realisations struck me that no matter how subtle and small or how large a difference I had made in each of their lives, each of them had in some way or another changed me and my life forever. I hope that they know I am forever grateful (Emma, Journal, 4.7.1997).

The conflict in Mrs. H.'s classroom probably happened because of the imbalance between flexibility and the setting of clear guidelines for placement. The field instructor in the school was informed about the details of the Programme but written information guidelines were not given to the teachers involved. In the future a detailed description of the Programme should be given to everybody involved and issues concerning the balance between flexibility and clear guidelines should be discussed with all participants in advance. This was also a good example of turning problems into challenges and encouraging students to find their own ways of solving conflicts and of providing them with the knowledge and the skill to so do.

### **7.17. The Integration of Theory, Practice and Experience**

The aim of the Contact-Challenge Method is to integrate theory, practice and experience and this was done through continuous reflection on theories in skills training sessions and supervision. By working on professional and personal issues during skills training students had the chance to integrate their experience with the theories they had learned.

Students were encouraged to read literature relevant to the course and had chosen to read other books not on the reading list. They then shared their impressions with the group. All the students who worked in the school had read at least two William Glasser's books, and Sharon reflected on Michael Belgrave and Loretta Brown's (1986) Pilot project: The Social Work in the Schools Programme North Shore Pilot Project, an Evaluation:

A very interesting read! And as we are in schools now it is easy to understand some of the problems they had. And disappointing to know that although the programme enjoyed the marked success it was unable to continue due to funding. I think it could be a future move. Not only will it save money in the long run - getting to kids before things go really bad, there are a lot of kids who desperately need it (Sharon, Journal, 1.7.1997).

The following paragraph from Maya's journal demonstrates how integration between theory and personal experience happened during skills training workshops.

The discussion was interesting about the "I am OK, you are OK" stuff. I've often thought about how people's problems come from how they see themselves in relation to others and then behave /think/ construct their lives from this, but I've never actually heard of a theorist who has written this down. I personally see this as fundamental to most problem solving (Maya, Journal, 5.5.1997).

The school where three students were doing their fieldwork placement was operating according to William Glasser's Choice Theory. Students had the chance to see Glasser's ideas operating in practice and to continuously link Glasser's ideas of doing individual counselling and conducting a Quality School programmes. That offered an opportunity to learn about social work in an integrative way.

I sat outside during lunchtime today and it was so funny to watch some of the kids playing. How they create this very bizarre games. I've noticed in the classroom how often, when they are left to themselves to play, they will play at being the teacher and making others sit on the mat and read the alphabet and call the roll. I was thinking about this in relation to the William Glasser book I have been reading and how he believes people learn through fun, and I can see how children learn through modelling adult behaviour when they are playing.

It is interesting also that at this early level, most of what they learn must be presented in such a way that makes it fun or else they just wouldn't listen or do anything, yet later on, this changes and children are expected to do it anyway and they don't find some of the format fun at all (Maya, Journal, 16.5.1997).

Being a very practical person Maya continually reflected on theories and tried to apply them in practice or to find theoretical explanations for what she observed in work with her client and his family.

I found the bit we did on attachment theory, its relationship to grieving and the process of alienation that leads to violence and aggression really interesting. Having this coupled with the section on negotiating and working with aggressive clients was really interesting for me and enabled me to make those links a lot clearer in my mind. The whole attachment theory idea makes a lot of sense to me and I can see how it works in the 'real' world (Emma, Journal, 17.7.1997).

Students practising social work skills with one another on their learning goals facilitated the integration of theory, practice and personal experience. By so doing, they were encouraged to support one another in achieving their learning goals and in their personal growth and development.

I am a little concerned that Glasser's theories are not being properly utilised within the classroom as H. (classroom teacher) seems to have defined quality as what she deems it to be not by (as Glasser defines it) as the very best a child knows they can achieve on a given day given a certain set of circumstances. As a result there are children in this classroom who are being kept in at lunch times to repeat work up to five times until they either discard it or manage to meet H.'s standards. The downside of these lunch-time sessions is that many children are frustrated as a result and either don't attempt the work because they believe that they "can't talk to Mrs H. about sort of stuff because she does not understand" or are in at lunch every single day of the week repeating, finishing or tidying up work from weeks ago or even last term. Whenever I mention such things to other staff or to H. the answer I get is "My/H.'s father died at the beginning of the year and so I/she needed a lot of time off and as a result she's/ I'm on a back foot and needs to punish the kids more than usual." Isn't one of Glasser's theories based on not making excuses as we all make choices about our behaviour (Emma, Journal, 19.5.1997)?

This reflection shows Emma's ability to integrate theory and practice. She was not prepared to accept or take for granted situations when what was presented as the school's philosophy was not acted on in the classroom. Her main task was to learn how to confront colleagues in such a way that was not offensive, but

supportive and resourceful. Emma would not accept an all talk - no action position, but was aware of the need for developing new co-operative skills in order to be more ready to face challenging situations without rigidly imposing her opinions.

All students said in the interviews and noted in their questionnaires that theory, practice and personal experience were integrated in the course. To the question: *Do you think that theory, practice and experience are integrated in this paper?* - students answered the following:

Yes, we receive the theory in lectures, the practice in labs and the experience on placement (Tania, Feedback for the Module Two).

Yes. We get a good grounding in theory from lectures and labs, we get practice and experience whilst on placement, in supervision and while with our clients (Mark, Feedback for the Module Three).

Yes, definitively, in the way that surpasses the others easily. It is a very good mix (Tania, Feedback for Module Three).

Although students' feedback showed that integration happened, the integration of theory, practice and experience can still be improved.

The "Contact-Challenge" was incorporated into the existing MSW (Applied) Programme and the full-time placement was added to the original concept of the method. During that full-time placement period students did not have any lectures, just skills training once a week and supervision every fortnight. Interactive lectures throughout the year while students were meeting with clients would enable them to reflect and ask questions that would help them to integrate theory, practice and personal experience. For the method to be effective it would be preferable if students did not have a break in lectures while on placement, but could continue to participate in integrative lectures, field visits, skills training workshops and contacts with clients throughout the year.

For integration to happen it would be better if time and space did not separate theory and practice. This would also allow more time during skills

training workshops to practice social work skills instead of using precious group time to talk about the theoretical background of the skills that were practised during skills training. Although the students were satisfied with the way theory, practice and experience were integrated in the Contact-Challenge Method, they stated that theory, practice and personal experience would be better integrated if skills training could follow the lectures (in the time-table) and if the same teacher could teach theory, skills training and co-ordinate placement. This would allow for better reflection on theories and provide an opportunity to practice in skills training what was taught in lectures.

#### **7.18. Learning from One Another, Learning about Co-operation, the Multi-disciplinarity of the Profession, the Various Fields of Social Work and Networking**

Originally it was planned for students to be placed in four different settings but since only five students opted for the Contact-Challenge Method the four settings were reduced to two. The first problem, transformed into the challenge, was the fact that all five students wanted to work with children with behavioural and learning problems in the school. I was aware that the students would learn much more if they choose more settings but I was also aware that I should respect their choice. This “problem” was presented to the group and two students immediately decided to go to the agency “Unique Capabilities” which provided care and support for persons with special needs. Their first choice to participate in the school setting reflected their prejudices of which they were unaware at the time. In Croatia, when the Contact-Challenge Method was first performed and the lists with possible placements were displayed, the column for working with children with no parental care or with behavioural problems was the first one to be filled by the students, that for the elderly was the next one to be filled, and the mental health field was the third one to be filled. Lists with placements in agencies, which dealt with special needs, were ‘reserved’ for students who had not

signed early enough under some more popular social work settings. On the other hand, at the end of the Programme, students reported that they benefited the most when learning from clients with special needs. During the following years when new students communicated with students who had already experienced the Contact-Challenge Method, the special needs field became more popular.

The disadvantage of having in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study only two settings for practice was minimised by the students' suggestion of organised field visits. These field visits added vividness, variety and contributed to the students' engagement in the Programme. Students were responsible for organising field visits and field visits happened during their free time. Each student organised one field visit during the Programme, according to his or her interests in the field.

Learning contracts were very useful in terms of students defining what they would like to learn and how. On their placements they were focused on their learning goals so they utilised every opportunity to meet them. They learned from their clients and their families, from the agencies, by reading relevant literature, visiting agencies, participating in the skills training sessions, lectures and supervision, from writing their journals and reflecting upon their experiences. The aim was to create a co-operative atmosphere and this was realised by the continuous active participation of all. Students who were at Unique Capabilities had many opportunities to see how important networking is, while students at the school had more opportunities to experience the multi-disciplinary nature of social work. A lot of seemingly simple skills were observed and students became aware of how important these were.

The relieving teacher wasn't sure at all how to handle 5 year olds so some of the stuff she got them to do was too easy and some of it was too hard. I ended up taking over a lot and I did not want to usurp her authority but some of the children's behaviour was out of control. You can see how good planning and stability is so important with young children (Maya, Journal, 22.5.1997).

When interviewed, students stated that they have learned a lot from clients, their families and from one another. They also stated that they learnt from their

clients what they still need to learn in the future, and from their field instructors and Programme co-ordinator they learnt how and where to find necessary information, as well as a number of useful and applicable theories and skills. They also stated that they gathered a good deal of information by reading and by participating in skills training sessions. Two students emphasised that they became aware of how strong their values were and of how easy it was to make assumptions.

The importance of networking was transparent to some students because they were involved in situations where networking was essential for solving the problem. By sharing these situations in supervision they provided rich material for other students to learn from.

Joined in today with Kim's (Nick's teacher) meeting with Nick's parents. We talked about what Kim has seen of his behaviour and how it matches up with behaviour at home, what I have been and will be doing and also that there is a psychologist coming next month to assess Nick. You can see the importance for all those involved in a case to get together. Nick's parents needed that feedback on what has been happening and it was good to catch up strategies Kim has been doing in the classroom with what Nick's parents are doing at home. They obviously put a lot of time and effort and thought into him and seem to be doing a lot of really good things. I think it's important too for them to feel supported through the school (Maya, Journal, 23.5.1997).

Visits to various agencies, organised by students were evaluated as being very useful. Having such a small group of students enabled us to be welcomed in all agencies we contacted.

It was most useful to visit different agencies. Also because it helps to find out about other agencies that they network with (Maya, Journal, 26.5.1997).

Remarkable learning happened in the school where they discussed with the school's Deputy Principal the variety of agencies that the school had links with.

It was interesting to talk to school's Deputy Principal about the agencies that the school links in with. He deals with most of that and with most of

the children who need extra attention. It was great to hear he had a lot of positive experiences with CYPS<sup>5</sup>, especially when all you hear are horror stories. He said it would be ideal to have a social worker in schools but that he couldn't see it happening because of funding. They do so much to help the kids at that school, they seem to have some really positive approaches, but you wonder what happens when they get to high school and how much people care there (Maya, Journal, 20.6.1997).

Field visits are inexpensive and easy to organise and proved to be very useful for beginning students. They also made valuable links with people in agencies when they organised visits themselves.

I found visiting agencies different from the agency where I did my placement very useful. I learned that social work is a very heterogeneous process, there are so many different fields and agencies, which target very different problems. I also learned what I definitely do not want to do. Once again I very much appreciated seeing the practical side of things rather than it all being theoretical classroom work - very valuable I feel (Tania, Feedback for the Module Three).

I enjoyed the visits to other agencies as they provided me with some insight as to what the roles of social workers are in the different fields (Mark, Feedback for the Module Three).

From their own experience students learnt about the importance of filing. Writing notes and filing is often a part of the job that students do not like doing, and they often consider it tedious. Lectures about the importance of filing could never be as effective as the direct experience of problems that occur because of inadequate record keeping.

The other thing Sharon and I got talking about today was how she has been told some different things about Maria's family from her father than we have been previously told. We wondered where the different stories have come from. It shows how important good written case notes are so that the situation is clear and so that things don't get changed or misinterpreted as they get re-told verbally (Maya, Journal, 15.5.1997).

Sharon assessed that the family she was working with would need more assistance than the school could offer, and she decided to involve Barnardos. She

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<sup>5</sup>Children and Young Persons and their Families Service.

put considerable effort into helping Maria's father ameliorating his prejudices about professional social workers and, finally he agreed to meet with a Barnardos social worker.

Yesterday was meant to be a visit from Barnardos to John - they left him a card. He even rang up and checked they were coming. He was becoming a lot more comfortable with their visit after we had talked about it. I had really encouraged him to look it as him interviewing them seeing what they could offer him. I got the impression he felt quite empowered about the experience rather than persecuted or checked up on. Which was quite awesome to see! I went out for the meeting and they never turned up, in the end John rang - they had stuffed up somehow and rescheduled for next week. As we were waiting John and I had a good talk and he has suggested he really wanted to work towards taking the girls for a holiday to the beach for the week. Which is a really great forward thinking goal for someone who when I first talked to was just trying to get through the week. It is also showing a real push towards spending some quality time with the girls (Sharon, Journal 30.7.1997).

