# Statutory social work, the voluntary sector and social action settings: A comparison of ethics

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# Abstract

For decades, ethical issues have been seen as a problem throughout the social work profession, not just in the UK but also internationally. In the English context, the Care Standards Act 2000, which led to the establishment of the General Social Care Council, aimed to protect service users, employers and social workers/social care practitioners through the publication of codes of practice. As Strom-Gottfried and D'Aprix (2006) have noted, however, the plethora of codes of ethics and codes of conduct have failed to address explicitly the issues faced by those regulated by them. Consequently, the actual situation in England remains the same: practitioners work in difficult situations that frequently result in ethical dilemmas, yet the guidance fails to address the actual complexity of the situations in which practitioners find themselves.

The aim of this research was to investigate the experiences of practitioners in England working for statutory social services in comparison with those of practitioners from social action organisations and who work for the voluntary sector, in relation to their conduct, ethics and professional values.

The methodological framework was based on Grounded Theory. The data were collected via focus groups, semi-structured interviews, semi-structured questionnaires and vignette-based interviews. Constant comparisons were made between sectors during the data analysis. The research was validated by inter-triangulation and by communicative validation. The concept of power remained

the sole category of the Grounded Theory process once the research had reached saturation.

The key conclusion was that, by adopting a Foucaultian perspective, the "organisational context of work" is an expression of the power relationships that influence the ethical decision-making of social workers and social care practitioners. The concept of virtue ethics was introduced in the discussion of the data to counteract the effect of power felt by social workers and social care practitioners. The research concluded by proposing ways of incorporating the findings into the teaching of social work at the higher educational level and among qualified practitioners, emphasising the concept of practical reasoning (MacIntyre 1999) at the collective level.

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# Chapter One

# Introduction

My interest in this research area began in 1998 while in the last year of my bachelor's degree at Laval University, Canada. During this time, I had the opportunity to undertake a fieldwork placement at my place of work. I was working as a community worker for a voluntary organisation that provided food and clothing for Native American people experiencing poverty at various levels. My role as a co-ordinator was to fundraise for the organisation and to manage employees, volunteers and activities within the centre.

One of my objectives as a student on placement was to set up a group intervention that would enable service users to define the issues they faced and to eventually create alternative activities and resources that would replace the need for accessing basic food and clothes through the organisation. I decided to set up a group of users that would work to incorporate the principles and process of self-directed groupwork (Mullender and Ward, 1991), also known as social action work. Indeed, this method seemed to be the most appropriate, as people using the services reported oppression and victimisation by the rest of the community through regular acts of discrimination, due to their social status. Since self-directed groupwork is a well-known method for addressing the roots of oppression, I envisaged that it would be an appropriate method for working with this group.

Because part of our funding came from local government, my line manager was a practitioner (qualified social worker) from the local authority. I quickly realised that adopting an anti-oppressive practice framework and trying to

challenge inequalities at both the social and structural level would not be straightforward, since I would be using self-directed groupwork within a bureaucratic environment with many rules and regulations. For example, I had to justify the outcomes of the intervention at the same time as fulfilling the aims of the funding body. The result was that the funding body wanted me to identify, prior to the intervention, what the outcomes and the duration of the group would be, whereas I had planned to let the group decide what they needed and how long they wished to work together (in line with my interpretation of self-directed groupwork). Consequently, I realised that it would be impossible to define the group's outcomes based on the self-directed groupwork principle while also answering the needs of the funding body. I was therefore faced with a difficult situation, as the group desperately needed the funding for developments, but I did not want to plan the intervention and influence the process for them simply to justify the funding.

Another issue I faced was in relation to my involvement within the group. In using a self-directed groupwork model, the worker adopts a role of facilitator and specialised member of the group. I had made this clear with the user group, and I felt that the group was comfortable with this approach: I was not seen as an agent of social control, and the group felt able to explore the issues they faced. After a few sessions of collective cooking (a project that emerged from the self-directed group process), members of the group wanted me to take some food home that we had cooked collectively, as they had done. A social worker, however, should not accept gifts or benefit from their intervention (Ordre Professionnel des Travailleurs Sociaux du Quebec (OPTSQ), 1993). My line manager therefore called me in for a meeting and assertively told me that I would have to keep my distance from the group and

adopt a "more professional role". In taking the food home, however, I was aiming only to practise what I preached, to indicate that I was a 'specialised member of the group'. I envisaged my action as rendering the situation more 'normal' and 'accessible', and I believed that it was thus good practice to do so. I was therefore put again in a situation where my personal and professional values were in conflict with the OPTSQ code of ethics for Quebec social workers (1993) and with the agency, which enforced the code of ethics through their policies.

After almost a year of working in this environment, I had the opportunity to meet my current supervisors, David Ward and Jennie Fleming, at a conference on groupwork in Quebec. I decided to register for an MPhil/PhD in order to explore the issue of professional boundaries in self-directed groupwork. My interest in this research topic therefore came from a very personal situation where my own professional social work values were at issue. I believed that research on the topic would be beneficial for me as well as for other social workers practising a social action work approach. I decided to engage in research on this topic in order to further understanding and gain insights in relation to ethics and social work.

In England, as in Canada, the role of the social care practitioner is often vague and confusing, while the guidelines for practice and codes of ethics are often very rigid or contradictory. Work becomes even more complicated when trying to deal with issues such as empowerment and social action work.

This research project therefore aims to investigate the experiences of practitioners in England working for statutory social services in comparison

with practitioners using social action principles and those who work for the voluntary sector, in relation to their conduct and ethics.

To accomplish this, the research will have two objectives. The first will be to explore and compare the experiences of practitioners in statutory social services from the voluntary sectors and social action settings with regard to their conduct and ethics. The comparative analysis between areas of social care practice emerged in part due to the Grounded Theory methodology, but also due to the difficulties I had experienced in trying to apply social action principles while working for a voluntary organisation mainly funded by the statutory sector. Indeed, it became apparent that social action work, the voluntary sector and statutory social work involve fundamental differences that affect the others' practice and that this issue therefore needed further examination. The second objective of the research will be to determine the differences or similarities between the three sectors in terms of decision-making processes and to examine critically the interface between the statutory and voluntary sectors and social action work settings, especially in relation to ethics and empowerment.

The thesis will be presented in an order that does not totally capture the research process conducted under a Grounded Theory framework. For example, while only some background literature was consulted at the beginning of the research process, constant examination of academic sources was done during each stage of the data analysis and therefore cannot be summarised within a traditional 'literature review' chapter. The literature review was updated at the end of the research process, and therefore the three

chapters on the literature review include more information than was known at the beginning of the research process.

In order to accommodate the variety of topics necessary for understanding the research and to facilitate the structure of the literature review, the first part of the thesis, namely the literature review, will be divided into three chapters. Thus, Chapter Two will explore the research context, that is to say the nature of social work and, more generally, social care in England. Chapter Three will explore two very important concepts in the practice of social work and social care, that is to say the notions of 'power' and 'empowerment'. Finally, to conclude this first part of the thesis and the review of the literature, Chapter Four will examine the concepts of 'ethics' and 'ethical practice' in social work and social care and the contributions of various mainstream moral theories to social work practice.

This research was based on a qualitative framework using Grounded Theory. Data were collected using a systematic approach by means of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, semi-structured questionnaires and vignette-based interviews. Part Two of this thesis aims at examining the research design as well as the different methodological procedures for collecting and analysing the data. Chapter Five will therefore explore the overall research design, paying particular attention to the research perspective, methodology and methods used to conduct the research. This chapter will conclude with an examination of the research's validity and reliability and a reflection on research ethics. Chapter Six will focus on data analysis procedures as well as the presentation of data according to the various stages of data analysis.

Part Three of the thesis will focus on making sense of the data on a theoretical level. Thus, Chapter Seven will theorise on the final and sole category of 'power', whereas Chapter Eight will take the discussion further and examine the findings for future practice, proposing a framework for understanding ethics in various sectors of social care practice as well as making some propositions for maintaining high standards of ethical practice in social work.

It is important to note that this research project was carried out over a period of eight years in total, during which I lived in two different countries. In addition, during this time, I had the chance to practise within various areas of social work: as a youth and community worker in Quebec, as a social work lecturer, as a youth and community lecturer, as a researcher for the Connexions service in Plymouth, and also as a manager in the Centre Local des Services Communautaires (CLSC), a local-authority agency providing health and social services (specialising in older people) in Montréal. My understanding of social services and ethical practice is therefore influenced by a variety of social policies and work settings, all of which have contributed to my understanding of the contexts of research on a global level. I do not, however, claim that the research findings are applicable to countries or practice settings other than those explored here. Further research would be needed to verify the extent of the applicability of these findings to other social-services systems across the world.

# Chapter Two

# The research context: Social work activities in England

"European social work can perhaps best face up to the actuality of value questions through a critical examination of its own historical roots and its 'received ideas' in the context of their various discourses" (Rojek, Peacock and Collins 1998 in Lorenz 1994:41)

This research project aimed at examining the understanding and experience of ethical practice among social workers, qualified and non-qualified,[1] from three different fields of practice. This thesis will use the terms 'social workers' and 'social care practitioners' interchangeably to include the staff working in the social care/welfare sector with responsibilities for the development or provision of services and care packages and working directly with clients and service users. This definition includes staff calling themselves 'social workers', 'community workers', 'youth workers' and 'social care practitioners' but excludes people having primary 'caring' roles such as care assistants and auxiliary staff.

As briefly explored in the introduction to this thesis, three sectors of social care provision were included for the comparative element of the study. This opening chapter aims to highlight on the development of social work activities in England and provide an understanding of the three sectors under study. Underpinned by an historical approach, the chapter will begin by briefly examining the origins and development of different forms of social work in England and will end by providing a summary of the key features of each

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[1] Since 2005, the title Social Worker is reserved to those who hold a Social Work qualification recognised by the General Social Care Council

sector considered in this study, that is to say, the statutory sector, the voluntary sector and the social action setting.

There have been a plethora of Acts and regulations related to the development of the welfare state since the end of the Second World War, some of which were related to Health, Education, Housing or Social Security; some to other legislative frameworks related to personal social services and social care. Among the social policies related to personal social services and social care, some were developed in relation to a particular field of care, such as Children and Mental Health, whereas some others were related to the structure and provision of personal social services (Jones and Lowe 2002). Using an historical approach, this section will only consider those social policies and regulations that are essential to this thesis such as the Beveridge Report (1942), the Seebohm Report (1968) and the Care Standard Act (2000).

**The origins of Social Work in Britain: before 1940**

It is difficult to argue against the fact that the origins of social work and more broadly social care in Britain have their roots partly in philanthropic activities and Christian tradition, as well as the women's and socialist movements, much from well before the beginning of the twentieth century (Lorenz 1994). Indeed, Payne (2005) asserts that social work in Britain began to emerge as early as the initial 1600s with the creation of the Poor Law and continued to develop steadily, through activities such as mutual help movements, the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and the diverse Settlement movement. However, it is during and after the industrial revolution that, by the many changes in social conditions such as an increase in population moving from rural to city areas, changes in agricultural industry which contributed to a

rural poverty and the overall change in occupational structure that social problems multiplied and that a greater need for social order emerged (Harris 2004). As Cowden (2006:3) explains,

> the development of capitalism and industrialisation saw the destruction of centuries old ways of life, as formerly rural populations migrated into the huge urban centres like London, Manchester and Birmingham. The result was social dislocation, poverty and squalor on a scale never previously witnessed.

The emergence of modern social problems and the impetus for maintaining social order both contributed to the emergence and continuous development of social work activities which became a central feature of modern social care. However, as Payne (2005) points out, it is apparent that as early as the end of the nineteenth century, two main forms of 'social work' activities began to develop alongside the support offered by the family and the neighbourhood: the Settlement movement, on the one hand, and the Charity Organisation Society (COS), on the other:

> Organisations like the Mutual Insurance and Friendly Societies, the Charity Organisation Society or the Settlement Movement characterised an early approach to welfare that is based on initiatives at the civil society level and expressed a sense of self-help or of self-organisation in such way that it did not involve the state directly (Lorenz 2005:201)

Both the Settlement movement and the COS can be considered as early forms of social work, emerging from different philanthropic activities, but with different values, aims and functioning. As Payne (2005:31) puts it,

Charity organisation developed 'social casework', a method that eventually combined with Poor Law welfare to become local government social work. Settlement work drew on movements for social reform to develop more radical social action in a move towards community and groupwork, especially for young people.

The Settlement movement consisted of groups of people striving for working-class education and Christian values in new cities. The original Settlement was Toynbee Hall, which was established by Canon Samuel Barnett in Whitechapel in 1884 (Payne 2005). The key idea behind the Settlement movement was that students and the well educated would live in poor areas and use their skills to both practise what was learnt in their education as well as to improve the quality of life for those people. As W. Moore Ede (1896 in Woodroofe 1962:65) explains, the settlements:

will not be converted by missionaries and tracts sent by dwellers in the West End. The dwellers in the West End must go to the dwellers in the East themselves, share with the East those pleasures which give interest and delight to the dwellers in the West, and make up the fullness of their lives.

Participation in the lives of people living in difficult conditions was therefore central to the ethos of the Settlement movement, an ethos that marked 'true human fellowship between the more educated and the less educated, the value of knowledge for its own sake, and the duty of all men to fulfil their functions in the social order" (Woodroofe 1962:65-6). Therefore, the Settlement movement, by its nature, had the dual purpose of providing a space for people from different social classes to live together as well as learn from each other. This also emphasises the importance of Settlements as an educational setting:

the training dimension was most pronounced within the settlement movement both for the recipients of philanthropic attention and for the middle-class participants in its activities, and settlements, with their emphasis on 'practical learning', had a lasting influence on the applied nature of social work training. (Lorenz 1994:47)

Therefore, the Settlements were unique in so far as their educational purpose was central to the movement. Yet, the Settlement movement was not the only group to provide training within its activities. The Charity Organisation Society (COS), although providing quite a fundamentally different approach by their 'deficit' model value base, also developed formal training for their 'philanthropists', from 1896 through lectures and practical work and then from 1912 onwards, within the London School of Economics (Woodroofe 1962). As Woodroofe (1962:53 citing Loch 1895) explains,

since charity was the work of the social physician, it was to the interest of the community that it should not be entrusted to novices or to dilettanti or to quacks.