Sharon was present at the meeting with the social worker from Barnardos, and learned from that experience:

It was interesting to hear what the Barnardos social workers discussed and discovered in their first, one-hour visit. A lot of stuff! That probably took me about a month to find out. Although now I know more and could see what was left out or made to sound better (Sharon, Journal, 7.8.1997).

Students placed at Unique Capabilities learned much about networking and shared their knowledge with others.

It seems that social work involves a lot of phone networking and making contacts with other professionals. Meetings are crucial to the running and momentum of things, it seems that some of the most important issues are discussed afterwards in hushed tones after the meetings - when the formal side of things - are over. All kinds of interesting things unravel (Tania, Journal, 19.5.1997).

The more agencies involved in the Programme - the better. Although in the

Aotearoa - New Zealand study we worked with only two agencies it was good to learn that the field visits and networking minimised a potential disadvantage.

Even though emphasis was put on practising social work skills in skills training workshops, sometimes, meaningful discussions prevented us from further practice. Such discussions were useful opportunities for students to learn from one another and to clarify issues that had arisen in practice. Co-operative learning proved to be the perfect way to learn about co-operation and contacting a variety of agencies was an effective way of learning about the range of social work settings. It was also particularly useful for beginning students who did not yet know where they would like to work when they complete their studies.

When the Contact-Challenge Method is performed with a small group of students and only two agencies, the field visits were essential for the depth and breadth of social work experience necessary to achieve quality learning. When the Contact-Challenge Method is performed with a larger group of clients, agency field visits are not as necessary as the students are able to learn about the variety of social work settings from one another. In the Croatian study where this was the case, students were required to visit at least two settings other than the one where they had been working during the year and to write a short report about it.

One of the students in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study evaluated field visits as:

Excellent! One of the best things on placement would have been keen to do more. Got a chance to network, met a lot of valuable and important people, got a chance to know extent of social work, career opportunities, different issues in different areas. Thoroughly recommend for future (Anonymous student, Feedback for the Module Two).

### **7.19. Insights**

It was impossible to note all the insights gained during the course. Only some of these were noted in the students' journals, others were discussed in skills training and during supervision.

Work was an issue with most disabled clients. Working was a dream - a goal - often unattainable. One of the women from High Road house, Wendy, had a job but she was the only one I encountered. Disabled people are too slow, non-verbal, too “paralysed” to be competitively viable in the work place. Moni would love to have a job and would particularly like to work in television. A deaf client of Dianne’s was continually searching for work. Being accepting of disabilities simply does not make good business sense, and this is sad, because work is such a big part of one’s identity, and feeling useful is something we all strive for (Tania, Journal, 2.7.1997).

At the end of the year it was wonderful to see one of the clients with special needs performing in the theatre, dancing with professional dancers. Unfortunately, full time employment is still only her dream in spite of her creative abilities. Becoming aware of the problems persons with special needs face, helped students to think of possible actions which may prevent discrimination and oppression. They also became aware of the necessity of being an active social worker contributing to social change.

I think that this week has been a process of me learning about the fact that not all the children like me and the fact that neither do I like all of the kids. It is hard sometimes when the kids don’t like you and you want them to. You want to be able to help them and do things with them but sometimes they are just not interested in attention from you. Alternatively it is also hard sometimes to work with the children that you don’t particularly adhere to. It is not that I “hate” any of them or that I don’t want to put effort into all of them, but it means making a concentrated effort to still work with those who I don’t get on so well with. I am sure this must be true with any group of clients. Some of the kids are beginning to get a bit clingy and this is also something I may have to deal with (Maya, Journal, 22.5.1997).

This was a valuable insight for Maya and an excellent opportunity for her to practice the skill of creating boundaries but not barriers. Supervision sessions were very valuable for exploring these issues for all students and of finding ways to cope with “difficult” clients. The other side of the issue of boundaries was explored too. Students often disliked the characteristics of others that they disliked in themselves. Just by teaching them about projection mechanisms, transference and counter-transference in an experiential way, without much psychoanalysing,

was sufficient for students to learn to recognise their projections. They also learnt several useful questions to ask themselves when they do not feel comfortable with a client.

Students who worked with persons with special needs often shared their insights so that the other students could benefit from them as well.

Moni is well. If anything we watch too many videos, but it is a relaxing thing to do and we both enjoy it. We went to see Hamlet in Newmarket last week and we also did some shopping for a lamp for Moni. There were a lot of shops we simply couldn't get the chair into because of the steps and ledges, it was actually quite frustrating. Moni tried some clothes on and it was obvious that things were not created for people her shape, which was also annoying. It was nice to get out and about instead of staying at her flat (Tania, Journal, 5.6.1997).

Intensive work with clients and full time placement in the agency pushed students further to further explore their ideas about their future profession:

I am having serious doubts about whether I want to be a social worker. Working with drained, disadvantaged people all the time. So much of the actual work seems to involve doing very menial things for other people. Advocacy work, Income Support, I would dearly like to work with Maori and Pacific Island Youth. Maybe in my placement next year, I might get CYPs South Auckland... Although I admire what Dianne is doing I am not cut out for it (Tania, Journal, 12.7.1997).

In skills training workshops the focus was on the wider perspective of the problem and rarely only focused on work with individuals. The context always played an important role.

Social impacts and influences that oppress or hinder the individual can be identified in consciousness raising way, lessening the blame of the individual involved, and empowering them with this knowledge. Often it brings a whole new dimension to what was previously perceived as a very personal, private problem (Tania, Journal, 20.8.1997).

Students did not only have prejudices about their clients; they had even more prejudices about social workers. An advantage of the Programme was that

some of their prejudices melted.

We took Molly Jasons to Income Support Point Chev. Which worked out fairly well because we were well prepared and were working with a woman who had previous experience with Molly. It didn't take long to sort out and she was particularly helpful contradicting my Income Support prejudices (Tania, Journal, 11.6.1997).

How contact and interaction can melt prejudices is obvious in this paragraph:

High Road is a house that is owned by North Harbour Housing Trust. Four people with disabilities flat there. There is ongoing care given in this house 24 hours a day. All the clients who flat here were previously in an institution. Dianne organised this house and another in Ellice Street. They are a part of the de-institutionalisation process. The clients live as independently as possible. I can see that this sort of thing is a recent invention. I can't imagine it happening ten or twenty years ago. Miles and Moana live in the back of the flat together; they are engaged to be married. Miles is head injured and quite fragile, health wise, however he is able and his disability is not severe, he looks after a variety of pets and is forever tinkering about the house it seems. Moana is Maori and she is deaf, in a wheelchair and suffering from cerebral palsy. They make an unusual couple and it is a real eye opener showing that a love relationship between two people can transcend all boundaries (Tania, Journal, 22.5.1997).

Many insights passed without students sharing them with the rest of the group because of lack of time, but when they did share them, others learned from them as well. The writing of journals proved to be useful for recording insights and learning from them. In the future more focus should be placed on these insights linking them immediately with theory, and teaching students the necessary skills to benefit from these insights, and how to link them with theory and with values they hold dear.

## 7.20. Working towards the Realisation of Learning Goals

Feedback was obtained from students at the end of every module after they had the chance to reflect on the achievement of their learning goals, to restate them or change them if relevant to do so.

To the question: What did you learn during this period? One student answered:

1. How to ask question so that you get the useful answer.
2. How to take responsibility for my learning goals.
3. Good basic ground rules for life (Anonymous, Feedback for the Module Two).

Continuous reflection encouraged the students to re-examine their learning goals and to work on achieving them by using support from the group and utilising their contact with clients and their families.

This question was followed by another: What strategies or methods did you use to reach your learning goals?

The same student answered:

A lot of my strategy was to jump in boots and all, kick about a lot and then reflect on what I had learnt, often I learnt to be a little more cautious about jumping in. I asked questions when I was unsure, a lot of questions starting: where, why, how, when, who - I have practised basic questioning skills (Anonymous, feedback for the Module Two).

When asked to re-examine learning goals, the same student answered:

I have not changed any of my learning goals from the beginning of the year, but in addition to that I would like to learn: to be more patient, to show more empathy to my work mates, to be more cautious to look both ways before leaping in boots and all: to realise I can't work miracles nor change the world (Anonymous, Feed-back for the Module Two).

Another student stated that he or she learned:

Heaps! About my limits, about some of the "political" processes of an institution, about building a relationship with a client who is nothing like

me, stress management, etc. etc. (Anonymous, Feed-back for the Module Two).

Half way through the Programme, she or he met some of her or his learning goals, all of them to different degrees, and she or he used the following strategies:

Visits to the agencies, having ongoing contact with a client, just by thinking about it (Anonymous, Feedback for the Module Two).

Another student wrote that during skills training workshops she clarified a lot of generalisations which she held and that she learned a lot about herself. She also realised that she was the one who is in charge for achieving these things, not somebody else.

Contact with clients was one of the main sources of learning and reflecting on experiences:

Moni and I seem to be striking up a good friendship. I don't think that there are any worries about being more professional I think that we have a lot to learn from each other (Tania, Journal, 19.5.1997).

The process of achieving one of the learning goals can be seen from Maya's case study about her learning:

**Learning Goal - *To develop good communication skills***

*Reflection*

This is definitely something that is an ongoing process and is not something you just grasp in one day. I feel I have made progression on this but it still needs work especially in communicating with different people.

*Action*

I have attempted to meet this learning goal mostly through my interaction with Nick and his family. Also within the classroom with classroom teacher and other children and in interacting with other professionals, students and people I had to work with.

### *Observation*

Being involved in a new situation and in relationships I have never had to have with people has meant utilising my communication skills. It has meant being aware of how I say things about things I am not willing to say. Also, the importance of being tactful and how to broach sensitive issues but also saying what needs to be said. Also tailoring how to communicate depending on the situation, e.g., with Nick and other five year olds and thinking about alternate ways of communicating beyond just saying things so that they will understand.

### *Planning*

This is something I will keep working on quite consciously as much as possible. I would especially like to work on my communication skills in dealing with conflict situations (Maya, Case study on Learning Goals).

Tania phrased one of her learning goals as follows:

To develop a relationship with another human being, being able to assist, empower and help another person (Tania, Case study, 5.8.1997).

At the same time, her client and “teacher” Moni, formulated her goal as:

To have Tania to assist me in practical ways with tasks I find difficult and to have benefits of a student social worker who knows me reasonably well to attend to any needs I may have (as reported in Tania’s Case study, 5.8.1997).

Here follows the description of the process how these two goals were achieved:

### *Planning*

I went through the process of trying to figure out exactly what I could do for Moni and what we could do together. This meant planning outings and doing a bit of organising. It also meant visualising a relationship that was bound to become more intimate as time went on and working through how to deal with professionalism “not caring too much” (even though that sounds awful) but finding a good balance for a student social worker and their sole client.

### *Action*

Moni and I got to know each other relatively easily and met every Friday. Often Moni would have prepared certain things that she wanted to accomplish in our time together such as paying bills, banking, filing, even vacuuming. Sometimes we would venture into town and watch a movie or shop and often we would merely stay at Moni's place and do simple things like post some letters, get a video and talk. What is important to realise is that doing things that seemed basic could often be quite difficult, painstaking or even impossible for Moni because of her disability.

### *Reflection*

As I reflect now, there was no cause to be so worried about working with people with disabilities, especially after being placed at Unique Capabilities. It is definitely an eye opening experience. It has been rewarding to know so many brave individuals not the least of all, Moni. At the risk of sounding cliched many of the people I met had a refreshingly positive outlook on life and lived relatively full lives concentrating on what they are able to do rather than what they cannot do. In fact, most of the clients had numerous hobbies and various involvements that kept them busy and well rounded, more so I feel, than the average person you would come into contact with (Tania, Case study on her Learning Goals, 5. 8. 1997).

One of the main features of the Contact-Challenge Method is to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. After analysing their journals and their feedback it became obvious how essential continuous reflection on learning goals is for their realisation. Changing goals and adding new ones should be encouraged during the Programme as well as self-evaluation processes, which increase the students' motivation to learn more. Having the freedom to create their learning plans increased the students' motivation while continuous contact with clients helped them to integrate theory, practice and experience.

## 7.21. Learning about Problem Solving Processes

Learning about problem solving was supposed to happen during skills training workshops where students worked with one another. The only part of the problem solving process that was exercised with clients and their families was making, maintaining and ending contact with clients. Students were encouraged to observe and reflect on this process. They were also repeatedly reminded that their role was not to practise problem solving with their clients. They expressed that they felt quite relieved when this was emphasised, but on the other hand, they were concerned that they would not be of use to their clients if they were not going to act as social workers. They then started to negotiate with their clients as to what would be the best way they could support them and came to many useful and practical ideas. These helped the students to learn, and the clients to improve their quality of life. Students had the freedom to use only those skills, which they felt comfortable in using with their clients, and were often reminded to check with their clients if what they planned to do would be useful for the clients. The main focus was on how to learn about social work practice through having contact with their clients and learning from them. The task centred model was presented to students as they practised this step by step during skills training workshops.

Learning from contact with clients was reflected upon in the following case study on the learning process.

**Learning goal** - *Learn How to Make, Maintain and End Contact with Clients*

*Action:*

I was involved with Nick and his family.

*Reflection:*

This one has been quite difficult, especially because I only had one client and I am not sure how I would handle in other situations.

It was initially harder than I thought to make good contact from my point

of view with Nick, than I thought it would be. We had very little in common and while he is a very friendly child, he does not bond easily with people, myself included. Some of this was just my expectations however about children and my experiences with some other children in class in comparison to Nick rather than him necessarily. This could mean being more open from my point of view about the way people handle developing relationships differently, not just the way I expect them to. It did seem to take quite some time to develop a relationship. I tried constantly to put things at his level. We have had some real moments of bonding though and time keeps improving things.

The initial first contact with the parents was difficult, as I was not sure how to approach things and how to have a balanced student/friend/professional approach. It can be a strange situation to walk into somebody's home and life for the first time and not know quite what to expect, for you and from them. This could maybe have been improved if I had literally planned what I was going to say and set up things from the beginning by talking it through with them, what they wanted from me and what I expected. In the end I think balancing a friendly yet professional approach as a student means just this, to be friendly yet professional. That I need to be aware of ethical considerations and confidentiality but that also through my extended interaction with the family you naturally become quite friendly with people. If a difficult situation had arisen then supervision would have become very important.

Having to deal with conflicts with Nick was also a bit of trial and error. I wanted to maintain our good relationship but also stop him from doing things he was not allowed to do and not letting him get his own way all the time. Sometimes I just had to let it go and let him do what he was doing. Sometimes I rationalised and talked to him about things to deal with the conflict. Compromise was usually the best way to deal with it. Later I discovered, leaving him alone for a few minutes meant he would stop and think about it and usually calm down.

I think having an extended period of time with him has been the best thing. It has meant some times where things have gone really well that has meant we have made a pretty good contact, such as when spontaneous things have happened that were different but fun and so grabbed his attention and mine and made it a real learning experience for us both.

Our contact has not ended yet and I am not sure how that will go. It will be something I will have to deal with more than him though I think. I should be careful about not underestimating him though.

### *Planning*

To keep developing this and also prepare Nick, his parents and myself for the end of the year. I will do this by making sure the family know when I am finishing and to give them as much information as I can about the availability of the program next year. I am hoping initially Nick's parents will talk to him about the fact that I will not be seeing him any more and then I will talk to him about it too quite near the end and answer any questions he has and reinforce all the good work he has already done. I would like to keep a general contact with him by writing the occasional letter. I will tell him this. Preparing myself I think purely means getting on with it as necessary part of the job and accepting it. Ultimately while it will be sad I do see it as essential (Maya, Case Study on the Learning Process).

Learning how to make, maintain and end contact with clients is essential for effective social working. This can happen only through encounters, which continuously happen over longer periods of time. By being focused on the process of developing a relationship with clients, students learned the essence of effective social work with individuals. By being in continuous contact with a client's family as well they learned about the complexity of these relationships, family work and about the ethics of the profession.

To the question: "What was the most useful aspect of task implementation that you have learned in the lectures and in skills training workshops?" Sharon answered:

That the tasks not only help a client through a particular situation but also give them skills for future problem solving. And that task not being completed at all demonstrates something about the client anyway - they still made a conscious decision and therefore action.

This question was followed with: What skills do you now plan to practice to gain full competency?

Being more attuned to clients in the initial problem identification and goal specification. To improve these skills would allow quicker and more insightful assistance making the interaction more fluid. Also to gain understanding of some do's and don'ts in questioning or directing e.g.: general questions that open up clients - questions that can be alienating (Sharon, Feedback for the Module One, 7.8.1997).

The paradox of the Contact-Challenge Method is that even though students are not supposed to do any kind of therapy, their relationship with clients can be very therapeutic. From this paradox students learned how respect, an empowering approach and consistency can give good results. They experienced how the “power to change is in the client” and how it is important to be there for them during that process. This was especially apparent for students who worked in the school.

I became more aware of a process and stages within it and I started to recognise the appropriate time to move on to the next one. Also I became more able to let the client go in whichever direction they want and find the reasoning and workable directions from it (Sharon, Feedback for the Module Two).

Those students who worked with persons with special needs learnt about respect in a different way. They did not help these people solve their psychological or behavioural problems, as there was no need to do that, but they learned from their experience with them how it is to be severely physically disabled but mentally very able, and what kind of support is needed. Integrating these insights, sharing them in the group, linking them with theories presented during the course, and practising problem solving with each other, helped the students to learn about problem solving processes and about the ethical framework necessary for competent practice. Students also learned about social work as a tool for social change and social control and were also faced with situations when social work values and principles were challenged.

All students paraphrased their learning goals in own their unique ways. For example, Sharon stated one of her goals as:

**Learning goal** - *Practise and test theories when working with clients.*

Sharon learned about the limitations of the approach of testing theories with clients. Maria taught her how it was impossible to impose anything on her, but also, how very willing she was to share her time with her and to do things that

at the beginning of their interaction seemed to be trivial to Sharon. Later on, Sharon learnt how doing activities with Maria was more beneficial for Maria than doing counselling with her. It is also important to note here that Maria had several professionals involved with her who already played a counselling role for her. She needed Sharon for simple companionship and mutual learning.

Even though the students did not succeed in imposing problem solving to their clients, they did managed to achieve their learning goals by practising with each other during skills training.

I learnt how to utilise and implement the Task Centred Model of Practice.  
I learnt how to do social work with Individuals through this model.  
I learnt several ice-breaking exercises to use with clients.  
(Emma, Feedback for the Module One)

In the future, more emphasis should be placed on advising students not to practise problem solving with clients unless they are asked by them to do so, as students do not necessarily read handouts and information packages with full attention. Learning how to implement problem solving was effective regardless of the students not fulfilling their initial expectations of practising “on” clients. The clients’ input proved to be invaluable for the students. Practising problem solving skills with each other during skills training should be even more emphasised. Whole day workshops for skills training proved to be very useful. Students evaluated skills training as the most valuable part of the course for their professional development. Practising skills in a safe “laboratory” environment enabled students to openly share their concerns and practise at their own pace without pressure to solve problems immediately. On the other hand, practising with one another contributed to development of good group dynamics and they were able to follow up effectiveness of the problem solving procedures taught during the course.

## 7.22. What Type of Support Students Offered Clients

Continuous contact with clients was a major feature of the Contact-Challenge Method. To make this contact a learning relationship it was necessary to develop a partnership with clients of benefit to both. The content of these sessions was unique for every student-client pair and activities ranged from simple associating to discussing very deep existential issues.

We went to the park and played around. I think we are finally beginning to bond. It is not that we don't get on and his mother said he likes me, but he's just not the kind of child that clings to anyone. He still forgets my name half the time but that's okay. He just sat with me when we got back to the house and I read him a book and we talked a little about stealing, which is something he does sometimes but doesn't really understand its wrong. I got a good chance to talk to his mother. It's great to make that contact with the family (Maya, Journal, 26.5.97).

Each contract was unique, but generally, as clients and parents reported, students supported clients in the following areas:

- ◆ students helped clients to do things they were unable to do by themselves
- ◆ they talked with them
- ◆ they had fun
- ◆ they helped clients to learn more things
- ◆ they supported them
- ◆ they felt safe with students
- ◆ they helped clients do some things they really wanted to do
- ◆ clients felt empowered
- ◆ clients knew students really cared about them

(Extracted and summarised from the Evaluation Questionnaires for clients and their families)

The idea of practising social work values was successfully transmitted to the students and they accepted to practice attitudes which are ingrained in code of

ethics of the profession with their clients and were keen to explore how this values may be challenged in real life situations. More important was how the relationship developed and what were the values that students observed themselves using, rather than what was done during two hours spent together. Activities were used only as means of achieving learning outcomes and improving quality of life of the clients involved.

Went prepared to set up contract and begin brainstorming. I wanted to encourage Maria as much as possible in the decision - making and ideas for the contract, which is in line with my goal to be empowering. She really lacks decision-making and self-confidence so I want to encourage to take charge of any process we go through together (Sharon, Journal, 15.5.1997).

Tania described her relationship with Moni in the following way:

Key elements of the relationship are that there is friendship involved, that there is a relationship of mutual respect and it is not a typical “empowered” social worker with “dis-empowered” client set up. Instead Moni and I are mutually beneficial to each other, each bringing different gifts to the relationship. I have already highlighted a concern that the role I am fulfilling is not one of a detached professional, I am not threatened by this fact, indeed I feel I am more useful to Moni as merely another fragile human being rather than a super human social worker without the sensitivity to establish a meaningful, real relationship (Tania, Case study, 5.8.1997).

All clients and parents who were involved confirmed that the students supported them in all above-mentioned areas. All confirmed that their association with the students improved their quality of life and that being with student was useful for them. All the clients assessed the Programme as being useful for them and that they would like to take part in Contact-Challenge Method in the following year if available. Four clients assessed their students’ abilities on a scale from one to five (one being the worst and five being the best) with five, and one assessed her student with four.

When asked for suggestions one parent remarked:

I feel the Programme was a great success in helping to develop my child's ability to recognise what a really neat person she is and if other children can obtain the benefits received this Programme will continue to be a great success. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to be a part of your Programme (Anonymous Parent, Evaluation Questionnaire).

Another parent remarked:

The Programme is well organised. I wish that some of the schools could be as well organised and not to pass the buck so easily. The student had excellent communication skills (Anonymous Parent, Evaluation Questionnaire).

Feedback from all clients and their families was very positive. In the mid-year evaluation all parents stated that their children benefited from being in contact with students. They all stated that the students helped children to do things and that they felt that their children were safe when with students. They appreciated that students helped children to do some of the things they really wanted to do, and that they thought their children felt empowered. All the parents assessed the students as being very successful in helping their child and all stated that they would like their child to take part in the Contact-Challenge if available the following year.

Emma reported the following:

As Selina was exhibiting attention-seeking behaviour I initially planned to build trust and get her talk about why she was "acting out" in this manner. On this vein I designed with her a mutually written contract to outline the boundaries and ground rules of the relationship. Very early on in this relationship I learnt that Selina was exhibiting this "bad" behaviour as a result of her negative opinion of herself and her abilities. Thus I changed tactics to work on building up her self-esteem and self-confidence through a series of discussions and written activities.

I introduced her to an extra curriculum activity (horse riding) that encompassed her outside interests so as to distinguish her and her interests/hobbies from her sister and her sister's interests/hobbies with the aim of creating for her a sense of her own self and identity as well as to improve her confidence in her abilities and skills at building relationships with other adults.

Additionally, I spoke to the school's support staff and Selina's classroom

teacher, about her self-esteem and confidence problem and recommend her to be referred to the self-esteem course (Kids Hour) which was run via the Special Needs Unit. As of yet the school has not followed through this recommendation. I myself followed this recommendation up by speaking to Mrs D. who runs this course and obtained worksheets from her to help me build/improve Selina's Self-esteem.

As this relationship is still in progress and has not yet been terminated I cannot yet conclude as how well Selina has progressed under my assistance. There had been to date, however, a noticeable improvement in Selina's behaviour and attitude which has been commented on by both her parents and the staff of her school (Emma, Process Case Study, 4.8.1997).

Even though Emma did not do any kind of personal therapy with Selina, she had considerable success with her though doing numerous experiential exercises with her. They would always do these exercises together and Emma would answer on the same questions Selina was supposed to answer. This further developed their relationship of trust and mutual understanding.

Feedback from the field instructors showed that they found these contacts very valuable for their clients:

The contact was very useful, very much so. From "client"/parent informal feedback both appear to have benefited from the experience. Relationship building is a difficult skill, especially with the "client" whom may not be someone we'd choose as a friend (Linda, Feedback Questionnaire).

Both field instructors assessed the contact as very useful for all their clients involved in the Programme.

Individual planning done by every client-student pair allows enough flexibility for effective continuation of the Programme. The areas where students can support clients should be broadly defined to allow an individual approach to each client and to encourage tailoring of the Programme according to the needs (being learning needs or other) of each participant.

### 7.23. Relevance of Supervision Sessions

Supervision held every fortnight appeared to some students to be too often at the beginning of the Programme. Throughout the year they were in continuous contact with Programme co-ordinator during skills training every week and while on placement they were able to talk to their supervisors anytime they needed. Group supervision sessions scheduled fortnightly allowed students to learn about the other social work field as well and to meet with another field instructor. At the end of the study fortnightly scheduled supervision sessions were evaluated as “just right”.

I can see why supervision is so important. To have time set aside, for accountability, to bounce off ideas. With Dianne also, it is great to have access to her networking skills and contacts.

The importance of good supervision just keeps coming out more and more. In the beginning of the year I thought there was too much emphasis on supervision, but now I can see how important it is for yourself and your clients. The support too is just so important, someone just to talk to (Maya, Journal, 28.5.1997).

Learning to take the advice but also to think about it and apply it only if appropriate was an important issue:

I felt a little like I dominated our group supervision with discussion about my client and her self-esteem issue. Also, I am a little apprehensive about talking to her father about these issues as she feels that “Dad doesn’t notice me, he ignores me.” And I dread sounding like I’m laying blame. One of our field instructors had some good ideas about how to approach him, but she also said that he was probably still grieving from the marriage break-up. This later argument I don’t agree with as he and his ex-wife (my client’s mother) have been separated for quite some time (at least 2 years). However my client’s mum did leave the family so maybe he is. I don’t know but I do not like the idea of confronting him with this concept (Emma, Journal, 19.5.1997).