This emphasis on training the 'social physician' or 'social doctors' who diagnose the causes of social failure and prescribed treatments (Richmond 1917 in Rimmer 2005), highlights the already medicalised aspect of social work which has left an important legacy to social work in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and, less significantly, with the training of social workers (Vincent 1999).

It can therefore be assumed that the COS is an important movement that contributed to the development of modern social work and emerged as a response to poverty (Payne 2005). As Smith (2002:1) explains,

founded in 1869, COS provided a key foundation for the development of social work as a profession in Britain. The aims of COS were to help and encourage 'self-respecting families who were struggling to keep themselves from destitution' on the one hand, and to organise and coordinate 'so the best could be made of resources' (Roof 1972 in Smith 2002).

The aims of COS highlight an important feature, that of deserving and non-deserving poor and of services based on individualism (Vincent 1999). Roof (1972) explains that the COS's aims were to respond to urgent needs and encourage "self-respecting families who were struggling to keep themselves from destitution" (in Smith 2002). Therefore the COS's purpose was in "helping the poor to demonstrate qualities such as cleanliness, thrift and sobriety" (Payne 2005) rather than learning from them, as in the case of the Settlement movement.

It is partly from the COS that social work took its origins, especially 'family casework', with its roots in social visiting (Vincent 1999; Smith 2002; Payne 2005). However Younghusband (1981 in Horner 2006) argues that both the COS and the Settlement movement have all contributed to the development of social work in more general terms, including social case work, groupwork approaches and community work. Nevertheless, the two 'branches' of social work practice shared some important differences that are still apparent in modern social work: the COS and subsequently social casework is concerned with elements of care, but also with control, although social control is not only typical of the COS's activity but can be traced back to the beginning of the Poor Law of 1834 (Payne 2005). On the other hand, the Settlement movement, and more recently social action work, social groupwork, community and

youth work are more concerned with the empowerment and social reform element than the social control aspect (Woodroofe 1962; Horner 2006).

Therefore, from the evidence of early social work activities, it becomes apparent that social work is developing in two entirely different directions: On the one hand, activities around campaigning, advocacy and practical measures to improve the lives of people in impoverished communities, and on the other hand, social work as a body which aims to regulate and control the lives of the poor and the imposition of values from the dominant social order (Cowden 2006).

The social control aspect of at least one of the directions of social work appeared quite early on in the development of the profession. Indeed, Harris (2004:61-62) agrees that some forms of philanthropy have been regarded as a form of social control but that such views have become increasingly controversial. For example, he cites Prochaska who believes that although in all parts of society, "the ruling classes ... openly expressed a desire to subordinate the lower classes through charitable agencies," the concept of social control is "rather murky and reductionist, for the wish to make another conform to the same values and speak the same language is important in social relations generally, from family life to national politics" (in Harris 2004:62). Consequently, while some authors view COS and other philanthropic organisations as being driven by a social control agenda, others interpret these activities as being "used to maintain social harmony and create mutually advantageous links between members of different social groups in an unequal society" (Harris 2004:62). Jones (2002:31) concludes that to argue that "all philanthropists were virtuous and self-sacrificing, or that all

philanthropists were gratifying their own egos, is to do less than justice to a very complex subject".

Whether the COS and the Settlement movement were considered as a mechanism of social control to a certain extent or not, it is difficult to argue against the fact that they both constituted, by their independence from the state, a form of voluntary action, or even charitable organisations:

> Some of the most influential leaders in the world of charity believed that charity amounted to a social principle. Charitable endeavour represented citizens united by moral purpose, voluntarily fulfilling their duty to those less fortunate than themselves. The idea was that better-off people would voluntarily perform their duty as citizens and help the poor to become fully participative members of society. The injunction to behave charitably thus amounted to a particular vision of an ethical society in which citizens motivated by altruism performed their duties towards one another voluntarily. (Lewis 1999:14).

Yet, this idea is contested and commentators argued that, even though these organisations were seen as independent from the state, they "may best be conceptualised as part of a range of 'buffer institutions' [to the state]" (Thane 1950 in Lewis 1999:15). Weisbrod (1988 in Lewis 1999) explains that the voluntary sector develops when the market or the state fails to meet minority demands, but that as the demands grow, the involvement of the state in meeting it also increases. Seen from this perspective therefore, the voluntary organisation is not totally independent of the state, as central government, through a small central bureaucracy and a strong aspiration to limits its activities, influenced them in their purpose and service provision. As Lewis explains, encompassing the work of voluntary organisations, were Acts such as

the Poor Law, and later Pension Act 1908 and Social Insurance Act 1911. However, as Harris (1999:43) points out,

> The annual income and expenditure of registered and unregistered charities, friendly societies, collecting societies, benefit-paying trade unions and other benevolent and self-help institutions vastly exceeded the annual budget of the Poor Law.

Therefore, the voluntary sector was the main provider of social welfare in Britain and the state's involvement was minimal. It is really from the Social Insurance Act 1911, by its compulsory nature, that "mixed economy of welfare began to tilt in favour of the state" (Lewis 1999:13).

The involvement of the state did not, however, dominate the welfare provision until the 1940s, and developed mainly as a response to the war (Glennerster 1995). As Titmuss (in Thane 1982:223) explains, "the circumstances of the war created an unprecedented sense of social solidarity among the British people, which made them willing to accept a great increase of egalitarian policies and collective state intervention".

**Social work and social welfare from 1940s to 1970s**

During the first half of the Second World War, the provision of social work and social care remained largely unchanged. However, with the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942, this was to change considerably. This key report to the development of the welfare state in Britain would have the aim of eradicating divisions between health and social welfare, and between the rich and the poor. The Beveridge Report is one of the key documents for

understanding modern social welfare, and consequently, the development of social work into the twentieth century.

Although Beveridge began to be involved in politics early on[2], it was in 1942, with the publication of his report *Social Insurance and Allied Services* that the welfare state began to take on its characteristic shape. Indeed, the report was to propose a 'blueprint' aimed at fighting against the five 'evils' of the modern world, namely Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness and recommend a free, universal and comprehensive provision of service from 'the cradle to the grave' (Fraser 2003; Payne 2005). Therefore, from the publication of the Beveridge Report, the Welfare State slowly began to take shape in the form of a universal system, aimed at providing services to everyone in need in relation to health and social assistance. This element of universalism is important in so far as it dissolves differences between attitudes towards the deserving and undeserving promoted by the COS earlier on in the evolution of social work. However, the universal nature of the propositions found in the Beveridge Report were not without criticism

Indeed, Titmuss (1987) argues that the report should be based on a more 'actuarial' formula for distribution of resources, and establish a closer relationship between what one pays in and what one gets out. Other criticisms were that the Beveridge Report was perceived as an 'ineffective and conservative document' as well as a report that was 'flawed and failed to live up to its promises' (Fraser 2003).

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[2] Beveridge's first major contribution to social policy was in 1907 with his article on the subject of 'labour exchanges' in the Economic Journal (Glennester 1995:20)

The Beveridge Report has also been criticised for having had an adverse effect on the development of social work resulting in practices more inclined to social casework than social activism. Indeed, Payne (2005:53) explains that,

> Cradle to grave provision of education, health, housing and social security might mean that interpersonal help is unnecessary. However, these changes also led to the development in social work services, as part of the general movement to improve welfare, which in facing up the social casework method, sought to demonstrate the value of interpersonal help as part of a universal welfare state.

Thus, social work activities changed with the publication of the Beveridge Report, shifting from a provision that was voluntary to something more of a public service.

Nevertheless, and despite of the number of criticisms the Beveridge Report also had a lasting effect on the development of the Welfare State, and indirectly, on social work activities. As a result, a number of Acts were passed, aiming at protecting against Destitution and Want, but also the other of the 5 giants identified by Beveridge: the Family Allowance Act (1945), the National Insurance and Industrial Injuries Act (1946), the National Assistance Act (1948) as well as the National Health Services Act (1946) and the Education Act (1944) (Fraser 2003).

In addition to his famous report, Beveridge also had an important impact upon the development of the voluntary sector with the publication of his report on *Voluntary Action: A Report on Method and Social Advance* (1948). Beveridge, who had worked earlier at Toynbee Hall, one of the well-known Settlements (Payne 2005) was much in favour of voluntary action:

Sir William Beveridge, author of the blueprint for post-war settlement, was himself a firm believer in voluntary action and harked back strongly to the turn-of-the-century insistence on the importance of the 'spirit of service'; the good society could only be built on people's sense of duty and willingness to serve (Lewis 1999:16).

However, voluntary services, since the mid 1940s, have been largely concerned with home care and meals on wheels (Paynes 2005). Indeed, although Beveridge perceived the 'voluntary sector as a fundamental ingredient of modern democracy' its role, from the publication of the report, was nevertheless limited to acting as complementary to the state, as opposed to an essential element of its composition (Lewis 1999).

Indeed, following the publication of the Beveridge report, and the subsequent Acts of Parliament and White Papers that were influenced by it, voluntary organisations found themselves compromised and began to take on a more 'regional' role and shifted from a focus on health to a focus on social care (Payne 2005). Titmuss (1987) takes a more radical view and explains that the Welfare State posed a direct threat to voluntary organisations. Payne (2005:55) explains,

> Major charities such as Dr Barnado's, the Royal National Institutes for the Blind and the Deaf, the (Church of England) Children's Society and the (Methodist) National Children's Home all found it difficult to identify a role, when the public focus was on comprehensive and developing public services. The London Charity Organisation Society (COS), able to claim an important influence on the development of social work practice, found a new and more limited regional role as the Family Welfare Association.

The legacy of the Beveridge Report has had a considerable impact on the quality of life for most people but some areas of the population were still left untouched by the policy born from it as Younghusband (1978:21) explains:

> The standard of living rose markedly between 1950 and 1975 and most people 'had never had it so good'. But some remained persistently caught in the trap of poverty, in particular low-paid, unskilled manual workers, single parent families, old people and the handicapped.

Although the Beveridge Report sets a framework for the Welfare State, the development of social work remained fragmented until the 1960s when a movement towards the unification of social services occurred. As Payne (2005:58) explains,

> the legislation of the 1940s was mainly permissive and divided responsibility at central government level meant that there was no ministry to take overall strategic direction. However, in the early 60s, concern about some social issues, particularly juvenile delinquency, did lead to pressure for the development and eventually to the Seebohm reform.

Therefore, despite the universal function of the policies inspired by the Beveridge Report, many people managed to fall through the net, which later resulted in further policy and regulation.

**Social Work from the late 1960s to the end of the century**

While social work and the provision of the welfare state since the 1940s was mostly dominated by the individual approach to understanding social problems, they began to take on a different hue by the mid 1960s. Both directions of social work, that is to say, the individualistic social work that

derived from COS, as well as social work orientated towards social change that was witnessed during the Settlement movement, become more apparent in the social work profession.

Firstly, as a result of the problem identified earlier, the inability of policy to reach everyone, the Seebohm Report was published in 1968. The Seebohm Report affected the development of both the voluntary sector and of statutory social work. Secondly, a radical social work movement started to emerge from the field, challenging social, and in particular class inequality as a central aspect of the practice (Fook 2002).

The Seebohm Report *Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services* (1968) set up the framework of Social Services Departments in local authorities and set in motion the development of networks of social care support between Health and Social Service Departments as well as the voluntary sector (Baldwin 2000). Based on the same principle as Beveridge, that is to say 'universality', Seebohm aimed to establish a unified system of public social services delivered under the administration of a Director of Social Services appointed in each local authority (Younghusband 1978). This would trigger the development of a new Personal Social Service (PSS), a service implemented as a mechanism through which to reach all sections of the community:

> We decided very early in our discussions that it would be impossible to restrict our work solely to the needs of two or even three generation families. We could only make sense of our task by considering also childless couples and individuals without any close relative: in other words, everybody (Seebohm Report 1968 para.32 in Younghusband 1978:233).

However, while the Seebohm Report, like its predecessor Beveridge, aimed at putting into place services that would reach all part of the population, only the needs of a number of groups would be met by such service, such as children, older people, disabled people and young offenders. Jones and Lowe (2002:192) explain that although the diverse user groups targeted by the Seebohm Report and the PSS share more differences than similarities between them, one core characteristic can be applied to all: their 'lack of political influence'. Thus, the PSS, despite its universal nature, tends to meet the needs of those who did not get their services elsewhere.

The Seebohm Report also influenced the establishment of a new generic training for social work that would be delivered through the Central Council for Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW in Horner 2006). In particular, the Seebohm Report notes an emphasis on skill and knowledge training, as well as teamwork and interdisciplinary preparation (Seebohm 1968 in Jones and Lowe 2002:197-198). The Seebohm Report therefore triggers the development of new generic social work training that reflects the acquisition of social work skills and knowledge useful to all social workers, regardless of their field of work.

The Seebohm Report has therefore had a strong impact on the development of social work practice in Britain. Payne (2005) describes social work activity during this period in time as being at its 'zenith' and explains that this move towards the unification of social care services under the new Seebohm Report leads also to the creation of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in 1970, a attempt to amalgamate different professional bodies such as the Society of Mental Welfare Officers, and the Association of Psychiatric Social

Workers (Higman 2006). This amalgamation shows a real focus for social work to become more generic and unified. Thus, even the social work definition shows a level of inclusion between the different branches of social work that had previously developed in England:

> ...social work extends its interest beyond the immediate issue to understanding the client's background, social situations, motivation, attitudes, values, personality and behaviour and attempts to encourage development and change by a wide variety of methods which amongst many others may well include the development of strong relationships with clients, insight-giving techniques, behaviour modification and practical help (BASW 1975 in Younghusband 1978:26).