This reflection shows how students developed the ability to critically reflect, not only on their practice, but also in terms of not accepting any advice

blindly and unthinkingly and then applying it in the situation. During supervision sessions they explored the issues but did not seek ready-made answers. Students were responsible for choosing what was most appropriate in a specific situation.

I enjoyed our group supervision and I found it useful for airing issues and catching up on what others were experiencing (Anonymous Feedback for the Module Three).

Supervision is a fantastic idea I think, definitely helpful especially learning how other people are finding things so that it is not entirely “you” focused (Tania, Feedback for the Module Three).

Field instructors were carefully chosen. Their commitment and effort was substantial.

Dianne was lovely both on a professional and personal level. She always discussed issues and events fully with us, we didn't ever feel “out of touch”. We got on very well and I learned a lot from her. She made a real effort so that was this way. (Anonymous, Feedback for the Module Three).

I felt that Linda was easily approachable and willing to assist us as best she could. I felt comforted by the fact that she was learning as much as we were thus making the characteristics of this relationship similar of that of colleagues (Anonymous, Feedback for the Module Three).

Field instructors reflected on supervision sessions as follows:

It was enjoyable - I felt I understood the process students worked through more clearly. I don't know how useful students found them - I felt the last session in June was getting to some “nitty gritty stuff” - the best session as far as dealing with issues (Linda, Feedback for the Module Two).

Intensive supervision is essential for the Contact-Challenge Method to be effective. Even though supervision sessions seemed to be too frequent at the beginning of the Programme, and that sometimes issues discussed seemed to be trivial, nonetheless the atmosphere of trust and better understanding was developed which established an atmosphere where deeper issues could be discussed later in the course. These meetings were essential for effective integration of theory, practice and experience.

### 7.24. Field Instructors' Evaluation

The field instructors pointed to many advantages in the Contact-Challenge Method. They were also very constructive in suggesting possible improvements. Both field instructors commented that working with students was a good learning experience for them. One stated that this was so because it pushed her to look for links between social welfare agencies and the school and the ways school could support these agencies and vice versa for the benefit of children. Both field instructors have not experienced students as being an extra burden to their agency/school. The field instructor from Unique Capabilities expressed that in the following year she might take on board as many students as needed for the Contact-Challenge Method but for a full time placement only one student, because of the lack of space and resources in her small agency. This shows how Contact-Challenge programmes can suit field instructors needs as well.

The placement period when students were full time in the agency, except coming once a week for skills training and supervision to the Department, was an addition to the original Contact-Challenge Method. It was required of social work students at Massey University. Even though being very valuable for students, having students for full time placement was found to be very time consuming for one field instructor, working in the small agency. On the other hand, in the school setting while the students were very useful for the school acting as teacher aides, the students did not learn as much about social work as they would have done in a social work agency. Nevertheless, they did learn about networking and the need for interdisciplinarity and intersectoral co-operation.

One of the field instructors expressed with regard to the Contact-Challenge Method that:

As a school community, it gave us insight into the world-view of social workers and we were able to make valuable links between their work and our school tasks. They were a very positive influence in our school, very helpful and professional, which meant they quickly assimilated into the culture of our school (Linda, Placement Evaluation Questionnaire).

Both field instructors expressed that student-client contact was useful for them both. One of them stated that:

It is useful because it allows the client to have the power to form the relationship and offer their expertise to students (Dianne, Placement Evaluation Questionnaire).

For the future than the suggestion is that the Contact-Challenge Method should be conducted as originally conceptualised without the full-time placement period in the middle of the Programme; to increase the hours of skills training, and to send students to the traditional placement in a social work agency, **after** completing the Contact-Challenge Programme. This would enable students to act more professionally on placement and to have a better base of skills and knowledge. The disadvantage of not having the opportunity to link the client's needs with the services provided through continuous contact with the relevant agency, as provided for in the full-time placement period, could be minimised by field visits and individual exploration of relevant resources for the particular client. The Contact-Challenge Method should therefore be seen in the context of the total curriculum and performed as early as possible in the course. However at least one paper on social work theory should have been completed and at least four introductory skills training workshops conducted prior to meeting with the clients and their families.

### **7.25. Endings**

Learning how to end relationships with their clients is essential for becoming an effective social worker. I remember being taught that the social worker always leaves a door half-open. Effective endings were modelled in the Programme and students had the chance to learn theoretically about attachment theory and grieving and separation cycle, share their experiences of ending a relationship and working on effective ways of ending their relationship with clients at the end of the Programme.

Knowing from the Croatian experience, how students can strongly bond to clients and clients to students during a whole year of being in contact a workshop on attachment theory was conducted. The attachment-grieving cycle was explored in detail, from theoretical, practical and experiential perspectives. We discussed possible ways of ending relationships and our discussion focused on the required reading for the course on how to end a professional relationship, and through utilising experiences from students' real life situations reflecting on how they had successfully ended relationships in the past.

Since the future of the Programme was unknown at the time the study was completed and the students could not tell their clients that they would introduce a new student next year as the Croatian students had, we did not want to give promises that we were not certain we could fulfil, but we also did not want the clients to feel rejected at the end of the Programme. The approach was again individual, and every student found the optimal way to end the relationship. Two students arranged for alternative services for their clients through the school and Barnardos; one encouraged her client to continue horse-back riding that she started during the Contact-Challenge Programme; one client started living with her boyfriend and became very busy organising her new life, and one student continued informal contacts with her former client because they had become friends.

Today we also talked about endings, about the emotions and feelings behind a relationship. I can see how important it is, both for the client and the social worker, to make clear when their contact will be finished. Programme co-ordinator asked us to share one of our own situations where we had an ending in a relationship. Sharing that was hard in some aspects, because my situation still feels unfinished, but it was good to actually think about how this situation did make me feel and think about how I might handle the ending at the end of the year.

The after thing we did today was write down positive things about each other, which was a nice way of finishing this Module (Maya, Journal, 28.4.1997).

Such a small group and friendly atmosphere enabled members of the group to bond strongly. All students expressed the opinion that Contact-Challenge Programme was an experience they will remember forever.

I am going to miss this group. I would like to think that this year has forged us in bonds that will last a long time and enable us to help each other in the future as we have done this year. I am looking forward to next year now with renewed enthusiasm. This method of learning has enriched my knowledge base with a number of new perspectives and I am more eager than before to be able to do social work, to use my knowledge and experience to help those in need of extra support.

Frequently this year I have been asked why do you want to do what you're training to do where as I used to answer: because I am interested in people, in their lives; I want to make the world a better place; or any of the number of cliched answers, I know now why I really want to do it. I want to do social work with children because if I can make one downtrodden, abused, or neglected child see the world as beautiful and as a worthwhile place to live, if I can make one child trust in adults again and not see all of us as ogres than I have succeeded in a beautiful miracle and that miracle is called life, the one thing each of us has as our own inalienable right (Emma, Journal, 6.10.1997).

In the last skills training workshop, we reflected on the experiences, students self-evaluated their learning goals, we evaluated the aims of the Contact-Challenge Method and how were they realised, and at the end we composed "Prophecies" for one another. We also discussed how and when this exercise might be used in group social work. One student remarked on how the term "Possibilities for the Future" is much better than the term "Prophecy", because of the danger of "self-fulfilling prophecies". In line with the idea of integration of theory, practice and experience that permeated the Programme, we all agreed and did the exercise under the changed title.

Monday, 6. October. Last lab!

This was kind of a bizarre feeling, a bit like I would imagine clients feeling at the end of the personal growth group. All the responses and feeling we had learnt about in class I sort of felt like I felt them to some extent. As it seemed very final. But then, as we did the "prophecies" for

each other and then at the end as Programme co-ordinator said we will keep in touch next year. And I realised I'm not that worried about the group ending - it was just a huge learning experience while it was going, and I am still learning now as it ends! It is just funny to have change to something I had become so completely used to (Sharon, Journal, 6.10.1997).

According to the feedback from all participants it is obvious that the Contact-Challenge Method provided a valuable framework for learning social work skills and that this good practice should continue. It would not be ethical to perform the method for few months and then leave the clients to their own devices. Continuing contact with clients and developing a good network of clients whom can benefit from the method and who can share their experiences with social workers is essential. It is also important that the contact continues for more than six months, preferably, during the whole of the academic year. During that time students and clients have the chance to develop a good relationship of mutual learning, to achieve their goals and to evaluate them at the end. Clear information as to when the contact is going to start and finish is important too, as is adequate education of students to enable them to understand and cope with separation and to transmit this ability to their clients.

#### **7.26. Advantages of the Contact Challenge Method**

The performance of the Contact-Challenge in New Zealand utilised the five years of continuous improvements in Croatia, but because of its very different context it was a unique and new experience. Despite of the very different context, the advantages found in the Croatian study were very similar to those found in the New Zealand study.

I went to unit today to catch up with some of the others in my class for a shared lunch. It was good to all to touch base and see how everyone's placements were going. We take it for granted so much all being together at school. Just about everyday Sharon, Emma and I get to off-load on each other and discuss things. We also have our labs every week too, so I could

see how hard it must be for some of the others with very little support. It was good to hear of some of the issues that the others have had and see how they've coped with it (Maya, Journal, 28.5.1997).

Continuous contact with teaching staff while on placement proved to be essential not only for integration of the theory, practice and experience, but also for the development of an atmosphere conducive to learning. Learning how to cooperate and not to compete during the placement was an important issue. Regular supervision was provided but peer supervision also played an important role. If students learn how to support one another and discuss difficult matters in a confidential manner, then when they complete their studies they will certainly use this valuable skill as professionals.

The Programme was very well structured and a special focus was placed on clarity. Because of the multiplicity of human relationships that can become very complex we started with a simple outline and very clear instructions which while it allowed for flexibility, every change nonetheless needed to be justified and clearly presented to the group.

I love this model! It makes things very clear and a lot of client behaviours are discussed in examples (Emma, Journal 5.5.1997).

All students stated that continuous work on feedback from all participants was the main advantage of the Programme. They also stated that by being involved in the Contact-Challenge they had to think and make their own decisions and take responsibility for them. They also appreciated the extra skills training that was offered and that they were involved in the whole process with no sense that anything was imposed on them.

By experiencing this "semi-professional" relationship with clients, the students had the opportunity to learn about boundaries, which they found very useful. They also were able to practice their assertiveness and to develop a relationship that was mutually empowering. Examples of learning how to set boundaries were numerous, such as: when to give a home phone number and

when not, how to shower an adult person and help with toileting in a dignified way and how to draw the line between personal and professional.

Emma's conclusion in her Journal shows what was happening during the year.

I really have enjoyed this year and I was quite surprised to discover those in the other lab were quite jealous of all the good work we got to do. I think having the extra labs and the extra contact was really good. Any extra skills training much appreciated! Our lab group ended up working quite well together by the end, which I suppose is a natural reflection of the development of any group. Some of what we went through as a group was quite helpful when we came to learning about groups - setting a contract, what that means, conflict, commitment, beginnings, endings, learning to work together, learning to trust each other, to speak up and sharing differing ideas. I am not sure how helpful it was to each of us to lead the group because it felt like an artificial, teaching exercise and I'm not sure how much we all learnt. That could just be me though.

Our contact with our clients was great though and definitely a learning experience. I am very much looking forward to whatever I do for placement next year.

Setting our own learning goals was also good because you know what it is you want to learn and thinking about it explicitly was helpful. It makes you strive for them if you have picked them and you also know when you achieved what you wanted. I have definitely achieved parts of mine but I suppose my expectations of myself are a bit high. I also think this year what I have learned the most is what else I feel I have to learn! Some of it will take experience and practice.

Anyway, thanks a lot to you most of all for doing a very good job with us this year and for all your support and encouragement.

I have really enjoyed this experience. I have learnt a lot about children and how they learn, the difficulties and the problems they face on a daily basis, however, much of this learning came about outside of H.'s classroom, particularly in D.'s room where I obtained many resources for working with my client (Emma, Journal, Final Reflection).

All students found that the intensive contact with clients was useful and that it offered them enough time to get to know the client's family, their social network and the agencies that offer support.

All students stated in the interviews that their clients helped them to

become better social workers and that they thought that these encounters were useful for the clients as well.

Sharon's reflection shows how she became more prepared for her placement the following year and which was one of the aims of the Contact-Challenge Method, and how she had appreciated the support given during the year. This support encouraged the process of mutual learning, a real learning from each other as equal participants in the process. This included all participants: clients, parents, students, field instructors and a Programme co-ordinator. It was not just a declared statement that all would learn from one another, but we "talked the talk and walked the walk" and from development of this kind of atmosphere, collegial peer learning happened, without any imposition.