This desire for a general social work profession continued until 1982, when the Barclay Committee reflected on the roles and task of social workers and came to the conclusion that social workers' tasks could be categorised according to two different branches, those of counselling and of social care planning (Higman 2006). Yet, the conclusions of the Barclay Report emphasise the individual casework role as opposed to that of social change and mobilisation.

However, an alternative type of social practice begins to emerge simultaneously to the publication of the Seebohm Report as Rimmer (2005:6) explains:

> In the 1960s and 1970s, social work became much more concerned with structural problems and community activism, whereby social workers should enable service users to 'change their situation by collective action.

This re-emergence of the recognition of structural inequality broadens the social work task as 'radical social work' and develops a counterbalance to the popular individual intervention and psychosocial approaches to social work. Rimmer (2005:7) asserts that:

> During the 1960s, social work rediscovered poverty and social workers, who were using solely psychodynamic approaches, came under fire. How could an individual 'talking session' stop the water coming in through the roof? (Benn, 1973:36). Many social workers thought that this kind of social work was soul destroying.

The emergence of radical social work therefore emphasised the social and class inequality aspect of people's social conditions as opposed to 'blaming the victim' approach more central in individual casework (Fook 2002). Therefore, the surfacing of radical social work had an effect of focusing social work activities on a movement toward social activism.

> in the 1960s the emergence of radical critique put the issues of social context back on the agenda and broadened it to include understanding of how the socio-economic structure and historical conditions also influence individual experience (Fook 1993 in Fook 2002:4).

Activities based on radical social work were then taking place mostly within the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector was also assigned an important role within the structure for provision of social care services within the Seebohm Report (Jones and Lowe 2002) and although the relationship between the statutory and the voluntary organisations tend not to be without conflict (Sebohm Report p.153 in Jones and Lowe 2003:2009), the voluntary sector once again continued to evolve around the statutory provision. Indeed, the Seebohm Committee's report on the personal social services recognised the importance of the voluntary organisation as pioneers and as a 'watchdog' and

"encouraged local authorities to include volunteers in their plans, albeit in a supplementary role." (Lewis 1999a:266). The voluntary sector is thriving, and many commentators even acclaimed its merits by the end of the 1970s (see Gladstone, 1979; Hadley and Hatch, 1981 in Lewis 1999a). However, the role of the voluntary sector remains at most complementary to the PSS during this period.

From 1991 onward, the voluntary sector tended to take a more important role in the provision of social welfare in England, when contracting became a major source of the funding pattern of many of the voluntary organisations (Lewis 1999a). Indeed, as Knapp (1996:167) suggests "many of these organisations are heavily dependent on government funding". Often, however, the voluntary agency that agrees to carry out work for local government in exchange for funding has to adapt its service to the aims of the funders, putting its original aims at risk (Brenton 1985). However, this is challenged by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust (1978:68), which asserted that:

> it is very difficult to generalise about the extent to which the receipt of a government grant by a voluntary organisation means that it becomes subject to government influence or control.

Therefore, although obtaining funding from the local authority may influence the aims and characteristics of voluntary organisations, this cannot be assumed for each individual organisation that receives funding from the statutory sector.

It becomes clear that social work activities from the late 1960s to the end of the century were still split between different aspects of service provision, with a

re-emergence of social work oriented towards social change with the rise of radical social work. By the end of the 1990s social work was not only split between "two souls" like at the beginning of the last century (casework and social changes) but as Payne (1997 in Thompson 2005) examined, between three main trends: the individual reformist (meeting social welfare needs on an individualized basis) and the reflexive-therapeutic (facilitating personal growth), more often present within the PSS and the voluntary sector and the socialist-collectivist (a system to promote co-operation in society so that the most oppressed and disadvantaged people can gain power over their lives) which is closely linked to the development of radical social work and social action work but also present in the voluntary sector. Thompson (2005) emphasises that these types of social work practice can also be combined, but this examination is useful to understanding social work as practice at the end of the twentieth century.

This present research will investigate three sectors of social care practice as understood at the end of the twentieth century. These three sectors, as briefly noted in the introduction of Chapter Two are namely the statutory sector, the voluntary sector and the social action setting. These sectors will continue to evolve into the twenty-first century, especially in the light of *Modernising Social Services: Promoting Independence*. The final section of this chapter will examine the state of play of social work and social care in England, focussing especially on the three sectors under investigation in this study.

## Modernising Social Services: Promoting Independence – the state of play in Social Work in the Twenty-first Century

With the election of the New Labour Government in 1998 and the operationalisation of the 'third way' for the welfare state, the natures of social work and social care were again about to change. Explaining Gidden's third way, Jones (2000:209) asserts that

> The Beveridge Report was essentially negative, a matter of combating the 'Five Giants', but in the future, in a positive welfare policy, Want will be replaced by autonomy, Disease by active health, Ignorance by education as a continuing part of life, Squalor by well-being, and Idleness by initiative.

Social work in the twenty-first century was therefore to develop according to a philosophy that will not only provide services to people who need it, but will also aim at promoting independence from services. In 1998, the Government published their White Paper *Promoting Independence, Improving Protection and Raising Standards*, which set the tone for social work to be more accountable and more efficient by setting targets and measuring outcomes for the provision of social services (Higman 2006). Indeed, as the Department of Health announces:

> High quality and good value services can only be achieved if there are sound management, information and performance systems in place. Checks are needed both locally and nationally to make sure that people are getting modern and dependable social services that they deserve (DoH 1998:109 in Langan 2000:152).

Modernising social services will therefore provide a platform for the development of four organisational structures, each having different

responsibilities, ranging from inspection (Commission for Social Care Inspection), promotion of best practice (Social Care Institute for Excellence), Staff regulation (General Social Care Council) and Training (Skills for Care) (Higman 2006). These four organisational structures have an overall aim which is to focus on the monitoring of services, inspection, audit and accountability (Langan 2000).

All the four organisational structures are important, although some of them are already struggling in terms of organisational changes (Higman 2006). Nevertheless, an important change to the social work profession is the creation of the General Social Care Council (GSCC), a government body that aims at

> increasing the protection of service users, their carers and the general public by regulating the social care workforce and by ensuring that work standards within the social care sector are of the highest quality (GSCC 2006).

GSCC achieves its aims through regulating staff in England by the creation and maintenance of a social care register, by protecting the title of social worker and by regulating the training of social workers in introducing a new social work degree (replacing CCETSW) (GSCC 2002).

The overall modernisation agenda has had many positive effects on the recognition of social work as a profession, with the protection of the title since 2003, the compulsory registration of social workers since 2005 and the new social work degree since 2003 (Higman 2006)

However, despite these changes (mainly in relation to registration and training), the structure of the provision of social care is not likely to change.

Partly inspired by the earlier values promoted by COS, the deficit model practised in social care services as well as in aspects of governmental control related to the profession will still remain as key features of statutory social work. Bureaucracy has increased by the ever-greater desire to be accountable, and as a measure of efficiency in the services. As Payne (2005:104) illustrates,

> While traditional responses to problems with excluded groups have often used generic social work with wide professional discretion within a system of bureaucratic control, new labour policies use limited social work techniques within highly specified services, reducing the flexibility and range of the service in favour of the delivery of a specific political policy.

Consequently, social workers, despite their new training and compulsory registration, are unlikely to be able to fully practise according to the core values of their profession[3]. Indeed, as Ferguson and Powell point out, social workers will be ever more challenged, as they will be:

> placing social justice and empowerment at the centre of social work practice and struggling to reconcile them with the increasing demands of risk management and checklist practice (cited in Payne and Shardlow 2002:103).

Social work within the PSS does not only involve 'providing an effective, family-oriented, community based service, available and accessible to all' (Horner 2006:91) but also, through risk management, a platform for controlling members of the society who do not conform to the majority. As McDonald (2006:28) argues:

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[3] For an in dept examination of social work values, see Chapter 3 on social work values and ethics.

the welfare state strives to regulate social life, particularly in its attempts to smooth the bumps of capitalism and buffer the citizens.

This projection of the welfare state is partly modelled by the omnipresence of the residual model that has been shaping social work and social care since the introduction of the Poor Law and the COS, even though the Beveridge Report attempted to re-structure social work into a universal service (Lorenz 1994).

Statutory social work or PSS is therefore understood in this study as being the principal provider of social welfare in England (Payne and Sharldow 2002), although, this has tended to change in the last few years with more and more services provided by the voluntary and private sectors (Sharldow 2005). However, the statutory sector still offers a wide range of service, such as case-work social services, residential care, hospital social work and education welfare (Dominelli 1997). PSS, in particular, typically includes childcare, community care and criminal justice (Thompson 2005), which were the focus of this study.

PSS tends to be difficult to define (Lowe 1993) and this difficulty is even more apparent with the publication of the new Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (2003) and the new Children Act 2004, which resulted in the end of 'social services departments' as defined by Seebohm (1968). Indeed, *Every Child Matters* brings together all children's services such as, for example, children and family social work, Connexions and the Youth Offending team, under a Children's Service Department (Horner 2006). However, this new feature of 'statutory social work' will not be examined as the research project, and in particular the data collection, took place before 2003 and it therefore did not influence the direction of the research. The same can be said about the

proliferation of private social care agencies, which were not considered for this study.

The second sector under study, namely the voluntary sector, is also difficult to define. Marshall (1996) claims that the concept of voluntary organisation itself lacks clarity. As the Wolfenden Committee has pointed out: "voluntary action in Britain covers myriad different activities and is undertaken from many different motives" (Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust 1978:15). The Rowntree Trust is not the only organisation to affirm that voluntary action and community organisations are complex and the sector is therefore hard to define. Kendall and Knapp, almost 20 years later, highlight the ambiguity in defining the term:

> The extent and nature of the voluntary sector's contributions to the UK economy and society often remain unremarked or are discussed confusedly because of a lack of clarity on the terminology, definitions and classifications being (often implicitly) employed. (cited in Davis Smith et al. 1995:66).

However, definitions of the voluntary sector emphasise the notion of 'spirit' or 'ethos', as opposed to the nature of labour force (Marshall 1996:45), "serving as mediators between the individual and the state, both holding society together and lubricating it for social change". Voluntary organisations, as pointed out by Leat (1996) are therefore mediating structures and vehicles for empowerment. The voluntary sector is very important in the provision of social care as Shardlow (2005:97) explains:

> during the past ten years, there has been an enormous growth in the number of private and voluntary social work organisations. Such that now, and precise figures are difficult to obtain, over half of all

employed social workers are to be found in the private and voluntary sectors rather than as workers for the local authority.

The voluntary sector, for the purpose of this research, includes both national voluntary organisations and small local charities. The key elements for inclusion as a national voluntary organisation were in relation to staffing and source of funding:

> These have incomes in the millions or tens of millions pounds brackets, and employ several thousand full-time and part time paid staff alongside volunteers nationally and locally in the provision of both mainstream and pioneering services (Kendall and Knapp cited in Davis Smith et al. 1995:75)

On the other hand, small charities were also included, because although they have smaller budgets, they may still experience pressure from local government, as they are often carrying part of their work as contracted projects or with a service-level agreement which results in affecting the organisation's values and ethos to a certain extent (Knapp 1996).

Social action, the final sector of the comparative element of this study is often carried out within voluntary or in some cases, within statutory agencies, but is different by its emphasis on empowerment as a value base, and on its focus on structural changes:

> [Social action is] about users taking action for empowerment. Our practice should reflect the fact that oppression, social policy and the environment are much stronger factors in service user's lives than personal factors (Social Action Journal 1995:2 in Rimmer 2005:8).

Social action work is composed of both a set of principles and a process that cannot be separated, as the Centre for Social Action points out:

Social action is made up of two essential and inseparable elements - the principles and the process. These do not stand alone, but are completely dependent upon each other. Combined, they form an effective approach for working with people and a powerful force for change (Centre for Social Action 2004).

Social Action work is therefore a 'social work' approach that has a clear ideological link with the Settlement movement and which is "marked by a 'striving towards an understanding of the relationship between oppression, power and change'"(Mullender and Ward 1991:13). The emphasis of social action is therefore oriented towards social change as opposed to adaptation of individuals in society.

Social action or self-directed groupwork is known as an extremely empowering approach. Several researchers, professionals and practitioners have described social action as a very powerful tool to enhance the loss of power experienced by oppressed people due to inequalities in the societies they live in (Mullender and Ward 1991; Denney 1998; Croft and Beresford 1989; Solomon 1976; Preston-Shoot 1992; Rimmer 2005). Fleming and Ward (1997:5) have defined social action work or self-directed groupwork as having two principal characteristics. The model was specifically designed to distance social action from the 'deficit' and 'blaming the victim' approaches (Mullender and Ward 1991). Thus, social action is based on a commitment to people having the right to be heard, to define the issues facing them, to set the agenda for action, and most importantly, to take action on their own behalf and contrasts greatly with social work as practised within the statutory sector.

There are six principles (Centre for Social Action 2004) to adhere to when practising social action work. A decade ago, Mullender and Ward (1991) defined five principles for self-directed groupwork (or social action work), which were later replaced by six principles defined by the Centre for Social

Action (2004). For the purpose of this research, these six principles will be used, as they are more up to date and are very closely linked to practice and research. A full list of principles can be found in appendix 1.

The process of social action can be described as involving five stages, examining different questions in order to understand the underlying causes of oppression. The five stages are known as 'what', 'why', 'how', 'action' and 'reflection' (Mullender and Ward 1991; Centre for Social Action 2004). The 'why' stage is particularly important and is often undervalued (Mullender and Ward 1991). Indeed, a group that does not explore the 'why' question will not gain a deep enough comprehension of the sources of structural oppression and will risk falling into the trap of seeing the problem as a personal deficit. The question 'why' therefore helps the group not only to find other sources of oppression, but also to realise that the sources of oppression are more structural or social than personal. Thus, the process of social action, by its five key questions, aims at facilitating change with the help of a facilitator, where services users are not just consumers but instead active agents for change (Centre for Social Action 2004).

The process of social action is circular, in so far that the different stages can be repeated as many times as the user group needs (Mullender and Ward 1991). It is through this process that users can achieve structural empowerment. As Mullender and Ward (1991:13) point out:

> some considerable time before the term 'empowerment' became fashionable, our involvement in developing the self-directed groupwork model [social action model] marked our striving towards an understanding of the relationship between oppression, power and change.

This in turn explains the relationship between the use of social action strategies or self-directed groupwork models and the possibility of structural empowerment and structural changes, because the aim of the model is to achieve an understanding of the relationship between oppression, power and change.

Social action work takes place in varied work settings and rests on an ethos as opposed to a particular organisational context. As discussed above, as a method of intervention, social action work is well defined in terms of principles and process. However, boundaries are frequently less clear than those within a statutory social services framework. Social action workers tend to work more 'independently' (where no statutory guidelines apply), have only the principles of social action work for guidance (Centre for Social Action 2004; Mullender and Ward 1991). Consequently, the principles for the practise of social action work, as a set of values for practising empowerment, can either fit well within the work setting where it is practised, or not. Indeed, some of the principles may come into conflict with other requirements of the organisation where the intervention takes place.

Preston-Shoot (1992) points out that it is rather difficult to be empowering and therefore practise social action when the practice is regulated, because regulation can itself be oppressive and disempowering. Therefore, while social action work is based on empowering principles, these are not always easily translated into practice.

To conclude this chapter, Thompson (2005) emphasises that twenty-first century social work still oscillates between two different interpretations. He

asserts that social work today is still divided between social work as 'an agency of social stability' (or consensus model) or as an 'agency of social change' (conflict model) (Thompson 2005:16). These two interpretations of social work are examples of how an understanding of historical development of a type of practice helps to situate it in a modern context. Indeed, social work as an agency of social stability has clear ideological links with the COS more than a century ago, and is now mainly situated within the remit of statutory social work. On the other hand, social work as an agency for social change appeals to the Settlement movement and to radical social work in the 1970s and to social action and some of the work carried out in voluntary organisations.

The next chapter will discuss two concepts central to social work practice: empowerment and power. As Becket (2006:125) explains:

> Social services are traditionally disempowering. Staff behave in ways that clientalise the individuals under their care. They no longer remain authentic citizens after entry to the day centres, old people's homes, psychiatric hospital.

Adams (2003:183), on the other hand, argues, "empowering individual service users requires that policies and practices are embedded in the culture of relevant organisations and professions" (Adams 2003:183)

Consequently, the examination of the term empowerment stems from a concern that while the word empowerment has become a "meaningless, ideological deodorant" (Ward, 1998:36 in Rimmer 2005:20), it is also central to the work of many social workers, and also a social work value.

## Chapter Three

## Empowerment and Power

The International Federation of Social Workers has defined their vision for the social work profession as one that "promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being" (IFSW 2001, in Horner 2003:2). Despite the centrality of the concept of empowerment to contemporary social work, many have commented on the fact that the term is used to mean many different things to different people and groups. Ward and Mullender (1991), for example, have observed that the term has become something of a 'bandwagon', within which so many diverse agendas have found a home that it is at severe risk of becoming meaningless (cited in Langan 2002). Empowerment is a concept central to social work practice, as Thompson points out: "The aim of social work intervention is empowerment, not adjustment" (2001:59). It is therefore important to define and conceptualise the word 'empowerment', as its use and meaning often differs from one context of work to another. As noted by Coulshed and Orme (1998:64),

> It is significant that the social work literature on empowerment (see Adams 1996; Braye and Preston-Shoot 1995) resists giving simplistic definitions of empowerment but concentrates on the process.

To illustrate this point, the meaning of empowerment within statutory social work tends to reflect a personal mechanism, whereas within social action work and self-directed groupwork, the same word is used to mean cultural and structural change (Mullender and Ward 1991). The term 'empowerment'

has therefore become increasingly popular in recent decades and has often been ill-defined or misunderstood:

> The world 'empowerment' has slipped into popular and social work vernacular. Like most jargonised words, it is in danger of losing clear meaning. 'Empowerment' is now used to describe just about everything we do in social work, but everything we do is not empowerment. (Lee 1991:5)

This finding, however, is unsurprising because, as Morrison Van Voorhis and Hostetter (2006) point out, little research has been undertaken on what the term empowerment actually means among social services professionals. Nevertheless, at this point, it is important to examine the definitions of empowerment that exist in social work and social care practice. The following section is therefore twofold: First, it will provide an examination of the various definitions of the term empowerment and their relevance within social work and social care. Second, it will examine an overarching concept, power, under a variety of theoretical tangents and their contributions to furthering the understanding of empowerment in relation to this research.

Empowerment is a very important concept in social work practice (Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi 1988; Solomon 1976, in Browne 1995; Morrison Van Voorhis and Hostetter 2006) and is central to the Social Action approach (CSA 2004; Mullender and Ward 1991; Rimmer 2005). There are several definitions and understandings of empowerment, and the concept is ambiguous and vague (Hegar and Hunzeker 1988 in Browne 1995). According to the Oxford Dictionary (2006:379), the definition of the verb *to empower* means the following: "i) to give authority or power to; authorize ii) give strength and

confidence." These two definitions are important, although the second relates more directly to empowerment within social care practice.

Many authors agree that empowerment should be discussed in terms of 'process' (Gutierrez 1990; Mullender and Ward 1991; CSA 2004; Rimmer 2005) and intervention (Parsons and Cox 1989; Solomon 1976, in Browne 1995). Solomon provides a useful definition of empowerment as practised in the social care profession:

> A process whereby the social worker engages in a set of activities with the client [...] that aim to reduce the powerlessness that has been created by negative valuation based on membership in a stigmatised group. It involves identification of the power blocks that contribute to the problem as well as the development and implementation of specific strategies aimed at either the reduction of the effects from indirect power blocks or the reduction of the operations of direct power blocks. (cited in Lee 1991:8)

In addition to emphasising the importance of 'process', the quotation above highlights another important concept in relation to empowerment: that of oppression. Oppression has also been identified by Mullender and Ward (1991), Thompson (1997) and Browne (1995) as a key component to understanding empowerment. Browne (1995:360) explains that "a traditional definition of empowerment focuses on domination and control, individual gain and upward mobility". Therefore, with regard to this definition, an empowering practice is about confronting and challenging oppression emerging from power relationships.

Mullender and Ward (1991:4) describe oppression as something that can be understood

both as a state of affairs in which life chances are constructed, and as the process by which this state of affairs is created and maintained.

The term oppression highlights an act of exploitation that can take a variety of forms (such as economic and social) and that has consequences that impact on the personal level for an individual. It is a process within groups that has power to limit, in an unjust way, the lives, experiences and opportunities of groups who have less power. Thompson (2001:34) describes oppression as the

> inhuman or degrading treatment of individuals or groups; hardship and injustice brought about by the dominance of one group over another; the negative and demeaning exercise of power. Oppression often involves disregarding the right of an individual or group and thus a denial of citizenship.

Denney (1998) also refers to oppression as something focusing directly on power relations, which gives some individuals the power to discriminate against particular social groups. Power is therefore a key component of oppression and empowerment and will be examined later in this chapter. At this point, however, it is important to emphasise that *challenging oppression* has been identified by many authors as the most important concept to apply in terms of an empowering practice (Lee 1994; Breton 1994; Mullender and Ward 1991; Thompson 2006). According to Mullender and Ward, the key purpose of empowering practice is to decrease and finally avoid any form of oppression.

Thompson (1997) agrees that successful empowerment practice involves intervening on the cultural and structural level around the user and that empowerment cannot therefore be achieved while using a one-to-one intervention exclusively. However, Gutierrez and Ortega (1991) argue that

empowerment is also possible on the individual or personal level through one-to-one intervention, although the impact might differ from that identified as structural empowerment. Therefore, while it may be possible to empower service users on a personal level while using one-to-one interventions, working towards cultural and structural empowerment through groupwork and community work could bring about more sustainable forms of empowerment, because structural and cultural oppression can be challenged.

LeBosse et al. (2004) identify various types of empowering practice, from personal empowerment and family empowerment to organisational empowerment and local community empowerment. Gutierrez and Ortega (1991), in relation to social work and empowerment, examine the concept differently, arguing that there are three interlinked levels of empowerment involving different types of intervention. They write about the personal, interpersonal and political levels of empowerment. This typology is useful when taking into account the concepts of oppression and of sharing power. Indeed, instead of arguing what type of action or processes constitute 'empowerment', this typology helps in conceptualising empowerment as a continuum of skills and feelings that help service users in their liberation from oppression, and therefore acknowledges that, although different levels of empowerment lead to different outcomes, the levels are all legitimate and necessary. (Gutierrez and Ortega 1991)

The personal level of empowerment could be described as focusing "on ways in which individuals can develop feelings of personal power and self efficacy" (Gutierrez and Ortega 1991:24). Personal empowerment is the first step for empowerment:

> While empowerment is a multilevel construct that may be applied to organisations, communities, and social policies, psychological empowerment is the expression of this construct at the level of individual persons. (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988:726)

Personal empowerment therefore remains with the person and involves the client or user gaining a *personal feeling of power* about aspects of their life. Even though personal empowerment remains on the personal level, it is nevertheless important for the client or user to understand the causes of disempowerment on a higher level. As Lee (1991:5) adds,

> social work practice with people who experience oppression requires theory that connects the personal and the political.

At this point, however, the concept of personal empowerment implies that a service user, for example, feels empowered and strengthened with regard to their personal conditions, but without gaining an understanding of the causes of disempowerment. It is this form of empowerment that is commonly found in the intervention plans of social workers from statutory social services settings (Dominelli 1997).

The concept of interpersonal empowerment builds from the understanding of personal empowerment: it requires that the individual feels empowered within themselves, but also emphasises

> the development of specific skills which allow individuals to be more capable of influencing others. Skills development can involve such things as training in problem solving or assertiveness (Hirayama 1985; Sarri and DuRivage 1986; Shapiro 1984; Sherman and Wenocur 1983) or learning how to influence the political process (Beck 1983; Mathis and

Richan 1986). In some cases developing skills to increase both interpersonal influence and political power can occur simultaneously (Checkoway and Norsman 1986; Garvin 1985). (Gutierrez and Ortega 1991:25)

Political or structural empowerment, on the other hand,

emphasises the goal of social action and social change. Political empowerment is based on both the personal and interpersonal levels of empowerment, with an additional goal being the transfer of power between groups in society. (Gutierrez and Ortega 1991:25)

Political or structural empowerment means that, not only do users or clients feel more empowered personally (at the personal level of empowerment) and have gained more social skills in order to change their lives, but they also act collectively to change the power imbalance in society. Power is therefore a key concept in understanding the term empowerment and will be explored further below. It is important, however, to note that the literature about power and its foundations is large, and definitions and conceptualisations often differ widely. The aim of the next few pages is therefore to examine different definitions and conceptualisations of power and to discuss them in the light of the different conceptualisations of empowerment.

As explained above, the concept of empowerment can be defined differently depending on the author. Staples (1990:30) defines empowerment as the "process by which power is *gained*, developed, seized, facilitated," while Mullender and Ward (1991:6), in contrast, bring a more political element to the definition, emphasising the concept of change. For them, empowerment is

not only through *winning* power – bringing to those who have been oppressed the exercise of control over what happens to them – but through *transforming* it.

The concept of power is central to the concept of empowerment. In the first definition, Staples (1990) talks about gaining, developing, facilitating or giving power and therefore refers to power as something that can be held or possessed. In the second definition, from Mullender and Ward, the definition of power is different because, instead of talking about possessing power, they talk about transforming it. These two definitions of empowerment reflect different understandings of power. The former reflects a one-dimensional or pluralist view of power, whereas the latter definition, provided by Mullender and Ward (1991), requires a more macro understanding of power. These two ways of understanding power are set below and complement other typologies that were examined during the course of this literature review.

The concept of power is also examined in this section, however, as in addition to being essential to understanding the term empowerment, power is also central to social work as a 'profession'. Indeed, as Banks (2006:77) points out, "while 'caring professionals' may not be regarded as fully professional in many people's eyes, and are given less status and recognition than, for example, doctors, they do wield considerable power, particularly over service users", and through welfare policy, social workers continue to maintain social control (Clark 2005).

The concept of power therefore has more relevance than simply understanding the process of empowerment from the perspectives of a service user and a social worker, that is to say, as an element that can result in the

oppression of the service user by the social worker and, to a certain extent, of the social worker by its agency (Bar-On 2002).

Barnes (1988) refers to many forms of power, for example political, military, economic and ideological. He does not provide his own definition of power, but states that power is "manifest in behaviours". Therefore, for Barnes, power is a form of behaviour in which human beings engage when involved in activities such as the army, politics and the economy. To analyse decision-making in relation to power, Polsby refers to behaviour with a "stress on the study of concrete, observable behaviours" (cited in Lukes 1974:12). Russel (1986:19) also classifies power in regard to behaviour, although he expands his definition and includes power as being "physical", originating from "reward and punishment" or created through "propaganda". This manner of categorising power complements the Barnes (1998) model, in that Barnes talks about how it is applied, whereas Russel (1986) also talks about the setting for its development. These two understandings of power, however, only cover the actions and consequences: they omit to inquire about its roots and the ways it exists in society.