I feel a lot more ready for my placement next year and that the skills I gained with the Contact-Challenge Method will stop me feeling dumped in the "deep end". When I talk to the others in our class I really think that a lot more people in the class could have benefited from the Contact-Challenge Method. And some have said to me that they almost felt a bit jealous as to how well we were supported and what we have got out of our labs and placements (Sharon, Journal, 6.10.1997).

The clients' evaluation reflected that they all had benefited from the Contact-Challenge Method and parents had found it very useful for their children. The field instructor from the school evaluated it as being very useful for all the children involved in the Programme and she said that students were very useful for the school as well. Her only reservation being that she wondered if students had benefited from working within a school, as it is very different from a social welfare agency. On the other hand, Sunshine Valley provided an opportunity for students to see how preventive social work in schools is as important as networking with social welfare agencies. The contact with Unique Capabilities gave students the chance to see how a private social work agency works, how it raises funds, what it does for its clients and how it networks with other agencies.

Both field instructors felt that they had established a good rapport

with students, felt open to approach them and found them amenable, flexible and willing to take on challenges. One field instructor stated that her clients benefited from the method by feeling empowered while sharing their knowledge with the students and that she considers the Contact-Challenge Method excellent for novice students. Both field instructors commented that they learned from this experience as well and that they would be keen to participate again.

Using Choice Theory, which states that there is no other motivation than intrinsic as a starting point, it was very encouraging to find the following feedback:

I enjoyed field visits, the group supervisions, skills training, my placement; it was all go during this block! I loved the challenge it presented; I have never felt so busy in my life (Anonymous Feedback on the Module Two).

The Contact-Challenge Method, structured as it is now, can be performed at any social work school, providing that lectures, skills training, contact with clients and supervision happen simultaneously, throughout a period of at least six months, but preferably over the whole year. Clear and simple guidelines and the development of an atmosphere conducive to learning are essential for the effectiveness of the method.

### **7.27. Disadvantages of the Contact-Challenge Method and Possible Ways of Transforming Problems into Challenges**

There were no disadvantages defined by participants and the reason for that may lie in the fact that all challenging and unpleasant situations during the Programme were used for learning and improving the quality. Problems were used for learning and improving effectiveness of the Programme and to learn possible ways of overcoming them.

Continuous feedback and reflection on the method helped us to sort out the issues sometimes before they became problems. Sometimes we would tackle some issues in supervision before they had arisen, so students were able to recognise them and cope with them better. They all felt well prepared, but nonetheless, unpredictable situations did occur as Sharon's reflection on her last visit to Maria's home shows:

### *Initial Reflection*

I planned this as my last visit with Maria, we had been leading up to it, I had reminded her and John a number of times that the end was drawing near. I planned a short walk so that I would have time before and after to see where everyone was at now and how things were going to go after I had gone.

### *Action*

I had a whole action plan that really fell flat - I suppose I followed the basic idea but the shock of everything that was laid before me - on my last visit; really stopped a thorough planning for the future session. In some ways I wondered if it was worth it.

### *Reflection*

There was a different atmosphere, John seemed exceedingly happy and Molly, a girl who I knew to be a friend of Maria's sister was there. Maria's sister has shifted out-which I don't actually think was a bad idea. It has enabled a diffusing of the situation. However, there are difficulties with the relations who she has gone to wanting guardianship - after having her for a week. I don't know how long will she last with this family. Her problems won't simply disappear with a change of environment. However, for now I think it is a better place for her - there was too much anger between her and John. Also her friend, who I have now found in the house, has shifted in as John's partner and she is hardly setting a good example - neither is John, especially as a parent, let alone the implications for John being in his late 40's and she is only 16! John did not tell me that Molly had shifted in and under what circumstances. I asked Maria and being extreme naive about it asked if she was sharing Connie's (younger sister) room!

Maria told me she thought the situation was silly. And when we returned home I saw just how much things had changed. Maria knocked loudly on the outside door before entering and than was extremely embarrassed at the giggling coming from the bedroom at the other end of the house.

With the already sensitive and confused ideas about sex, in a house of girls/some at the awkward teens/ and some confused due to issues of lesbianism and abuse. I really think this is a bad move by John, for his children's sake alone!

John told me some time ago that there was a lady he had been seeing, but that they had decided to keep things distant by putting their children first. I wonder what caused this change of heart? As if it isn't obvious; he has put his sexual wants or needs before everything.

### *Action*

I discussed the Maria's family situation with the supervision group and it was a relief to see them respond just as I had. I had been thinking maybe I was a bit naive or closed minded about the situation. But everyone else's responses showed me perhaps how normal mine had been. Dianne arrived and actually had some really good professional ideas for the situation.

### *Planning*

I am going to, according to Dianne's suggestion:

- Compose a letter to the Barnardos social worker informing her my time with the Maria's family is finished, that their family situation has changed, keeping the statement vague enough so that it can be applied to older sister leaving home as well as Molly shifting in.
- Send copies to Barnardos social worker, John and Sunshine Valley Deputy Principal who is familiar with the case and who recommended to Maria to participate in the Programme

### *Reflection*

I was really pleased with Dianne's input into the situation. I felt it allowed me to "cover" myself in a professional manner, but it also made me feel a bit better about leaving. As I really feel unnerved and quite disappointed to leave at that time (Sharon, Journal, 22.9.1997).

Sharon completed her relationship with Maria's family and Barnardos took over. Even though Maria father's feedback for the Programme was very positive they did not come to the closure celebration whereas all other parents and clients were present. When Sharon enquired they told her that they had problems with the car. Maria will continue to receive counselling and will start high school next

year. She will definitely need a lot of support during her schooling, and having her involved in the Contact-Challenge Method in the following years would be very good.

This unpleasant ending was actually a major learning experience for Sharon. A long discussion during supervision and exploration of possibilities of what could be done was very productive for the whole group. Many social work values were tested during this challenging situation: the client's right for self-determination, unconditional acceptance, respecting the uniqueness of each individual and the holistic approach. One of Sharon's learning issues was to learn how not to be a "fixer" and how to empower people.

Situations like this one are unavoidable in social work. Potential disadvantages like this one were transformed into challenges and used for learning. The only disadvantage of the Contact-Challenge Programme as performed in 1997 that we as a group were aware of was that we were not able to offer continuation of support for Maria and she definitely needed it. We were able however to arrange ongoing support through other services and we can only hope that she and her family will continue to use these services to their benefit.

When the Contact-Challenge Method is performed it is not easy to distil the disadvantages and advantages because every problem can be turned into a challenge. It is simply a matter of how we deal with the situation. It is also a valuable attitude and skill that students can transfer to their clients when they become professionals. The situation previously described can be analysed from the variety of theoretical assumptions. Further, if we attempt to analyse the situation from Sharon's perspective where she tried to "fix" Maria's family and she had quite high, and even unrealistic, expectations of her involvement with them, the situation which occurred at the end was very educative. It taught Sharon about her professional limits and about challenging the value of client self-determination in that process. Sharon learned a great deal about boundaries and about the need to pace the client and not to impose. At the same time she learned about her professional role and how to act in an unobtrusive way.

As we are coming to the end of our involvement I intend to use our time together basically as a time for enjoyment, no “social work” analysis or questioning. The funny thing is Maria still really enjoys my visits. I suppose she is still having her needs or wants out of this involvement met (Sharon, Journal, 5.9.1997).

It may be said that the most effective part of Maria’s and Sharon’s encounter was during these last few weeks, when they had a relationship as two equal persons – without attempts to change or “adapt” each other. The contact with clients in the Contact-Challenge Method is envisaged as support for clients in whatever way they see as appropriate, as long as it is ethical, and in whatever way students see as appropriate for them. For the students major learning occurs when they reflect on their experiences, when they link them with learnt theories and practice problem solving with one another.

The main disadvantage of the Programme may be that it requires continuous communication between social work teachers and practitioners and that could be time consuming. On the other hand the benefits from these encounters can outweigh this possible disadvantage. Careful planning and good time tabling can help.

Participants gave the following suggestions for the improving the Programme:

- \* Have more opportunities for clients to continue contact, I realise the lack of it now is due to it not yet being a permanent method. Maybe have a group meeting with all of the clients half way through - get to know each other and talk about Contact-Challenge Method between them.

- \* Have groups of labs small! It really worked this year.

- \* Be very cautious of field instructors non-social workers - they need lots of help to help us! Really encourage weekly supervision meetings in the field, maybe with some ideas of what can be discussed if no major problems exist.

- \* I simply suggest that the Programme continues and that it enhances the scholarship of other students and the lives of clients to come.

- \* More hours per week with clients.

This last suggestion came from parents and clients. More than two hours per week may overburden the students and distract them from learning theories and skills training. Equal distribution of hours for each aspect of learning encourages the integration of theory, practice and experience. I suspect that more hours of contact with clients may diminish the value of other components of the method such as lectures, laboratories and supervision. However, this suggestion will be taken into account in development of the Contact Challenge programmes in the future.

One field instructor suggested that it would be useful to use some direct supervision while the students are with the clients. This was realised in an unobtrusive way when we went for the field trip to the museum and when I, as Programme co-ordinator, visited students on their placement in the school. I asked the children and persons with special needs about how was it for them participating in the Contact-Challenge Method and was able to observe the students in action.

During the closure celebration, when all clients and their parents and siblings, as well as the field instructors, the supervisors of my thesis and the students were invited, the manner in which they related to each other was mutually empowering, supportive and full of appreciation and thankfulness. The attitude of all participants and the manner in which they talked about the Contact-Challenge Method showed that we have done a good job!

## **7.28. Conclusion**

The Aotearoa-New Zealand study confirmed findings from the Croatian study. It also proved the effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method in another context. Experiential Learning Theory, Choice Theory and principles derived from Andragogy or Adult Learning Theory offered a valuable framework for setting up the Contact-Challenge Programme at Massey University (Albany). Flexibility of

the method and continuous action-reflection-planning cycles allowed for further improvement of teaching-learning processes.

At the beginning of this chapter client-student pairs have been introduced as well as field instructors and agencies involved in the Programme. The study attempted to grasp and present the dynamics and interactions that happened during the course of the study.

Setting clear learning outcomes proved to be very useful for students as well as utilising work on learning outcomes to practise problem solving methodology. This experiential action research showed that Goal Attainment Scales could be used optionally because the learning contracts cover outcomes and they simply suit better to educational environment. Learning contracts offer clearer frameworks for outcome attainment and they incorporate criteria and evidence for self-evaluation and assessing achievement at the end of the Programme.

The most valuable part of the Programme as described by students and clients was their long-term contact. Students had the chance to learn from clients and experience making contact with persons with special needs seeing them in the context and the culture where they lived. They also had the opportunity to meet their families and networks and see the multitude of interactions, professional services offered and impacts on the whole family when one member has special needs. Students also had the opportunity to work in groups and experience how is it to be a participant and how is it to be in charge of leading the group.

The other important learning, as reported by students, occurred in skills training groups where they focused on their learning goals and personal outcomes practising problem-solving methodology. Continuous reflection on work with clients and learnt theories helped them to become aware of the importance of networking, setting boundaries and applying these theories in real life situations. It also facilitated the process of making sense of skills accomplished in skills training sessions. Development of a collegial and co-operative atmosphere in skills training groups allowed students to make mistakes, to openly share their

dilemmas and to become aware what they still needed to improve in order to become effective professionals.

It seems that setting very broad learning outcomes for the Programme allowed students to personalise them and to utilise their prior knowledge and experience. Personalised learning increased their motivation and students felt in charge during the Contact-Challenge Programme. The non-judgemental attitude and the idea that every problem can be seen as a challenge encouraged students to share their values, conflicts and insights and from that sharing they all learned.

Parents, students, clients and field instructors' feedback was most positive and the Aotearoa study proved the effectiveness of the Contact-Challenge Method. It also confirmed findings from the Croatian study. The Contact-Challenge Method offers a valuable framework for introducing beginning students to their profession in an integrative, holistic and empowering way. The next Chapter focuses in more detail on findings from both studies.

## **PART FOUR – REFLECTION**

### **CHAPTER 8**

## **DISCUSSION AND KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CROATIAN AND AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND STUDIES AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

*The Collins Dictionary defines motivation as: “That which incites to action, movement or motion. To motivate, to incite.”*

*My definition is: “Having the fire inside you, the passion, the drive, the initiative and the excitement to do what needs to be done to make your life what you want it to be.”*

*Pat Mesiti*

#### **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter seeks to integrate findings from both the Croatian and Aotearoa-New Zealand studies and focuses on the research questions set out in the Introduction. It also addresses similarities and differences between the two studies and identifies the central themes, which can be drawn from them. The focus is on both studies. In order to summarise findings, provide a discussion and offer a comprehensive framework for the application of Contact-Challenge programmes in the future, both the Croatian and the Aotearoa-New Zealand studies are considered. The major contribution of this thesis is in finding an effective way of teaching-learning social work practice through an integrative programme which utilises contact between clients and students to integrate theory, practice and experience. The main instrument for evaluating the method was feedback from all participants and the participant observation of the researcher. Tools, which enabled this type of evaluation, were the students’ journals, the interviews with all

participants and the application of the Kiresuk and Sherman's Goal Attainment Scale, which helped students to stay focused and to evaluate their achievements at the end of the study. All participants' experiences during the Programme were explored, analysed and triangulated. Experiences labelled as negative were considered in the light of finding ways to transform them into challenges and opportunities to learn.

The three theories on which the Contact-Challenge Method is based, Experiential Learning Theory, Choice Theory and Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy) and their application proved to be very useful in understanding the teaching-learning phenomena that happened during both programmes. The practical application of these three theories then helped in the development of the Contact-Challenge Method in a way that reflected the values and principles that permeate social work education, social work practice and educational research. The theories used helped us to understand our practice, and our practice was enriched (sometimes justified and sometimes challenged) with experiences from our contact with the clients and field instructors. The practical value of these theories was continuously tested. By having the opportunity to test these, by discussing and working with one another, students adopted them, not blindly but as a useful tool for improving their practice and the quality of their lives. It is an approach that encouraged "talking the talk and walking the walk" and the recorded material demonstrates the changes in understanding, skills, values and attitudes - which occurred. The integration of theory, practice and experience happened as a by-product of the effective performance of the Contact-Challenge Method.

An action research approach presented an effective research method for evaluating and improving the Contact-Challenge programmes. Continuous action research spiral (*initial reflection-planning-action-reflection*) kept reminding all participants to see the method as a viable system: to grasp it, understand it, and to benefit from it. The process of learning was mutual and empowering for all of us. I personally learned a great deal from the students, clients, their families and the field instructors. Students' and clients' accounts of the benefits gained were very impressive with the Contact-Challenge Method proving to be very valuable in

both contexts, Croatian and Aotearoa - New Zealand. This practical and academic exercise helped my academic practice to stay fresh and attuned to the needs of practice. It also contributed to my holistic understanding of teaching/learning processes where learning about theory, learning how to do effective social work and learning from experience can and should happen simultaneously. When continuous links between theory, practice and experience are encouraged the artificial gap between theory and practice disappears or does not occur at all. Students proved their ability to grasp concepts holistically and both studies proved that when teaching/learning processes happen in an integrative way, students learn more quickly, with more pleasure and are keen to undertake challenging tasks. It is essential that the whole process is useful, that it contributes to the students quality of life, that they see how their experiences can be utilised to improve their practice, and how they can adopt useful theories in future practice.

## **8.2. Discussion of the Key Findings**

The same method of teaching and learning has been evaluated in two different contexts. The Croatian study was focused on the evaluation of a new method of teaching and learning and proved the effectiveness of the method. Evaluation by students, clients and field instructors was so positive and overwhelming that it gave me the strength and courage to continue improving it, in spite of suspicion from my academic colleagues in Croatia who initially did not believe that students could learn from clients. At the beginning of the first year when the method was applied, the majority of students did not believe that they could learn from clients either, but after their first contact they reported in their journals how valuable this learning was for them. When I approached practitioners and potential clients and asked them about the idea of putting Contact-Challenge in practice - they were immediately aware of the potential of the method and never questioned the clients' ability to help students to become better social workers nor the students' ability to learn from that experience.

It is argued that quality is not something fixed that can be easily added to

the product and given this I focused in these two studies on continuous improvement of the quality of the Contact-Challenge programmes. It was possible to achieve this only through continuous participatory action research, which enabled the method to be “rejuvenated” each year.

All improvements were based on participants’ feedback and were related to the Contact-Challenge programmes, not to the Contact-Challenge Method itself. This was because participants in both studies were satisfied with the method itself and changes they wanted to introduce, were mostly organisational and related to the Programme, not to the basic idea of the Contact-Challenge Method as introduced in Chapter Four. All changes introduced were related to the way the method was applied. Since 1990 the main features of the method have stayed the same. Major changes in the structure of the Programme were introduced in New Zealand when the time of contact with clients was condensed due to the time-tabling difficulties, and an additional full-time placement period was introduced. In the skills training workshops - working with individuals, groups and families – had to be covered in the same time frame that was needed in Croatia to cover only working with individuals.

The large sample encompassed in the Croatian study offered the opportunity to use quantitative methods, seldom used in action research. The Aotearoa-New Zealand study was valuable because it offered the opportunity to test the method in a very different context and check its adaptability. The small sample allowed for a rich qualitative in-depth study of the Contact-Challenge process itself. The *initial reflection - planning - action - reflection* spiral of action research has been used in both studies but in very different ways. The Croatian study continued throughout four years, utilising experiences and feedback from all participants in order to continuously improve the Contact-Challenge Programme. Its fourth year of performance is summarised in the quantitative analysis and enriched with the summary of the qualitative data obtained during the study. It clearly shows how action research processes can significantly improve educational practices. Client involvement, essential for the Contact-Challenge Method, as well as work on learning outcomes using problem-solving methods proved to be

beneficial for all participants.

Clients' input was essential for the continuous improvement of the Contact-Challenge Programme and their feedback was a final check as to whether social work values had been acted upon throughout the Programme. Both studies have shown the Contact-Challenge Programme to be empowering and that social work values, as used in this research, have been acted on in practice. In both studies an holistic approach was used, uniqueness and the needs of each individual were valued, confidentiality was maintained, clients' self-determination was valued in spite of the all challenges that were experienced along the way, the value of unconditional acceptance was exercised throughout the both studies and the Programme was continuously evaluated and improved according to feedback from all participants. These values were exercised on many levels throughout the both studies. Theory was continuously linked with practice and challenging examples were used to highlight the essence of ethical social work. All values were exercised during the skills training workshops, beginning with the group contract when values were defined, through challenging values in the safe group atmosphere, to the experiential learning about ending processes and the value of feedback for continuous improvement. The same values were exercised with clients. Clients expressed that they felt empowered during the process and the value of their contribution to the continuous improvement of the method was acknowledged. It is interesting that the values that students had most difficulty with incorporating into their practice were those which were always challenged either in the peer group or with clients. It seems as if the Contact-Challenge process "knew" which challenges would be beneficial for students to learn from. This could also be explained by the students increased interest in finding opportunities to learn more and to improve their practice. All challenges were used for reflection and learning.

The method also proved to be empowering for students because it encouraged them to share their fears, their incompetence and prejudices. By sharing their fear they learned how to overcome it, by experiencing how the problem solving process worked in their own life they gained confidence to use it

and by making contact with persons with special needs they became aware of their prejudices and of the limitations that prejudices impose on people.

The contribution of the field instructors was very valuable in both studies and they became keen to continue to participate. This was the first time in the history of the Department of Social Work at the University of Zagreb that field instructors had asked for more students. After four years of using the Contact-Challenge Method, the usual struggle to find placements for students was exchanged for long lists of clients who wanted to participate in the Programme. The New Zealand field instructors and clients responded in a similar way. Only one teacher in the Department of Social Work in Croatia however did not perceive the Programme to be beneficial for the Department because students after completing the Contact-Challenge Programme became more demanding which was demonstrated by them being more active during lectures, asking more questions, asking for clarification and continuously trying to link material presented with social work practice. Jokingly he said: "Gone are the times when I was able to monologue for two hours without being interrupted, now they challenge me and ask questions so I need to update my knowledge. Students are different than they used to be".

Continuous integration of theory, practice and experience became a part of the students' epistemology. Most of the teachers were very satisfied accepting the change as an increased interest in the field, only one experienced the students as being too cocky and not respectful of the teacher's authority.

In the New Zealand study, such complaints did not appear to arise. I may speculate that perhaps the reason for this difference is that overall education in Croatia is performed in a more paternalistic way than it is in New Zealand. In Croatia the use of adult learning methods are exceptions, whereas overall, New Zealand education adheres more to adult learning methods where the active involvement of students is encouraged.

The Contact-Challenge Method is a process that empowers all participants and through this process they become, or continue being, self-directed learners. They are instructed to set their outcomes, to continuously check the value of

learned theories and practice in real-life situations. The journey is unique for each student-client pair and from reflection on that process students draw their conclusions and integrate these with learned theories.

In both studies it became apparent that social practice teaching can always be improved and that the more we operate in the feedback manner, the more able we become to continuously improve our practice. When these processes are embedded in our teaching methods, teaching and learning become mutual.

Potential limitation of the Contact-Challenge Method at this stage is that it may not be suitable for all social work clients. Clients who are referred and who do not participate by their own will may not be suitable for this kind of learning. However, the method was not tested with these populations, and maybe with intensive supervision or with some modifications it can be applied in these settings as well. On the other hand all persons with special needs, including chronically mentally ill people, elderly and children with behavioural problems can benefit from the Programme and students can learn from contact with them. Client consent and client appreciation of potential benefits from participating in the Programme is essential.

### **8.3. Similarities and Differences between the Croatian and Aotearoa - New Zealand Programme**

In the New Zealand study the method was piloted in the Master of Social Work (Applied) programme whereas in Croatia the method was originally created for second year Bachelor of Social Work students. In both studies the students had not had any previous social work experience. The self-directed learning proposed by the Contact-Challenge Method was well accepted in both studies although New Zealand students accepted it more readily. This may have been because they were Masterate students, or because they were more used to adult learning methods. In the Croatian study the students needed two to three months to get used to accepting responsibility for their own learning whereas in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study students grasped the model immediately. On the other hand the

New Zealand students wanted to do more counselling with their clients, even though they were repeatedly advised against it, whereas in the Croatian study students immediately developed a very friendly approach and had more difficulties with setting boundaries. These differences may either be cultural or related to the maturity of the students. New Zealand students were on average, three years older.

Some modification was required with regard to the academic time-table in New Zealand. In Croatia the Contact-Challenge Method was carried out over the entire academic year which was a nine-month period from the beginning of October to the beginning of June. Clients who had benefited from the original Programme were then invited to participate again the following year with a new group of students. After four years of being in the Programme clients became very experienced in helping students to become better social workers. Some of them even developed a whole network of students and stayed in contact with them after the completion of the Programme. Clients in Croatia were without formal student contact for only the three summer months.

The academic calendar in New Zealand is different and students were in contact with clients for only five and half months: from the middle of April to the end of September. In order to achieve the minimum of 50 hours contact time with clients some modifications were necessary. Special emphasis was placed on ending the relationships and on finding ways that would empower clients to continue to meet their own needs when the social contact with students was no longer available to them

In the New Zealand study, 5 students and 5 clients were involved whereas in the Croatian study a far larger number of students - up to 125 in one year - and a total of 161 participants (125 clients, 125 students, 9 field instructors, Programme co-ordinator and the Assistant were involved). Although the number covered in Croatia was larger and conclusions derived from a larger sample may sound more convincing, the smaller number of participants in the New Zealand offered the opportunity to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the method in more detail and to subject the Contact-Challenge Method to a closer scrutiny.

The group of 13 participants (5 students, 5 clients, 2 field instructors and the Programme co-ordinator) offered the opportunity for students to receive individual attention and enough time to discuss theories, experiences and the ways in which newly learned skills can be applied in professional practice. In terms of the validity of the research thirteen participants were sufficient to explore in depth the advantages and disadvantages of the Contact-Challenge Programme.

During the Croatian study, as a Programme co-ordinator, I was a University employee and was the lecturer responsible for lectures, skills training workshops and for the organisation of the fieldwork; whereas during the New Zealand study I was a PhD student testing a new method and responsible for tutoring skills training workshops and co-ordinating the fieldwork for five students involved in the Programme. As other teachers, three of them, taught theory, continuous communication was necessary in order to ensure effective integration of theory and practice. During skills training sessions, a special emphasis was placed on linking the content of the lectures with practical and experiential issues. It was occasionally necessary to present some material in a mini-lecture format before starting the experiential work which shortened the precious time needed for reflection and learning from experiential exercises.

The components of the Contact-Challenge Programme were the same in both studies; theory; skills training; contact with clients and supervision, with the addition in the New Zealand study of 48 days of full time work in an agency. This additional 48 days would not be recommended for future application of the method. Although students did some valuable work in the agency during their full time placement in the agency, the placement was premature. Students reported that they would benefit more by being placed in an agency after completing the Contact-Challenge Programme and after having learned more about social and community work theory and practice. Placement agencies would benefit more from having a student who is capable of undertaking some professional tasks as well. Contact with clients proved to be beneficial for both students and clients and it is necessary that this should happen as early as possible in the course.

In the Croatian study the Contact-Challenge Programme was linked to a

paper called *Social Work with Individual Systems* which focused on working with individuals within their families and their living contexts. Social work with families was taught in conjunction with the Contact-Challenge Programme as a separate paper. Group work was taught in the following academic year. Focusing only on work with individuals during the Contact-Challenge was an advantage because it allowed enough time for students to practice social work skills. Social work with families taught in the same year as a separate paper contributed to the development of social work skills necessary for effective practice.

In New Zealand the Contact Challenge Programme was linked to the paper Social and Community Work Theory and Practice and the Fieldwork Paper. Social and Community Work Theory and Practice encompassed work with individuals, groups and families, which was a very large amount of content for one paper. It was possible to integrate all three aspects of social and community work in the skills training workshops, however additional skills training was necessary in order to effectively integrate theory, practice and experience. A further nine - session block was added to the timetable and when the students were on placement they returned to the University weekly to do the extra skills training. This offered the opportunity to stay in touch with the students and to continue linking theory and practice when they were on placement and still meeting with their clients. All the students in the Aotearoa - New Zealand study appreciated these extra sessions.