In this respect, Hodas (1999) classifies power as having five sources: *reward* (in the sense of withholding or giving something desired); *coercive* (when it is a question of inflicting some kind of punishment); *legitimate* (when it is used in relation to an institutional sanction, position or authority); *referent* (when it is used for personal attraction) and *expert* (when it derives from superior skills or competence). This definition of power can, however, only partly reflect the situation in social work in so far that practitioners rarely use the referent power. Indeed, most users of social services are not usually 'free' to choose their social

workers or the service they need (Banks 2006), and therefore, perceiving social workers as having 'referent' power would be inaccurate in this context. In addition, social workers abiding by their codes of ethics (BASW 2002) emphasise the values 'service to humanity', 'human dignity and worth' and 'integrity', which are not in line with the utilisation of coercive power, although some social workers may be seen as displaying it by using their statutory power. Social workers, however, by their "semi-professional status" (Banks 2006) exert *expert* power over service users as well as *legitimate* power by the functions they hold within an agency. Indeed, social workers have power over service users in so far that they can withhold or provide a service to those in need. As Rhodes (1986:134) explains in relation to ethical practice,

> social workers must continue to make decisions despite inadequate resources, case overloads, excessive paper work and a labyrinth of rules, all of which contribute to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

Thus, social workers not only exert legitimate power over service users, but are also operating within the legitimate power of the agency for which they work.

The case of excessive paperwork and rules and regulations emphasised by Rhodes (1986) links well with Weber's understanding of power and bureaucracy. For Weber (2002:230),

> Bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy. Bureaucracy is the means of transforming social action into rationally organized action. Therefore, as an instrument of rationally organizing authority relations, bureaucracy was and is a power instrument of the first order for one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus. [...] Where administration has been completely bureaucratized, the resulting system of domination is practically indestructible.

Bureaucracy and its relationship to power are therefore relevant to understanding empowerment and disempowerment, especially in the statutory sector, but are less appropriate in terms of examining these concepts in social action settings where bureaucracy is less important. Further conceptualisations of power must therefore be explored.

Wrong defines power as the "capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others" (cited in Barnes 1988:6). This definition only considers the personal point of view and neglects the social one, but it could complement the definitions cited above. In his definition of power, Weber also puts the emphasis on the personal level, but he adds questions about the "relationship between individuals" when

> power is the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, *regardless of the basis on which this probability rests*. (cited in Barnes 1988:6)

Dahl (1957) also defines power according to the effect on a person. For him, power can be defined in the following way:

> A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do. (Dahl 1957:202–3)

These definitions of power can be classified under what many authors call the one-dimensional view of power (Lukes 1974; McNay 1994). The one-dimensional view of power implies that only one element or dimension is taken into consideration in the analysis of power relationships. Possession of power is the key element of this view. Dahl's (1957) definition of power can be

included under the umbrella of the one-dimensional view, in that his premise is that one either possesses power or one does not. However, one-dimensional views of power are not useful in understanding empowerment in social care practice, and further definitions therefore need examination.

Polsby (1963) and Wolfinger (1960) also discuss this concept of the possession of power through *observable behaviours* and *decision-making processes*, but while talking about possession, they talk about a "pluralist view" (Lukes 1974). A pluralist view, in its general sense, would imply more than one element in the definition of any concept but stresses the importance of decision-making (Lukes 2005). In relation to the pluralist view of power, Marshall (1998:449) argues that

> visible exercises of power may disguise the fact that some groups wield power in less obvious ways and that expressed political preferences are not necessarily equivalent to objective (or 'real') interests.

In addition, Dahl (1961) suggests that some groups or persons can hold power in a more covert way, but that this form of power still has repercussions for the other. Nevertheless, they still talk about possession of power, but add a dimension that is less visible than the concept Dahl presents. Therefore, two forms of power exist within these definitions that relate to the possession itself: *actual* and *potential* power (Lukes 1974). Lukes, however, does not totally agree with the use of the term 'pluralist' in these definitions, as both forms (actual and potential power) "are capable of generating a non-pluralist conclusion" (1974:11), since they incorporate only one dimension (possession) in their conceptualisation of power. In other words, Lukes argues that the term 'pluralist view' should not be used, as it incorporates only one element;

it should instead be called a one-dimensional view, in contrast to a truly pluralist perspective, which would imply more than one element.

Lukes (2005:19) summarises a one-dimensional or pluralist view of power as something that "involves a focus on behaviour in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as express policy preference, revealed by political participations". The pluralist and one-dimensional views of power are similar, although named differently; they are often linked with the concept of 'zero sum', in that if one individual or group or institution possesses power over another, the latter cannot possess the same amount of power. The one-dimensional and pluralist views of power (as defined by Dahl, Wolfinger, Polsby and Barnes) are also closely related, in that they are observable in manifest behaviour and are tangible or can be possessed.

For an understanding of power in relation to empowerment, the one-dimensional and pluralist views of power could be acknowledged, as they can be related to the definition raised by Staples (1990). Staples discussed *gaining* power or being *given* power, where power is something one can possess. Nevertheless, these definitions and conceptualisations of power are insufficient for an understanding of structural empowerment (Gutierrez and Ortega 1991; Mullender and Ward 1991); another level of understanding of power is needed.

Foucault (1983:217) argues that power is something *social* and *structural* rather than individual. His notion of power can help in understanding structural empowerment as presented in the work of Gutierrez and Ortega (1991),

Mullender and Ward (1991) and the Centre for Social Action (2003). Foucault's definition of power highlights *"relationships* between partners [...] and an *ensemble* of actions which induce others and follow from one another" (1983:217). As Foucault maintains, power is

> something *externally* 'held' [...] embodied in a person, a group, an institution or a *structure to be used* for individual, group, organisation or class purpose, a *"system of domination exercised by one group over another"*. (cited in Townley 1994:6)

Power is therefore not possessed, but is exercised by occupying a series of positions within society. Power struggles can be found among individuals in day-to-day reality, but their sources remain structural. Power struggles share common characteristics and are not limited to one place or context, although they will differ in degree and extent:

> In practice, for the worker, this [empowering practice] means undergoing awareness training and learning to deconstruct the oppressive ideologies which are embedded not only in the attitude absorbed by users but in their own personal behaviour and professional practice, and institutionalised in the procedures of their employing organisation (Mullender and Ward 1995:118).

Foucault (1983:112) states that

> the main objective of these [power] struggles is to attack not so much 'such or such' an institution of power, or group or elite or class but rather a technique, a form of power.

Without giving a definition, Foucault rejects the *possession of power* and emphasises *power struggles* instead. Although the concept of 'power struggles' is also examined by conflict theorists such as Marx and Marxist-inspired

writers (Lukes 2005), what Foucault means in this quotation is that, because power is not possessed, it is useless to attack someone who seems to have power, because in fact that person does not possess the power, but instead perpetuates it within society. This differs from a Marxist view of power that implies that it is the ruling class that own the means of production that possess power over the proletariat (Giddens 2006). However, power, according to Foucault, is something intangible and subtle but does not simply refer to class struggle. When talking about power, Foucault (1983) does not talk about possession on a personal level. He stresses the importance of *struggles* across different *forms* of power, rather than possession itself. Social work has been identified as a form of power by Donzelot (1979), an early Foucaultian scholar, who asserts that social work and other philanthropic activities, under a 'preventative' cover, exert power through the control of marginal families. Indeed, Donzelot (1979:197-8) explains that social services

> allow[s] the system to dissolve the resistance of families to the placements that are imposed, on behalf of the necessary socialization of adolescents; to interdict the lines of escape that are constituted by irresponsibility of parents with regard to infant children, on behalf of the necessity of a familial education; to perfect a new system in the utilization of the family for normalization practices.

Foucault and other Foucaultian scholars therefore move to a higher level of analysis. Societies, groups, structures or organisations, where the effects of power are observable, are in fact not really powerful in the sense that they 'possess' the power: their power is apparent mainly because of the relationships they have with these institutions or groups. Power is therefore something that we perceive and experience because of the way society is

structured. In this sense, Danaher et al. (2000:xiv), interpreting Foucault, define power as

> not a thing that is held and used by individual or groups. Rather, it is both a complex flow and a set of relations between different groups and areas of society which changes with circumstances and time.

Power, according to Foucault, is in fact relational and not something that exists on its own, yet it has a strong effect on people's lives. Foucault can be useful in understanding power and empowerment as applied to social work practice (Chambon et al. 1999). Nevertheless, Foucault's understanding of power carries one particular limitation that is worth noting: Foucault does not manage to give a full account of both structure and human activity (Layder 1994). In other words, the term 'power', as understood by Foucault, allows for little social change, as human beings are perceived as powerless in the big picture of power relationships. As Layder (1994:103) explains,

> The person is a container whose self identity and psychological interior is largely a product of the relation of power, discourse and practice in which he or she is enmeshed.

Foucault's understanding of power can therefore undermine the basis for progressive political intervention (Smart 1985), as actors are seen as bearing no weight in the balance of power and social action. Empowerment, based on Foucault's understanding of power, is therefore only possible by increasing resistance toward the mechanisms of power.

A theory that attempts to overcome the problems between structure and personal action is Giddens' Structuration theory. Indeed, Structuration theory

intrinsically related structure to action and vice versa (Elliot 2001) and therefore facilitated the notions of challenging structural oppression and of structural empowerment. Giddens (2002a:238) explains that

> The concept of Structuration involved that of the duality of structure, which relates to the fundamentally recursive character of social life, and expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency.

Therefore, the constraining structure according to Foucault is rejected and replaced by a structure that is both enabling and controlling (Giddens 2002a). As Giddens explains,

> power is expressed in the capabilities of actors to make certain 'accounts count' and to enact or resist sanctioning processes.

Empowerment, according to Giddens' Structuration theory, would be made possible by the social workers' ability to enable the service user to understand the causes of oppression, and in line with Foucault, resist power relationships. Giddens, however, brings an emphasis that differs from Foucault's work: while in Foucault's terms, *resistance* is the *means* as well as the *end* of challenging power relationships, Giddens emphasises that resistance is only the means and that the end is a (however slight) change in the structure itself. Indeed, Giddens (2002a:240) explains that "all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them". Therefore, for Giddens, all social actors have opportunities to make changes on the structure and therefore also have the possibility not only to *gain power* (Staple 1990) but also to transform the system (Mullender and Ward 1991).

This chapter has examined various definitions and understandings of the notions of power and empowerment. However, even though power and empowerment are central to social work practice, they only constitute one aspect of the social work values and ethics that underpin professional social work. The next chapter therefore aims to examine the literature around ethics and values in social work as well as some of the theoretical foundations that underpin ethical social work practice.

# Chapter Four

# Ethics and Values in Social Work Practice

For decades, ethical issues have been a problem for many social care practitioners, managers and researchers. In the UK, a variety of resources have evolved to address the issue of social care ethics. In the 1980s, a government committee was created to define social workers' roles and tasks (National Institute for Social Work 1982). A White Paper published in 1998 on the modernisation of social services in England recommended the establishment of a General Social Care Council, a governmental body to regulate the practice and conduct of social workers and social practitioners (DOH 1998). A code of ethics for social workers has existed since 1975 (BASW 1975), and a new Code of Practice for Social Care Workers is now forming the basis for social work and social care ethics in social care agencies (GSCC 2004). Furthermore, many agencies and organisations offering social care and social services provide their workers with staff handbooks, internal codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for practice. However, Strom-Gottfried and D'Aprix (2006) have noted that the plethora of codes of ethics and codes of conduct have failed to address explicitly the issues faced by those regulated by them.

On the other hand, many books about ethics are available with relevance for different practice contexts (for example social work, youth and community work, or counselling)[4]. This includes one volume specific to social action work, which defines the role of practitioners in this particular setting

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[4] The following examples of this type of resource were consulted in order to cast some light on the ethics of social care: *Ethics and Values in Social work* (Banks 1995); *Ethical Issues in Social Work* (Hugman 1995); *Ethical Issues in Youth Work* (Banks 1999); *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice* (Rhodes 1986).

(Mullender and Ward 1991). The Centre for Social Action was created at De Montfort University in 1995 in order to develop better practice, research and knowledge transfer in the field of social action, with emphasis on the principle of empowerment.

Despite all these resources, social care practitioners have difficulty resolving ethical issues in their work contexts, and their experience shows that many ethical dilemmas still occur (Rhodes 1986; Banks 2001; Banks and Williams 2005; Banks 2006). Social care practitioners' roles and conduct do not always appear to be clearly defined, even when they have recourse to a code of ethics. Social care practice continues to be ethically problematic. As Balloch et al. (1999:1) have pointed out,

> Scandals given prominence in the media, particularly in child protection and residential care, have focused attention on the training and regulation of social care staff and stimulated the demand for performance indicators, measures of quality and guidelines for good practice.

This is partly because none of the above documents have focused enough attention on what makes social care practice ethical. While these publications do provide general guidelines and typologies of different types of dilemmas and act as good reminders of professional values, they do not provide sufficient practical help in solving ethical dilemmas, especially as social care practice occurs in different settings and is highly regulated.

This study arose from the inadequacy of such broad guidelines in helping practitioners to resolve the ethical dilemmas they face in their practices. The main aim of this research project was to investigate and compare

practitioners' experiences in relation to their ethics and conduct across three different social-practice settings: statutory social services, non-governmental organisations (voluntary sector) and social action settings. A further aim was to identify differences and similarities in practitioners' decision-making processes in these settings and to explore the issue of the interface between the three sectors.

This chapter will begin with an exploration and clarification of the key definitions and theoretical perspectives underlying the research as they were understood at the beginning of the research process. Concepts of ethics and ethical dilemmas will be examined, followed by an examination of the concepts of power and empowerment.

## Ethics

For decades, the study of ethics has attracted the attention of the social work profession, not just in the UK but also internationally. In the English context, the Care Standards Act 2000, which led to the establishment of the General Social Care Council, aimed to protect service users, employers and social workers/social care practitioners through the publication of codes of ethics. Many authors provide frameworks for ethical decision-making processes (Legault 1997; Goovaerts 2003; Windheuser 2003), while some others emphasise the importance of thorough assessments of documentation policies and procedures (Reamer 2005), with the emphasis on dialogue (Rhodes 1986), moral reasoning (Kaplan 2006) and reflective and reflexive practice (Banks 2006) for resolving real-life ethical issues. However, the actual situation in

England remains the same: practitioners work in difficult situations that often result in ethical dilemmas.