In the Aotearoa-New Zealand study it was arranged that the two field instructors would come together at the same time for supervision sessions. This had the effect of providing a broader view of social work practice and allowed students to discuss issues from two different fields of practice. This was only possible because of the small number of participants. In the Croatian study supervision was held in nine groups centred around the field instructors. Students were obliged to undertake at least two extra group supervision sessions, in the social work setting where they were not involved, to broaden their knowledge and report about it in their journals. The students also found other creative ways of learning about various fields for example, in the Croatian study, one student was

in contact with a child who lacked adequate parental care and another student was in contact with an old lady who had no family. They introduced the young boy to the old lady both of whom developed a very special relationship. At the same time both students learned about two different fields of practice and in their journals reflected on similarities and differences of working with the elderly and working with children. They were also able to link their knowledge about attachment theory based on their experience with their clients and as a result offered some useful suggestions for the foster family where the child was going to be placed. The child stayed in touch with the old lady who became a source of wisdom and security for him.

Whereas the Croatian study initially involved six field instructors and in the last year nine, who came from four broad social work settings, the Aotearoa - New Zealand study had only two field instructors who came from different fields of practice. Further four settings would have improved the variety of learning experiences.

At the beginning of the year in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study the students themselves decided that they would like to learn more about a range of social work practice settings and organised group field visits to various agencies. This shows again the flexibility of the Contact-Challenge Method and the power of adult learning methods. From the moment when the students defined their learning outcomes and realised that they would themselves be responsible for achieving their goals they became very creative in terms of finding ways to so do.

#### **8.4. Contribution to Social Work Education and Practice**

The Contact-Challenge Method is focuses on first contact with social work practice. Students are encouraged to use the everyday social approach (Secker, 1993, as mentioned in Chapter Two) and their common sense, which allows them to utilise skills they already have and to broaden their horizons by performing a non-threatening task of simply being in contact with the clients and learning from that experience. In both studies the focus was on utilisation of prior knowledge,

skills and experiences. In such kind of contact registrative consciousness (Kolb, 1984) is active. At this first stage students were busy listening, watching, talking with clients and getting involved. By talking with clients about their picture of effective social working and by acting according to their instructions, they entered the *quality world* (Glasser, 1998) of their clients.

Clients willingly shared their expectations of the social workers and helped the students to integrate learned knowledge with needs in the social work field. By constructing Goal Attainment Scales according to their personal and professional outcomes - students became aware of their own *quality worlds*, of outcomes they would like to accomplish and they learned how to create a mental image of themselves as effective professionals as well as how to achieve this. They practised problem solving with one another in the skills training workshops where they were encouraged to use the fragmented approach (Secker, 1993) which would not be effective and beneficial had they used it with their clients. As they went through this phase practising with one another, they had the opportunity to experience what it would be like to be in the role of the client, to attain some professional and personal outcomes, and to link their experiences with theories taught during the course. By utilising this process of learning they developed their registrative consciousness which is a prerequisite for the development of integrative consciousness (Kolb, 1984). When integrative consciousness is active, practitioners use a fluent approach and are able to integrate theory, practice and experience, as referred to in Chapter Two under subheading *Research on Transfer from the Classroom to the Field*. The Contact-Challenge Programme sought to equip students for more effective work in the following years of their study when they are expected to undertake more professional tasks during their placements and in the skills training workshops. The Contact-Challenge Method focuses on establishing contact with clients, learning from them and on exploring social work values and principles.

The six basic premises as outlined in the Introduction were confirmed and enriched by the two studies conducted in two very different settings.

The first premise that persons with special needs may benefit from contact

with students was confirmed as was the aim to improve the quality of life of persons with special needs and their families by offering support and help in a way they saw as being appropriate. The clients and their families proved to be an irreplaceable source of knowledge for the students offering their expertise in “coping with” social workers and by telling them how would they like to be treated with respect and in an empowering way.

The Contact-Challenge Method proved to be useful in helping students to explore their values, prejudices and individual learning styles. The field instructors’ participation and respect for their invaluable contribution increased the students’ motivation to learn more about the setting they were involved in, as well as to learn more about other social work settings. After conducting both studies it became apparent how continuous education, support and recognition of the importance of the field instructor’s role is essential for effective social work education.

Practising social work skills with one another, working on professional and personal outcomes instead of practising these skills with clients or in role-play situations increased the chance of integrating theory, practice and experience. It also helped the students to focus on their learning goals and to link these with their mission and their vision of themselves in the professional field. This process was also beneficial for the students who had ended up in the social work field either by mistake or who were motivated only by the need to resolve their own personal issues. It is better that they realise that the social work profession is not a good choice for them at the beginning of their study rather than at the completion of their academic education. Personal experiences were especially useful for creating a context conducive to learning and for the integration of theory, practice and experience. Theories were challenged and skills tested in a safe atmosphere. Students did not need to “experiment on clients”. This is probably one of the main reasons why clients and students enjoyed being in the Programme so much.

A reflective approach has been adopted throughout this thesis utilising students’ and clients’ unique experiences to help students link theory, practice and experience. The process attempted to be inductive and deductive at the same time.

Students learned about social work theories and then tried to apply these working with one another in skills training workshops. They also had the chance to reflect on their unique experience, either life experience or experience gained through contact with their clients, and they utilised these in developing their own theoretical approach. By valuing each experience and by continuous reflection and discussion on how these experiences could help students become more effective social workers a context was created where theory, practice and experience became one and where the artificial split between theory and practice disappeared. When the Contact-Challenge Method is applied participants do not talk in terms of what is right and what is wrong rather they reflect on the proposed theories and experiences and attempt to find ways of continually improving their practices: students' practice to learn and utilise learned knowledge in real life, field instructors' practice of being effective in providing services, clients' practice in improving the quality of their lives and academics' practice in improving their teaching.

The two studies proved the effectiveness of applying the Contact-Challenge Method in social work education. Both studies confirmed that the integration of theory, practice and experience took place and that students managed to utilise their personal experiences in the process of becoming effective professionals. They had the opportunity to explore their prejudices, values and individual learning styles in a supportive and safe atmosphere where they were neither judged nor criticised. Clients involved in both studies claimed that their quality of life had been improved and they felt empowered by sharing their worldview and through having an impact on future social workers. The Contact-Challenge Programme itself has been enriched by both studies and in its future applications it will be improved on the basis of the findings of these two studies.

Individually tailored learning plans that students created proved to increase their motivation and the continuous linkage of theory, practice and experience made social work theories more comprehensible and easy to understand.

The issue of increasing the number of contact hours addressed by clients and their families in both studies will be considered in the future applications of

the Contact-Challenge Method.

The clients' willingness to participate again shows the need for more client involvement in social work programmes and demonstrates how much they have to offer to future social workers, as well as how they can benefit from these encounters. Exchange programmes, like this one, have the advantage of being inexpensive - they merely require good organisation and a lot of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm generates enthusiasm and it is contagious. Seeing students listening to their clients and learning from them; browsing in the library and on the Internet, enthusiastically sharing with colleagues what they had discovered; changing and adjusting their learning outcomes in order to be able to learn as much as possible in order to become effective practitioners was rewarding enough, even without all the data that proved the effectiveness of the method. It is impossible to distil what makes the Contact-Challenge method so effective. Is it Choice Theory, Experiential Learning Theory or Andragogy which offer the theoretical background of the method; is it clients' involvement where students learn from them; is it in the careful choice of field instructors who contribute with their practical wisdom or, is it in the non-judgmental and non-coercive context created during the Programme? I argue, based on the presented research, that it is the combination of all the non-negotiable factors of the Contact-Challenge Method (as described in Chapter Four) and the viability and flexibility of the method, which allows it to grow, change and develop according to participants' needs.

### **8.5. Suggestions and Modifications for Further Improvement**

When a large number of participants are involved in the Contact-Challenge Programme, workshops prior to commencement of the Programme are necessary. In a small group such as it was in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study a two-hour meeting with clients and their parents was sufficient along with field instructors talking individually to all clients. Four skills training workshops for students during a period of at least one-month is the minimum time necessary to explain the basic theoretical ideas, principles and values that underpin the method.

Continuous contact throughout the year is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the method. It is also necessary to meet with all participants in small groups and then, with all of them together, prior to starting the Programme.

Learning contracts offer a valuable framework for self-evaluation and a very specific structure for defining learning strategies and providing evidence for the accomplishment of learning. Goal Attainment Scales could be optionally used by students to help clients define their outcomes if clients find these useful, or to define more precisely expected levels of outcome achievement. Learning contracts can be modified and used by clients, field instructors and Programme co-ordinators as well.

Although the written information provided in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study was detailed it became obvious that students did not read everything that was given to them and that the face-to face contact was essential. Written information should comprise important dates and expectations outlined as well as the list of contact phone numbers of all participants.

In the Croatian Study, having students who participated in the Programme in the past to come and talk about their experiences, proved to be very useful. Students enjoyed these first-hand contacts and very often would choose their placement according to senior students' accounts.

Various methods of pairing students and clients were chosen in the Croatian study. In the first year when the Method was applied students signed up their names under the setting where they wanted to participate, in the second year clients expressed their wishes and listed their interests and the students then chose and assigned their names accordingly. In the third year students from the previous year introduced newcomers to the clients and we continued with this practice in Croatia. In the Aotearoa-New Zealand study the field instructors got to know the students and then from their knowledge of their clients suggested who should work with whom or, during discussion the students decided with whom would they like to meet. Variations are possible in the introduction process and various group exercises can be utilised to facilitate it.

The Contact-Challenge method is suitable for students who do not have

any previous practical social work experience but it should not be limited only to beginners. It is also suitable for students who have had some practical experience because in these cases the students can focus on improving skills they would like to improve and be assigned to clients who may need more professional support, advocacy or counselling. Experienced students may be also assigned to a field of practice in which they have not had experience and explore how they can adjust or apply their prior knowledge in the new field. With regard to peer learning, the presence of experienced practitioners in the group is invaluable.

The Contact-Challenge Method establishes a good basis for more professional work that is required from students on their placement in the following years of study. It is an excellent, inexpensive and non-threatening way to enter the profession, to self-evaluate ones own values and attitudes and to check whether these are in accordance with professional principles and values.

From these two studies it may be concluded that it is an advantage that the same teacher teaches theory, skills training and is involved in the organisation of the Programme with the field instructors and clients. Students in the Aotearoa-New Zealand study stated that theory, practice and personal experience would be better integrated if in the time-table the skills training followed the lectures and if the same teacher was to teach theory, train skills and co-ordinate placement. They felt that this would provide for better reflection on theories, the opportunity to practice in skills training what was taught in lectures, as well as provide continuous contact with social work practice. If more than one teacher is involved in the Programme then, close co-operation is essential for integration and the effectiveness of the Programme.

At this stage, the Contact-Challenge Programme can be followed by usual field placements in agencies. It may be useful to suggest to students that they choose for the placement following the Contact Challenge Programme a different social work field in order to learn more from a variety of settings. There is also the possibility of continuing with the Contact-Challenge Method after the first year of participation is completed, as students can then work as group facilitators in the specialised field, which they have chosen. They can continue with skills training

workshops but focus more on group theories and group skills. The flexibility of the method offers a range of possibilities as well as providing opportunity for close interactions between Faculty and practitioners.

In the students' final year they can become involved with the community and develop action research projects which would reflect their client's needs and also help the students to become reflective researchers. Involvement in the Contact-Challenge Programme may become an individual scientific project where a student can practise as a reflective practitioner and learn the valuable skill of integrating theory, practice, experience and research.

## **8.6. Concluding Observations**

Participation in the Contact-Challenge Method encouraged a paradigm shift in the students' and educators' epistemology. A paternalistic approach was exchanged for empowerment, domination for partnership and competition for co-operation. Networking took place of hierarchical structures and experiences of mutual learning occurred within an ecological framework.

The action research methodology provided an useful framework for evaluation and improvement of the method. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provided a wide range of data for effective evaluation of the Contact-Challenge Method. Information gathered from all participants enabled me to adjust the method to participants' needs and further improve it.

Both Contact-Challenge Programmes (Croatian and New Zealand) proved to be useful and valuable for all participants. The balance of flexibility and clear guidelines of the Contact-Challenge Method contributed to effectiveness of both programmes.

The Contact-Challenge Method is a tool, which needs to be applied in order to further improve social work practice and education. It is not meant to sit on the library shelf unused. The action research methodology, which accompanies the method, allows further development and improvement. The Contact-Challenge Method is created to be used so students, clients, practitioners and teachers can

benefit from it.

The major contributions of this thesis are that it promotes the continuous improvement of educational programmes; it offers a valuable framework for effective education where partnership and co-operation are exercised; it utilises three theories (*Adult Learning Theory, Choice Theory and Experiential Learning Theory*) to explain and further improve teaching-learning processes and it seeks to directly improve the quality of life for all participants in Contact-Challenge Programmes. It can be said that it brings forth the world.