Contributing to this situation is the complexity and diversity of social work and social care practice. Banks (2001:1) states that

> Social work has always been a difficult occupation to define because it has embraced work in a number of different sectors (public, private, independent, voluntary), a multiplicity of different settings (residential homes, area offices, community development projects), with workers taking on a range of different tasks (caring, controlling, empowering, campaigning, assessing, managing) for a variety of different purposes (redistribution of resources to those in need, social control and rehabilitation of the deviant, prevention or reduction of social problems).

This is also supported by Rhodes (1986), who adds that special areas of competence in social work and social care are less well defined than they are in other professions, such as medicine; indeed, when philosophers refer to the social realm, ethical issues are perhaps less clear cut than is the case in medicine. It is usually more straightforward to realise that an ethical error has been made when looking at physical consequences, rather than emotional or mental ones. Moreover, because the social welfare system is complicated and encompasses many sectors (each one employing people with different roles, competencies and qualifications), the elaboration of a code of conduct and code of ethics, that is the development of guidelines on ethical decision-making and frameworks for resolving ethical dilemmas, has always been an issue in social work and social care practice (Banks 1995).

## Ethics, Ethical Dilemmas, Issues and Problems in Social Work

According to Webster's Dictionary (1998), ethics can be defined as follows: i) the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation, and ii) sets or theories of moral principles or values. This definition does not distinguish between different kinds of ethics or the various specific fields to which ethics can be applied. Another definition is provided by Banks (2006), who defines ethics as the study of morals, the behavioural norms people follow concerning what is right or wrong, good or bad. Both these definitions are similar and highlight three key concepts: morals, values and behavioural norms. Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Kant have also defined ethics as the study of rightness and wrongness (Vardy and Grosch 1999). Therefore, the term 'ethics' tends to be defined differently by different authors, as Böhme (2001:11) notes:

> The field of ethics is divided up in various ways. Such classifications have to do with a degree of universality, for example. Thus one speaks of general and specific ethics. But distinctions are also made, according to the addressee, between individual ethics and social ethics, or according to the type of behaviour, between the ethics of striving or the ethics of virtue, and regulatory ethics or moral philosophy.

For the purpose of this research, ethics is understood as being not only comprised of morals, values and behavioural norms, but also of judgements about what can be considered to be right or wrong, morally acceptable or not, and of moral philosophy.

Ethical dilemmas are the result of conflicting ethical concerns, and they emerge because of conflict between different values: they are practical

conflicts that imply at least two possible courses of action. Banks and Williams (2005:1006) refer to a dilemma as a "choice between two equally unwelcome alternatives". The alternatives, even when they take the form of practical situations, can be understood on a theoretical level in the realm of philosophy, and therefore ethical dilemmas can be solved by using different moral perspectives (Rhodes 1986; Banks 2006; Becket and Maynard 2005; Clark 2000; Hugman 2005), some of which will be covered in the next section. Therefore, a dominant moral perspective used in ethical problem-solving strongly influences the decision-making process and therefore the course of action taken, which might differ if another perspective were chosen.

Ethical problems often emerge from a confrontation of two opposing values conflicting with one another (Kimmel 1988; Banks 2006; Becket and Maynard 2005). These values can be personal, professional, social or even explicitly philosophical and taken from a moral perspective. Becket and Maynard (2005) refer to "values in tension" when societal values, agency values, professional values or personal values conflict with one another but values in tension potentially occur in the same category, for example between two different professional values. Ethical dilemma therefore implies at least two different ways to resolve a situation that involves two different possible solutions or two opposite actions. Banks (2001) writes that ethical dilemmas occur

> when the social worker sees herself as faced with a choice between two
> unequally unwelcome alternatives which may involve a conflict of
> moral principles and it is not clear which choice will be the right one.
> (Banks 2001:11)

Banks and Williams (2005) make a useful distinction between ethical dilemmas, ethical issues and ethical problems. While the first is clearly a

choice between two equally unwelcome alternatives (Banks 1995; Banks 2001; Banks 2006), ethical problems evolve around a "situation where a decision had to be made but where there was no dilemma for the person making the decision" (Banks and Williams 2005:1011). An ethical issue, on the other hand, arises when a situation again involves an ethical dimension, but when this dimension is unarticulated by, or even unconscious to, the person experiencing the situation, and results in no attempt at all to act more ethically. However, most literature around ethics and social work concerns the concept of ethical dilemmas where two courses of action are in conflict, and therefore, at this point, the research focuses solely on the concepts of ethics and 'ethical dilemmas'.

As explained earlier, ethical problems often emerge from a confrontation of two opposing values conflicting with one another (Kimmel 1988; Banks 2006; Becket and Maynard 2005). These values, when in conflict, foster the emergence of ethical dilemmas. However, Rhodes (1986) raises the prospect that the work of social workers is often influenced more by the organisation's rules than by the client's needs or social work values. Banks (2006) also identifies that ethical issues in social work arise in relation to the broader context when she defines four different areas of professional practice in which dilemmas take place: social workers are often faced with issues around individual rights and welfare; issues around public welfare, which include the rights and interests of non-service users; issues around equality, difference and structural oppression; and issues around professional roles, boundaries and relationships. Indeed, the power of the practitioner is an important element in conflict identified by Rhodes (1986) and Banks (1997). Moreover, social care practitioners in general have a multitude of roles, and there is often

conflict between these roles. For example, is it better to adopt an empowering and enabling approach or a controlling one? This sort of question often leads to ethical dilemmas. Finally, Banks (1997) identifies that dilemmas often occur between the values of the person, their professional values, those of the agency and societal values. Indeed, as mentioned above, many people employed in social care practice are regulated or influenced by elements external to them, for example policies and procedures, funding and codes of ethics. However, the social care practitioner has additional influences, such as their personal values and professional expertise. These values may often be in conflict, thus causing ethical dilemmas.

Banks's (1997) explanation of ethics in social care practice is interesting in that it identifies the dimensions of ethical conflicts and dilemmas and the important elements of ethical dilemmas but omits to define the primary root of these elements. Her explanation of the elements of ethical dilemmas is useful in identifying the situation, but is less useful in weighing up solutions for the resolution of ethical dilemmas. In addition to examining different types of ethical dilemmas in social care, another way of examining ethical decision-making is to explore different moral theories. The next sections will examine some of the most popular moral theories and their applications to social work practice.

## Moral Perspectives for Understanding Social Work Ethics

For thousands of years, moral philosophers have tried to develop theories that would accommodate citizens when faced with dilemmas or difficult

situations.[5] These moral theories are now known as moral perspectives and can be used to guide people to behave rightly towards each other and also to influence perceptions about rightness and wrongness. The adherence to certain moral perspectives as opposed to others also influences the development of codes of ethics and codes of conduct (Banks 2006), and therefore, moral philosophies are of particular interest for this research.

Ethical conduct can be defined in different ways depending on the many traditions in philosophy that can be used to provide an understanding of the nature of ethics. These traditions have been identified in various ways by different authors. For example, Wall (1974) isolated eight kinds of ethical or moral traditions: religious ethics, intuitionism, formalism, naturalism, emotivism, the 'good reason approach', prescriptivism and existentialism. Vardy and Grosch (1999) explored ten that are, for the most part, different from those examined by Wall. The study of ethics has therefore developed according to different 'tangents' in a similar way to the development of sociology in relation to the influences of Marxism, structuralism, symbolic interactionism and so on. Each of these different moral philosophies, as applied to the study of ethics, has its strengths and weaknesses, and each one provides guidance in understanding what is good or bad through different lenses. Rhodes (1986), in relation to social work practice, examines utilitarian theories, Kantian theories, rights-based theories, Marxist-based theories, intuitionism theory and virtue-based or relationship-based theory. On the other hand, Banks (2006) categorises moral philosophies into only two, that is to say 'principle-based ethics', which includes Kantian and utilitarian theories, and 'character- and relationship-based ethics', which includes virtue ethics,

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[5] Examples of these theories include the Kantian approach, utilitarian ethics, virtue ethics, ethics of care, feminist ethics and emotivism.

feminist ethics and ethics of care. Finally, Clark (2006) explains that social work ethics is ruled by three families of moral theories, that is to say the duty-based (Kantian ethics), the outcome-based (utilitarian ethics) and virtue ethics.

The best-utilised perspectives in social work and social care practice are Kantian and utilitarian ethics (Banks 1995; Wilks 2005), although virtue ethics and other philosophies deriving from it have begun to regain popularity during the last decade (Rhodes 1986; McBeath and Webb 2002; Houston 2003; Clark 2006). Starting from a combination of Rhodes's (1986) and Banks's (2006) categorisations of moral philosophy for social work, the following section will explore the fundamentals of Kantian and utilitarian ethics under the umbrella of 'principle-based ethics' and will then go on to the character- and relationship-based ethics and examine the rudiments of intuitionism and emotivism perspectives as well as virtue ethics.

## Principle-based Ethics: Utilitarian and Kantian Ethics

Although Hume (1711–1776) refers to "utility" and Hutcheson (1694–1746) to "the greatest good for the greatest number" in defining the notions of right and wrong, it was only from Bentham (1748–1832) that the concept of utilitarian ethics emerged, in particular in his book *A Fragment on Government* (Vardy and Grosch 1999). Many critiques of utilitarianism appeared, including those written by Mill (1806–1873) and Ross (1877–1971). Although many versions of this perspective were developed, the essence of utilitarianism influenced many of the values that were translated into codes of practice and regulations applicable to the social care profession. Utilitarianism as a moral philosophy is

categorised under 'principle-based' ethics because the right course of action can be predicted based on principles of utility.

In a nutshell, utilitarian philosophy is based on the premise that

> a particular action is justified as being right by showing that it is in accord with some moral rules [...] and that [...] moral rule is shown to be correct by showing that the recognition of that rule promotes the ultimate end. (Urmson, in Foot 1990:130)

This is usually summarised in the phrase, "The greatest happiness for the greatest number" (Vardy and Grosch 1999:63). As Almond (1985:7) points out,

> For a utilitarian, a multiplicity of individual interests – what is good for each member of society – make up the common interest – what is good for all, or at least the most. [...] For the utilitarian, then, the ethically right action is whatever maximizes the welfare or happiness of the greatest number of people affected by it. Utilitarianism is a form of ethical consequentialism, in that it makes right or wrong depending on the consequences or outcome of an action, as opposed to either the means by which it is achieved or the nature of the action itself.

The ultimate end in terms of utilitarian moral philosophy is that which serves the majority of the people involved. Therefore, the utilitarian approach weighs right or wrong actions by examining the consequences they have on society in general.

Utilitarian moral philosophy claims that the greatest good for the greatest number of people would be the right thing to do. The present system of social welfare is largely influenced by the utilitarian tradition of moral philosophy in that many social policies and budgets aim to offer services to the greatest

number of service users. In addition, various codes of conduct are influenced by utilitarian values (Banks 2006; Rhodes 1986). For example, the following statement can be found in the draft code of conduct and practice for social care workers:

> As a social care worker you must, to the best of your ability' balance the rights of service users and carers with the interests of society. This includes: balancing rights of service users whose behaviour represents a risk to themselves or other people with the paramount interest of public safety. (GSSC 2002:4–5)

This ethical tradition, however, often clashes with the user's needs and the self-determination of the clients or their right to confidentiality (Rhodes 1986), which is often referred to in terms of Kantian ethics. Therefore, while the utilitarian tradition has acquired an important degree of influence over the provision of social care services, it only provides a framework for understanding ethical decision-making, especially in relation to concepts such as resource distribution and fairness (Banks 2001) and social problems (Rhodes 1986). In addition, the utilitarian approach to ethics has been criticised for not taking into account the personal relationship element of social work, and thus, 'pure' utilitarianism regarding social work has not been well developed (Banks 2006).

Kantian ethics, on the other hand, is usually related to concepts such as respect for the person and self-determination (Banks 1995), and as Hugman points out, it is also concerned with fairness: "Kant's categorical imperative can be seen as a statement that implies fairness as a moral good, because it asserts that what applies for one person should apply for everyone in similar circumstances" (2005:16). However, Kantian ethics is usually perceived as different to

utilitarian ethics in so far as it claims that right action is based not on principles of utility but on principles of good will and self-determination, invariably regarded as a core social work value (Preston-Shoot 2002, in Ellis and Rogers 2004).

A Kantian approach supposes that the individual should be perceived as self-determining and fully able to take his or her own decisions (Hugman 2005). Kant believes in "the assertion that nothing is unconditionally good except a good will, whose worth is entirely separable from the value of the results it brings about" (cited in Norman 1985:97). Norman goes on to say that

> This initial claim derives its plausibility from the widely held idea that moral evaluations focus primarily on people's intention. People are not morally blamed if, through no fault of their own, their good intentions lead to unfortunate results. (Norman 1985:97)

Rachels (1986:115) adds that, according to Kant,

> Humans have an intrinsic worth, i.e. *dignity* because they are rational agents – that is free agents capable of making their own decisions, setting their own goals, and guiding their conduct by reason.

Therefore, according to Kant, if human beings follow their self-determination, because they know what is good for them, they should thus take a decision that is good for them. In terms of ethical social care practice, a Kantian approach would imply that the social worker should respect the user's self-determination (Rhodes 1986). Kant's moral philosophy is underpinned by an understanding that "we should treat others as beings who have ends (that is choices and desires) not just as objects of our own ends" (Banks 1995:28). Therefore, acting

ethically, according to Kant, is acting for the interests of the user only, not for the interests of the practitioner or the agency.

An emphasis on self-determination is important with regard to the Kantian tradition of moral philosophy, but so are the principles of acceptance, a non-judgemental attitude and confidentiality (Banks 1995). These Kantian principles were in fact part of the values of social work as defined by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in terms of the requirements for social work training. Indeed, all students studying for the Diploma in Social Work needed, among other values, to show a commitment to the

> value and dignity of individuals, right to respect, privacy and confidentiality, right of individual and family to choose. (CCETSW, cited in Banks 1995:38)

These values are directly inspired by Kant's moral philosophy and are very important in day-to-day social work:

> Kant aims to ensure that we eliminate self-interest in the particular situation in which we find ourselves. (Vardy and Grosch 1999:57–8)

Nevertheless, social workers and social care practitioners also have to follow different guidelines and procedures prescribed by their agencies, and issues may occur in relation to the application of Kant's approach in practice. Banks (1995) stated that the interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy could pose a problem for practical ethics because principles of self-determination and confidentiality often clash with existing rules and regulations. Warburton

supports the view that Kant's moral principles do not always yield satisfactory solutions to moral questions.

> If, for example, I have a duty always to tell the truth, and also a duty to protect my friend, Kant's theory would not show me what I ought to do when these two duties conflict. If a madman carrying an axe asked me where my friend was, my first inclination would be to tell him a lie. To tell the truth would be to shirk the duty I have to protect my friend. But on the other hand, according to Kant, to tell a lie, even in such an extreme situation, would be an immoral act: I have an absolute duty never to lie. (Warburton 1999:47)

Kant's moral philosophy may therefore clash with other values of practice such as confidentiality and other values translated through guidelines, regulations and internal workplace policies and procedures. As Rhodes (1986) explains, Kantian ethics does not always fit with the institutions and political structures in which social work takes place. Webb and McBeath (1990) also agree that Kantian ethics do not fully fit the social work tasks and roles because of the relationship of power between the social worker and the service user.

Consequently, despite an important contribution to the fields of ethics, principle-based approaches do not seem to answer fully the needs of practitioners faced with ethical dilemmas, mainly because they either omit to take into consideration the context in which social work takes place or the relationship in which social work intervention takes place. In addition, many authors point out that, although the typology used may change slightly, many ethical conflicts in social work practice evolved between the rights and welfare of several people against the rights and welfare of one service user (Banks 2006; Becket and Maynard 2005; Rhodes 1986). Consequently, since different

principles are sometimes at issue, it is relevant to examine another approach to social work ethics: relationship- and character-based ethics.

## Relationship- and Character-based Approaches to Ethics

The general terms 'character-based' ethics and 'relationship-based' ethics are usually directly related to the person facing the ethical dilemma as opposed to a set of 'principles' used to guide the action (as explored in the section above). Character- and relationship-based ethical systems generally refer to a variety of moral theories such as virtue ethics and ethics of care, but also include moral theories such as intuitionism ethics because of the nature of this particular theory not relying on a set of beliefs that guide the action. Since 'ethics of care' is usually mainly concerned with 'feminist ethics', and because an examination of gender is not included in this research, the following section will explore the two main schools of thought related to character-based ethics, that is to say intuitionism on the one hand and virtue ethics on the other.

Intuitionism is an umbrella term and refers to various moral perspectives that believe that there are no rational systems for resolving ethical issues and that ethical decision-making thus rests on intuition (Rhodes 1986). Emotivism is a form of intuitionism and can be helpful in order to understand social care practice. Vardy and Grosch (1999:110) state that

> emotivism is probably the best-known meta-ethical theory[6] in that it focuses exclusively on the language being used and the meanings

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[6] ' Emotivism as a moral philosophy is classified within meta-ethics, as it refers to an analysis that takes place after the ethical dilemma has occurred.

being suggested, and not at all on the rightness or wrongness of the character of the person, or the principles and purposes followed.

As opposed to principle-based ethics, emotivism or intuitionism (I shall use the terms interchangeably) does not try to prescribe the types of behaviour that could be considered right or wrong, but instead tries to understand that it depends on the person facing the dilemma. Rhodes (1986:39) explains that "the appeal of this approach is that it enables us to act flexibly without 'sacrificing' a client to a moral principle. In some situations, we may have a 'gut' feeling that we must, say, preserve confidentially, even though we cannot find an adequate justification." The intuitionist perspective acknowledges that what can be perceived as good by one person can be interpreted as bad by another. Since the purpose of the research was to explore the ethical issues experienced by social care practitioners from a variety of fields, this moral philosophy could be appropriately used in this particular research context. MacIntyre (1999) embodies emotivism within what he calls "impersonal criteria". He explains that what is good or bad can be understood as a preference for certain individuals. He also maintains that what is most important in relation to the emotivist moral perspective is not what is morally good or bad, but rather what the 'speaker' or 'hearer' perceives or feels about what is good or bad. For emotivists, ethics is therefore very subjective and depends on the relationship between the people involved in the dilemma. Vardy and Grosch (1999:82) define emotivism as

> the moral theory based on people's emotive response to other people [...] Emotive response here simply means a person's feelings about something. Hence emotivism is concerned principally, if not exclusively, with how people feel about something.

Emotivism is a philosophy that can help in understanding the experience of social care practitioners and social workers. Indeed, as mentioned, the system of social welfare varies throughout England (Banks 2006), and social care practitioners and social workers generally hold different values depending on their training, personal histories or fieldwork. Therefore, using emotivism as a moral perspective to understand ethics in social care practice in England would enable researchers, practitioners and philosophers to understand that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and that, instead, what is considered to be right or wrong depends on personal interpretations of a given situation. However, there are some weaknesses within emotivism as related to this research, since codes of practice and codes of ethics would not have much application. Additionally, because emotivism claims the concept of 'personal preference', it neglects to take into consideration the culture and structure of the society that shapes individuals (Thompson 1997). Rhodes (1986:39), in a similar vein, points out that the weakness of the approach is that "we may find ourselves acting on the basis of prejudice or personal whim". Therefore, even though ethical approaches under the umbrella of intuitionism provides an explanation for ethics and moral dilemmas, it is not very useful when a practitioner is faced with a dilemma in practice. Another form of a character- or relationship-based approach to ethics is 'virtue' ethics.

Virtue ethics derives from the works of Plato (c.427BC) and Aristotle (c.384BC), who defined morality around the question of character (i.e. what sort of person should one be?) (Vardy and Grosch 1999). Morse (1999:50) explains that virtue theorists argue that

> an individual's action in a given moral situation follows from the character traits which he or she has developed through the course of his or her life.

Ideally, a person strives to develop a set of positive character traits which lead to moral act, and these are known as the virtues.

As Warburton (1999:54) points out,

> Unlike Kantians and Utilitarians, who typically concentrate on the rightness or wrongness of particular actions, virtue theorists focus on character and are interested in the individual's life as a whole. The central question for virtue theorist is 'how should I live?' The answer they give to this question is: cultivate the virtues. It is only by cultivating the virtues that you will flourish as a human being.

Virtue ethics is a form of moral approach that does not take into consideration the action and the reason for the action, but instead emphasises the importance of 'character' and personality, which is the product of a fine balance, a mean between vice and excess (Hugman 2005). For the virtue ethicist, a good person will act in a good way, not because of their principles or duty, but because they are a good person. As Banks (2006:55) comments, a person will not tell a lie,

> not because of some abstract principles stating 'you shall not lie' or because on this occasion telling the truth will produce a good result, but because they do not want to be the sort of person who tells lies.

Virtue ethics was the main moral perspective until the eighteenth century, but lost popularity with the emergence of modern moral theories such as Kantian, utilitarian and, in particular, emotivist moral perspectives (MacIntyre 1985; Lynch and Lynch 2006). However, it regained popularity from the second half of the twentieth century with the publication of such books as *Modern Moral Philosophy* (Anscombe 1958) and *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1985), which claim a

return to virtue ethics from a reaction against consequentialist and deontologist moral theories (cited in Vardy and Grosh 1999). Virtue ethics is nowadays associated with Aristotle and MacIntyre (Lynch and Lynch 2006).

MacIntyre tries to revive 'virtue' ethics, as he believes that previous moral philosophies have failed to find the truth about rightness and wrongness:

> The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed is their interminable character. I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on and on – although they do – but also that they apparently can find no terminus. There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture. (MacIntyre 1985:6)

As noted above in the introduction to the various moral philosophies, each of the perspectives used poses different solutions and problems in relation to ethical issues. This is exactly what MacIntyre points out in *After Virtue* (1985). From this starting point, he offers quite a different perspective, arguing a case against the emotivist moral perspective and other moral philosophies developed during the Enlightenment (including the Kantian and utilitarian perspectives presented above), because these moral perspectives are studied – and used to debate ethical issues – outside their historical contexts. He illustrates his point in arguing that

> We all too often still treat the moral philosophers of the past as contributors to a single debate with a relatively unvarying subject-matter, treating Plato and Hume and Mill as contemporaries both of ourselves and of each other. This leads to an abstraction of these writers from the cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest of the culture. Kant ceases to be part of the history of Prussia, Hume is no longer a Scotsman. Far from the

standpoint of moral philosophy as *we* conceive it these characteristics
have become irrelevances. (MacIntyre 1985:11)

In addition to opposing the use of modern moral perspectives in ethical
debates, MacIntyre (1985) argues against the notion of right and wrong being a
matter of personal preference (emotivism), or that of ethics being decided on
the basis of the concepts of rights (Kantianism) or utility (utilitarianism).This
rejection is particularly emphasised in his thesis when he discusses that ethics
grounded on an emotivist perspective cannot be understood as being purely an
"expression of personal preference", as human beings, according to him, are
very often involved in manipulative relationships that would affect judgement
about preferences. As a result of this analysis, MacIntyre (1985) emphasises his
claim for a return to virtue ethics, to which virtues, according to him, must be
embedded within "practices" and "traditions" in order to develop morally
good conduct in society. Therefore, in addition to taking into consideration
what he calls the "narrative" or historical context, MacIntyre points out that it is
essential to incorporate the concepts of "practices" and "traditions" into the
development of virtues.

MacIntyre (1985:187) defines practice as

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative
> human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity
> are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of
> excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that
> form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve
> excellence, and human conception of the ends and goods involved, are
> systematically extended.

In order to illustrate his understanding of the concept, MacIntyre uses practical examples:

> Tick-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music. (MacIntyre 1985:187)

Practices are therefore sets of activities that are recognised by groups of people practising them and that provide *internal goods*. Goods internal to practice include elements such as analytical skills, strategic imagination, competitive intensity and reasoning. Examples of goods external to practice are money, prestige and power (MacIntyre 1985). Social work could fit into the definition of 'practice' as understood by MacIntyre. First, social work involves a "coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity" (MacIntyre 1985:187). Second, it includes goods (or gains) internal to its practice, such as analytical skills, the capacity to evaluate, self-awareness, creativity, patience and compassion (Vass 1996). Third, social work is a profession that strives to excel in its practice: this can be examined through the multitude of reports on social work practice, the governing bodies and different practice committees (see chapter one). Finally, there is continuity in the activity and an underlying historical development in which skills continue to build from generation to generation "with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conception of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (MacIntyre 1985:187). As explored in Chapter Two, social work practice has taken place within a historical context and has continued to evolve since the beginning of "modern" social work in 1921

(Payne and Shardlow 2002). However, practice, in the moral perspective developed by MacIntyre, is not sufficient for the development of the virtues necessary for moral practice. In order to evolve, practice needs to take place within a tradition. MacIntyre does not, however, provide any definition of his understanding of tradition, as Porter comments:

> Clearly, any study of MacIntyre's thought must take account of the central place that he gives to the concept of tradition. Yet this task is complicated by the fact that, even though MacIntyre discusses tradition extensively, he never defines the term nor does he situate his account of tradition in the context of other recent discussions. (cited in Murphy 2003:38)

Horton and Mendus (1994) elaborate on MacIntyre's conception of tradition. Indeed, a 'tradition' can be understood as a set of institutions that are the "medium by which such practices are shaped and transmitted across generations" (Horton and Mendus 1994:10).

These traditions can be religious, economic, aesthetic or geographical (MacIntyre 1999). In other words, the concept of 'tradition' as understood by MacIntyre (1985) forms the structure and culture in which society is shaped. MacIntyre's main point is that ethics is not only a question of personal preference, but instead is influenced by individuals as well as the institutions to which individuals belong and the culture and structure of their society. This belief reinforces MacIntyre's rejection of emotivism and other modern moral philosophies, as they do not include any historical context in their uses. Tradition is therefore very important in MacIntyre's thesis, as it bridges the gap between the concept of practice (where ethical practice would occur on a

practical basis) and the concept of virtue (the concept that leads to a morally good life):

> The virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if the variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provide both practice and individual lives with their necessary historical context. (MacIntyre 1985:223)

MacIntyre believes in a return to virtue, which is only made possible by taking into consideration historical contexts and acting within defined practices that are embedded in traditions. The concepts of practice and tradition are especially important in trying to conceptualise the appropriateness of virtue within social work practice. Indeed, a return to the historical roots of social work practice and an emphasis on the importance of values would enable practitioners to develop the virtue needed in social work and, consequently, to practise social work values regardless of the management style, power structures and regulation cultures that are ever present in social work.

It is important, however, to point out that MacIntyre's *After Virtue* philosophy is not one of those most commonly used in current definitions of ethics across the field of social care practice and that virtue ethics has not received much consideration in social work (Houston 2003). Most current codes of ethics in social work are not built on an understanding of emotivism or MacIntyre's moral philosophy, but rather on Kantian and utilitarian approaches (Banks 1995; McBeath and Webb 2002; Wilks 2005). However, the moral perspective of

virtue ethics as applied to contemporary social work practice has gained in popularity during the last decades (McBeath and Webb, 2002; Banks 2001; Clark 2005).

Drawing on a range of social theories,[7] McBeath and Webb (2002) defend a return to virtue ethics as constituting an appropriate response to the prescriptive and highly regulated system of social welfare in which social workers and social care practitioners must currently operate.

One of the critiques of McBeath and Webb's thesis, and generally in relation to virtue ethics applied to social work practice, concerns the "insufficient attention given to the problem of how virtue is defined and established in the first instance" (Houston 2003:819). Houston (2003) suggests a "Habermasian"[8] model for developing virtues, while Morse (1999) suggests that virtues or character traits are developed by the performance of an action that reflects this trait and that further action reinforces the development of the character. Indeed,

> Through habituation over a long period of time, the person acquires the 'virtue' as [a] fixed disposition of his or her character. (Morse 1999:50)

McBeath and Webb (2002) identify elements such as developing analytical ability and skills as well as cultivating a moral 'character', which, in their opinion, would enable the social worker to be 'virtuous'. They suggest that virtues can be developed through experience, reflection and circumspection but they are unclear as to how this can be successfully achieved in practice. Other authors attempt to list a range of virtues appropriate to social work practice

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[7] McBeath and Webb refer to a number of social theorists in their thesis: examples of theorists consulted include Antony Giddens (1991), Michel Foucault (1977) and Jurgen Habermas (1984).