*You are never given a wish without also being given  
the power to make it true.*

*You may have to work for it, however.*

*Richard Bach*

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## **Appendix One**

### **The Contact-Challenge Programme in Croatia**

Here follows the outline of the programme as it was conducted in Croatia. This was a framework and students' input was taken into account. Whenever more time was needed for certain topics, or when students wanted to discuss some issues that were not planned, the Programme was adjusted.

#### **The First Semester**

##### **1. Lecture**

Introduction

Presentation of the Contact-Challenge Method

Information about ways of working, responsibilities, absences, readings, assessments

Informing students to come prepared to lectures, to participate in lectures actively and benefit truthfully from their being there

##### **Skills training**

Forming groups

##### **2. Lecture**

Theoretical perspectives for social work practice

Social work - art, skill and science

##### **Skills training**

Getting to know one another - communication cards

Experiential exercise on expectations

##### **3. Lecture**

Values in social work practice

Responsibilities of a social worker

Ethical dilemmas

Empowerment

**Skills training**

Responsibilities and obligations

Dilemmas and fears from the fieldwork and skills training workshops - discussion

Exercise: how students envisage themselves as social workers, and how they think that this course may have helped in pursuing that goal.

Confidentiality and activity contracts

**4. Lecture**

Elements of the relationship

Skills in social work practice

Ability for self-observation

Problem solving process - globally

Problem solving process as a life process

Interaction of emotion, knowledge and relationship

**Skills training**

Students assigned to clients with whom they will work during the year (they assign themselves or clients choose them)

Guests - students who completed the course last year

Role-playing - introducing yourself to the client (last year's students are role-playing clients)

**5. Lecture**

You and Me relationship

Barriers to communication

**Skills training**

Experiential exercise: barriers to communication

Making contact

**6. Lecture**

Problem solving process in phases

First phase - initial contact

Initial interview

**Skills training**

Initial interview

Experiential exercise - listening

## **7. Lecture**

Preliminary contract with the client  
 Verbal and non-verbal components of behaviour  
 Exploration - data gathering in problem solving processes

### **Skills training**

How to do a preliminary contract  
 Exercise: practising making contracts with one another, using real life goals  
 Introduction of the Goal Attainment Scale (Kiresuk and Sherman)

## **8. Lecture**

Problem solving process: assessment as a joint activity  
 Labels

### **Skills training**

Experiential exercise: prejudices  
 How to do assessment

## **9. Lecture**

Problem solving process: defining a problem as a joint activity  
 Stating priorities with a client  
 Defining outcomes

### **Skills training**

Experiential exercise: defining a problem  
 Practising defining priorities and setting goals with each other

## **10. Lecture**

Problem solving process: Social networks  
 Client's living and working contexts  
 Giving relevant information to the client

### **Skills training**

Advantages and disadvantages of the social network and context where the client lives  
 Exploration of advantages and disadvantages of contexts where students live

**11. Lecture**

Problem solving process - choices and possibilities  
 Effective and ineffective behaviours  
 Short-term and long-term behaviours

**Skills training**

Experiential exercise: choices and possibilities  
 How to satisfy needs with long-term effective behaviours

**12. Lecture**

Problem solving process: plan, contract, agreement  
 Components and characteristics of the effective plan in the framework of planned process of change

**Skills training**

Exercise: making effective plans and contracts with one another

**13. Lecture**

Evaluation  
 Social worker's evaluation and client's evaluation  
 Assessment and self-assessment of effectiveness

**Skills training**

Experiential exercise: self-evaluation

**14. Lecture:**

Endings in social work practice  
 Bonding, separation and grieving cycle

**Skills training**

Evaluation of the first semester

**The Second Semester****1. Lecture**

Various approaches in social work  
 Comparative analysis of various approaches used in social work (Transactional Analysis, Gestalt, Reality Therapy, Behaviour therapy, Cognitive approaches)

**Skills training**

Presentation of various approaches in social work

How to find the most effective approach for the specific problem

Work on a hypothetical problem - a presentation of various ways of working on it

**2. Lecture**

Supervision in social work

Peer supervision

Personal growth and development

Research and professional development as means for continuous improvement

**Skills training**

Peer supervision

**3. Lecture**

Single subject research in practice

**Skills training**

How to construct and apply scales and questionnaires; how to take structured notes and instructions for video and audio tapes usage

Measuring effectiveness and quality

**4. Lecture**

Involuntary clients

Dealing with “difficult” situations in social work practice

**Skills training**

Role-play: How to work with involuntary clients and managing difficult situations

**5. Lecture**

Social skills training

Social worker’s roles

**Skills training**

Experiential exercise: the worst social worker

Which role do you presently perform with your client, and which role would you like to perform as a professional

**6. Lecture**

Aggressive, non assertive and assertive behaviour

Fields of social work practice

Specifics of social work with persons physical disabilities

Specifics of social work with persons with intellectual disabilities

**Skills training**

Acting assertively

Students' examples from practice with persons with physical or intellectual disabilities

**7. Lecture**

Specifics of social work with children without or without adequate parental care

Specifics of social work with the elderly

Specifics of social work with terminally ill persons

**Skills training**

Acting assertively

Students' examples of practice with children, the elderly and terminally ill

**8. Lecture**

Mental health and illness

Long-term care

Youth at risk

**Skills training**

Problem solving processes - practice

**9. Lecture**

Work with refugees

Alcohol and drug use and abuse

Team work and interdisciplinary approach

Competition and collaboration

**Skills training**

Experiential exercise: team work

Students' experiences of being refugees

Sharing experiences with alcohol and drug abuse

**10. Lecture**

“Burn out” and how to prevent it  
 Conflict  
 How to work with aggressive clients  
 Negotiating

**Skills training**

“Burn out” and how to prevent it  
 Conflict resolution  
 Negotiating  
 Experiential exercise: being dangerous

**11. Lecture**

Prevention  
 Social work for the 21 century

**Skills training**

Practising problem solving processes

**12. Lecture**

Evaluation of lectures, skills training workshops and fieldwork

**Skills training**

Closure celebration with clients and field instructors

Supervision was organised fortnightly in groups with field instructors and individually on participants' requests. It covered problems that arose from individual work with clients and their families. Some supervision issues were addressed in skills training workshops as well, especially when they offered a good opportunity for learning about various social work settings. This Programme was only a frame of reference for our work. It was essential that students came prepared to lectures; so, lectures comprised discussions on specific themes. The aim was to encourage students to think critically, and to reflect upon learned theories and social work practicalities.

## **Appendix Two**

# **The Contact-Challenge Programme in Aotearoa - New Zealand**

## **SKILLS TRAINING WORKSHOPS OUTLINE**

### **Module One - Working with Individuals**

#### **Workshop 1**

3.3.1997.

Getting to know one another

Expectations

Information about Contact-Challenge Method

Group agreement, confidentiality contract and activity contract

Discussion and experiential exercise on learning styles

#### **Workshop 2**

10.3.1997.

Values in social work practice (personal reflections)

Discussion on ethical dilemmas

Social worker's responsibilities and client's responsibilities

Empowerment

Task centered model - an overview

#### **Workshop 3**

17.3.1997.

Preparation for the fieldwork

Each student expresses how he or she envisages him or herself as a social worker, and how he or she envisages that this course may help him or her in pursuing that goal.

Dilemmas and fears from the fieldwork and the laboratory work

Experiential exercise - Making contact - first contact - how to introduce yourself to the client

**Workshop 4**

24.3.1997.

Field instructors invited to come

Preparation for the fieldwork - students assigned to clients with whom they will associate during the year

Initial interview

Introduction of the Goal Attainment Scale

**28.3.1997 - 13.4.1997 MID SEMESTER BREAK****14. 4. 1997. MEETING WITH CLIENTS****SUPERVISION WITH FIELD INSTRUCTORS STARTS****Workshop 5**

14.4.1997.

How to make a preliminary contract with a client

Experiential exercise - listening

✕ Task centred model - problem or outcome specification as a joint activity

Assessment

Labelling

Experiential exercise - prejudices

**Workshop 6**

21.4.1997.

Practising defining priorities and setting goals

Measuring effectiveness

Significance of client's living and working contexts - social network

Exploration of social networks and the context where clients live

Exploration of social networks and the context where students live

**Workshop 7**

28.4.1997.

Developing contracting skills

Effective planning

Task implementation

Evaluation

Endings

Bonding, separation and grieving cycle

## **Module Two - Additional Skills Training**

### **Workshop 1**

5.5.1997.

Experiential exercise - Barriers to communication  
Verbal and non-verbal components of behaviour  
Feelings

### **Workshop 2**

12.5.1997.

Effective and ineffective behaviours  
Short-term and long-term behaviours  
How to satisfy needs with long-term effective behaviours

### **Workshop 3**

19.5.1997.

Critical analysis of various therapeutic approaches used in social work (Transactional Analysis, Gestalt, Reality Therapy, Behaviour therapy, Cognitive approaches), some typical experiential exercises used in each approach.

### **Workshop 4**

26.5.1997.

How to work with involuntary clients  
Dealing with “difficult” situations in social work practice

### **Workshop 5**

3.6.1997.

Social skills training

### **Workshop 6**

9.6. 1997.

Experiential exercise: the worst social worker  
Social worker's roles  
Discussion: Which role students presently perform with their clients, and which role they would like to perform as professionals

**Workshop 7**

16.6.1997.

Aggressive, non-assertive and assertive behaviours  
Acting assertively

**Workshop 8**

23.6. 1997.

How to work with aggressive clients  
Conflict  
Negotiation

**Workshop 9**

30.6.1997.

Burn-out, and how to prevent it.

**Module Three - Working with Families****Workshop 1**

7.7.1997

Values and work with families  
Working across cultures  
Exercise: Family workers come from families, too!

**Workshop 2**

14.7.1997.

Family characteristics  
First meeting with a family  
The referral  
The social stage

**Workshop 3**

21.7.1997.

Problem stage  
Basic skills in work with families  
Exercising basic skills with each other.

**25. 7.1997 - 1.8.1997 - SEMESTER BREAK**

**Workshop 4**

4.8. 1997.

More skill development

Culturally sensitive problem identification

Challenging a less active member of the family

Discussion on differences and similarities in family backgrounds of the group.

**Workshop 5**

11.8. 1997.

The interactive stage - working together

Second order change within the family system

Identifying outcomes

Contract construction

Experiential exercise: What would you like to improve?

Mediation processes

**Workshop 6**

18.8. 1997.

Ending work with families

Preparation for module 3 - working with groups

**Module Four - Working With Groups**

Module 4 was organised in such a way that each time two students led the group according to the plan and suggestions from group members. At the end of every workshop, the group would analyse what happened and link theory with actual experience of the group dynamics.

**Workshop 1**

25.8.1997.

Starting a group

(Ethics, group agreements, planning and forming the group)

**1 - 5 SEPTEMBER 1997 STUDY BREAK****Workshop 2**

8.9.1997.

Working with groups

(Leader tasks and skills)

**Workshop 3**

15.9.1997.

Working with groups  
(Group in action)

**Workshop 4**

22.9.1997.

Working with groups  
(Problems and challenges)

**Workshop 5**

29.9.1997.

Working with groups  
(Skill development)

**Workshop 6**

7.10.97.

Working with groups  
(The ending stage of group work)

Supervision sessions were organised fortnightly in a group with both field instructors present and individually on participants' requests.

## Appendix Three

### **The Group Contract – sample only**



## **CONTRACT**

### **PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTACT-CHALLENGE METHOD**

**DURATION:** 3 March 1997 - 29. September 1997

**FREQUENCY:**

**Skills training workshops** - two hours weekly (3.3.97. - 29.9.97)

**Contact with a client** - 50 hours (14.4.97. - 29.9.97) (recommended 2 hours weekly, but other arrangements are possible)

**Supervision** - 12 sessions of group supervision (every fortnight) and individual sessions when necessary

**Placement within an agency** - 48 days of working full time in the agency during the placement period (5.5.97. - 4.8.97)

**VENUE:** Massey University, Albany Campus, Clinical block (for the labs, other as arranged)

**DAY:** Monday (for the skills training workshops - labs, other as arranged)

**TIME:** 1 - 3 p.m. (for the skills training workshops - labs, other as arranged)

## **COMMITMENT**

1. Confidentiality of group discussion
2. Punctuality
3. To work towards building an atmosphere that is safe for all to share aspects of themselves without fear of criticism by other members
4. To be active and responsible for learning
5. To be prepared to evaluate own work and to identify strengths and areas for development

6. To give an opportunity for everyone to speak
7. To show up at every session
8. Every participant has the right not to answer on the question which may be too personal and every participant will share with the group only what he or she is willing to share.
9. If there is a problem participants will discuss it in the group first.

### **AIMS**

1. Integration of theory, practice and personal experience
2. To discuss problems or difficulties and gain support regarding tasks and people
3. Improving problem solving skills
4. Learning about the specific field of social work which the student has chosen for field work
5. Learning about other fields of social work practice through participating in laboratory work and supervision sessions
6. Developing a good relationship with the client
7. Solving personal issues (problems) or attaining personal goals

The supervision contract is between:

(Names of participants listed and signed)