(Rhodes 1986; Beauchamp and Childress 1994, in Banks 2001), although Rhodes (1986) does not develop a virtue-ethics model for social work but instead questions the relationships between the clients, agency, professional colleagues and society as a whole (cited in Banks 2001).

## Social Work Values and Codes of Ethics

Thus far, the literature review on ethics has provided an opportunity to examine a variety of conceptualisations of ethical dilemmas in practice, as well as four different moral perspectives under two broader umbrellas as applied to the social work context. Because the study aims to explore how social care practitioners from different work settings behave in relation to ethical issues and dilemmas in practice, as well as to examine the factors that influence their decisions on specific areas of the ethical spectrum, the following section intends to discuss one particular area of the literature on ethics and social work that has a great impact on the way ethical dilemmas are resolved: codes of ethics and codes of practice for social work. This section therefore aims to give an overview of social work values through examining different codes of practice and codes of ethics and exploring the rationale for utilising such codes in social work contexts.

The British Association of Social Work (BASW) (1975) defines five core values for social work, and the ethical principles found in their code of ethics are derived from these values (Strom-Gottfried and D'Aprix 2006). The values of 'Human Dignity and Worth', 'Competence', 'Integrity', 'Social Justice' and 'Service to Humanity' were the fundamentals of BASW's (1975) first code of

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[8] A Habermasian model involved group reflection with the aim of reaching consensus.

ethics. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), on the other hand, bases their codes of ethics around 29 standards of conduct (Strom-Gottfried and D'Aprix 2006) but, unlike the BASW, does not state a core value for social work practice. The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (1989) defines five values, whereas the General Social Care Council (2002) does not define a value base for social work but instead provides six 'headings' for practice that constitute general statements of social work aims.

Despite the disagreement of various professional bodies and social work organisations on a universal set of values, social work world-wide is based around two basic principles identified by Lynn (1999) as "personal caring" and "social justice" (O'Brian 2003). On the other hand, Banks (2006:44–46) explains that the literature around the principles and values of British social work all revolve around the concepts of "respect for persons" and "service users' self-determination", a "commitment to the promotion of social justice", and the concept of "professional integrity". However, O'Brian adds that, with the rapid change in British social work through the development of new policies regulation and guidelines, as

> professional judgment becomes circumscribed [...], the social worker's role is somewhat different than ones that are based on the two values of personal caring and social justice. A third value base appears to have emerged that we might call 'resource and risk management'. (O'Brian 2003:391)

Therefore, the social work value base, although made paramount in many documents and texts, differs slightly from one author or organisation to another. Nevertheless, social work values always rest on either the principles

of respecting the individual, of social justice or of professional competences. As a result, specific codes of ethics have emerged and need to be examined in the context of specific social work practice.

Having said that, many authors use a code of ethics as a starting point to solve ethical dilemmas (Levy 1976; Reamer 1982). As Witkin (2000:198) points out,

the code of ethics serves several functions: providing guidance to social workers, protecting and reassuring the public, legitimizing our claim to professional status, and fostering the allegiance of members to the profession.

Nevertheless, a code of ethics is only a general guideline to help those with dilemmas to solve them (Reamer 1982). Witkin (2000:199) explains that,

like all dominant discourses, mainstream ethical beliefs tend to function in ways that preserve the social order. Codes and rules, although necessary and well-intentioned, have a transcontextual quality that favours people in socially advantageous positions. For people who see themselves as victim of that order, ethical prescriptions may seem more like instruments of control than moral guides.

Before the BASW published their code of ethics, which was the first of its kind in British social work, Millerson (1964) identified certain factors that determine the need for introducing a code of ethics in social work practice. He stated that concepts such as the type of practice (for example those in the voluntary sector or statutory services), the nature of practice and the techniques used, must all be comprehended by users for their protection. However, Millerson (1964) does not suggest ways to incorporate variations in the practice setting, the nature of practice or the multi-cultural dimension of the intervention. It is clear that one code of ethics cannot answer all the needs

emerging from different practice settings, let alone from different types of professional social care training. Moral perspectives, the values of the profession, different interests and agencies' core values all influence the perception of what is good or bad for a client, a group or a population.

Furthermore, Leighton (1985), referring to the practice of social work, argues that social workers must not only consider the BASW code when dealing with an ethical dilemma,

> because some of the boundaries of social work activities have a fundamental impact on ethical principles. For example, community and groupwork must adopt a very different standard of confidentiality from private psychotherapy. (Leighton 1985:60)

Therefore, Leighton (1985) is clear that one code of ethics cannot meet the needs of every type of social care practice. However, in 2000, the Department of Health was producing a new piece of legislation known as the Care Standards Act 2000, which would recommend the creation of the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Consequently, in 2002, the British government announced the emergence of the GSCC, a statutory body that aims to protect service users, to provide better social services to the population and to regulate the practice of social care across England by making compulsory guidelines such as a new code of conduct for social care practitioners as well as one for employers. The Chair of the GSCC, Rodney Brook, justified the creation of these codes with the following argument:

> These codes are a clear statement of how registered social care workers and employers should behave. People who work in social care are in a position of great responsibility, doing work which has a direct impact

on people's lives, often at times of stress. Now, for the first time, we have set down clearly exactly what we the public can expect. I hope this will also lead to a better understanding from the public of what social care workers can and should do. (Brooke, 2002:1)

The guidelines found in the GSCC codes of conduct were developed to take into account the varied elements of social work and social care values, such as respect, confidentiality, skills of listening and communication, judgement in assessing risk, honesty, reliability in workers' relationships with users, knowledge about services, and flexibility and fairness in the provision of services (Brand 1998). The aim of the Council is to become established as the statutory regulatory body for Personal Social Services (GSCC 2001), setting and enforcing standards of good conduct and practice. Protection of the public is ensured in all sectors by publishing codes of conduct and by compulsory registration of members.

As noted above, two codes of conduct are now available from the GSCC: a code of conduct for employers and a code of conduct for employees (GSCC 2002). The code of conduct for employers aims to complement rather than replace existing agency policies with many social care service providers (GSCC 2002). The GSCC and the social care agencies are responsible for reinforcing social care practitioners' compliance with the codes (Strom-Gottfried and D'Aprix 2006). Compliance is also ensured by the process of registration of all social care workers and practitioners and by close monitoring of social care practitioners' adherence to the GSCC's six 'headings' (Department of Health 2002). This reform includes all social care practitioners, qualified or non-qualified: in other words, the GSCC codes of conduct are for all workers who provide social services.

Nevertheless, the codes are set out in terms of general guidelines and expose the same problems as previously published codes (IFSW, BASW and other codes of ethics published by social work organisations). The codes suggest ways to behave, but as Rhodes (1986) argues, bureaucratic norms, when too strict, can decrease moral responsibility in decision-making and discourage reflective practice, which in turn can have a negative impact on ethical decisions and, in a broader sense, on ethical conduct.

So far, this thesis has therefore taken the position that ethics in social work cannot simply be understood as a rule-following activity based on codes of ethics and, therefore, can only with difficulty fit all social care settings and types of practice. As explained above, within the different sectors, there are great differences in terms of values, but also in relation to the way services are organised and delivered. Social care practitioners and social workers can only work within codes of ethics and practice while at the same time integrating local agency policies and procedures, their professional expertise and service users' needs.

# Chapter Five

# Methodology

This chapter covers the methodological framework and procedures used to conduct this research. The chapter is not written using a chronological presentation of the way the research progressed, but instead examines the methodological procedure using a logical sequence from the more theoretical research perspective to the practical examination of research methods.

First, the research paradigm, that is to say symbolic interaction, will be explored. This chapter will therefore begin with an examination of the theoretical underpinning of such a paradigm and its application to the research topic, which is ethics and conduct in social care practice. Second, the methodology used for conducting the research and analysing the data will be examined. In this sense, Grounded Theory will be explored as a methodological process for both data generation and analysis. Third, this chapter will examine the research methods used to collect the data as well as outlining the overall validity and reliability of the research. The chapter will conclude by a section on research ethics, where the principles upheld by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) will be examined in the light of this research project.

## Research Paradigm: Symbolic Interaction

In order to fully understand the research process and its theoretical underpinning, it is important to examine the perspective the researcher has adopted about the nature of reality (Sarantakos 2005). A research paradigm

helps in situating the way 'the world is perceived'. Patton explains that a paradigm proposes

> a world view, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world, telling researchers and social scientists in general 'what is important, what is legitimate, what is reasonable'. (Sarantakos 1993:30)

The research paradigm adopted for this research is symbolic interactionism, which originated from the work of George Herbert Mead (Chicago School of Sociology 1863–1931) and Herbert Blumer (1900–1986). Symbolic interaction

> examines the symbolic and the interactive together as they are experienced and organised in the worlds of everyday lives. It looks at how meanings emerge, are negotiated, stabilised and transformed; at how people do things together through joint actions; and at how interaction strategies organise such meanings at all levels of collective life. (Stryker, cited in Plummer 1991 Vol. 2:ix)

Symbolic interactionism is therefore a perspective that tries to understand behaviour as emerging from interactions between people on a micro level, taking into account the symbols used that result in defining meaning at the collective level. In other words, starting from an individual level of interactions, symbolic interactionism examines situations and proposes explanations that reach cultural and structural levels. Indeed, Marshall argues that the use of symbolic interaction

> has been to analyse the meanings of everyday life, via close observational work and intimate familiarity, and from these, to develop an understanding of the underlying forms of human interactions. (1998:657)

Symbolic interactionism tends to analyse behaviour, taking into consideration interactions between people as well as symbols used to shape these interactions, on a level that begins from the personal one, but which affect, for example, the extent to how society is shaped:

> It is through symbols that they [human beings] are capable of producing culture and transmitting a complex history. (Marshall 1998:657)

Symbolic interactionism is interested in understanding the interface of symbols and interactions between people. As Blumer explains,

> The term 'Symbolic Interaction' refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's action instead of merely reacting to each other's action. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such action. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's action. (1969:78–9)

Symbolic interactionism is one level of understanding that can be used in research. Since the research is not interested in pathological explanations, but rather in people's understandings of ethics and conduct, symbolic interactionism is appropriate to this paper. The understanding of ethics as explained through different perspectives in the literature review may be understood differently from one person to another. It is therefore the interactions between the people that make the perspective accepted collectively as the rules to follow. Using a symbolic interactionist perspective enables us to understand the field of ethics (and its relevance to social care

practice) in terms of the influence of the environment on which decisions take place. As Blumer (1969:87–8) explains,

> From the standpoint of Symbolic Interaction, social organization is a framework inside of which acting units develop their actions. Structural features, such as 'culture', 'social systems', 'social stratifications,' or 'social roles', set conditions for their actions but do not determine their action. People – that is, acting units – do not act toward culture, social structure or the like; they act toward situations. Social organization enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations.

Yet social care practitioners make ethical decisions based upon different elements, for example codes of conduct, agency settings, professional values and personal values, and their final decisions are made according to the significance and interpretation of each of these elements. These elements are perceived as symbols, and the decision-making will be carried out in relation to the interactions between the symbols.

Symbolic interactionism was influenced by a reaction against the idea of positivist methods. For symbolic interactionists,

> the social world is a dynamic and dialectical web, situations are always encounters with unstable outcomes, and lives and their biographies are always in the process of shifting and becoming, never fixed and immutable. Attention is fixed, not upon rigid structures (as in many other versions of sociology), but upon streams of activity with their adjustments and outcomes. (Marshall 1998:658)

Symbolic interactionism is not against scientific methods per se, but against a positivist view of social behaviour that ignores meaning. Symbolic interactionism shifted social research from a positivist to an interpretive

paradigm, focusing on the symbols and meanings that explain human behaviour rather than on the 'objective' behaviours themselves. In this view, human beings behave in a certain way due to social interactions with each other and due to the symbols (formal and informal conventions) people adhere to and which are commonly understood in a society:

> Field researchers do not claim to discover the 'true meaning' of behaviour, but try to uncover, by observation of words and action, the meanings of behaviour to informants. (Fine and Kleinman, cited in Plumer 1991:105)

The meanings of behaviour in the context of this research are therefore understood as forming through interactions between actors. Indeed, for symbolic interactionists, human behaviour cannot be examined in the same way as in the fields of natural sciences such as chemistry or physics (positivist approach), because the different situations may produce different behaviours (Sarantakos 1993; Winch 1964).

Indeed, Winch (1964) argues that, in many cases, the regularities of social life are not the same as those of the natural sciences. In the social sciences, there are certain rules similar to the natural sciences, but these rules are influenced (and can be changed) by various aspects of social life, such as the ways that human beings perceive a situation or a symbol. Symbols are constructed by human beings in response to different aspects of everyday life.

Without rejecting positivist methods, symbolic interaction takes the position that what is perceived by one person can be perceived differently by another. Cuff et al. (1998:119) suggest that,

as members of society, we are aware of these patterns [of behaviours], but we do not find them out by studying concurrent events and seeking to infer causal connection between them. We become aware of these patterns and of the point of a particular activity within that pattern by being taught the rules.

For example, norms and morals can be seen as sets of rules or symbols that are developed by people and to which people respond according to different situations. What might be totally acceptable for one group of people could be seen as wrong by another group. Therefore, the notion of 'radical' truth has to be rejected, because even though there are actors who define social rules, these rules can be understood differently across various contexts; they can be adhered to in one context and broken in another context by the same behaviour:

it is up to each individual or group to decide for themselves what is true, and that their decision settles the matter. (Cuff et al. 1998:122)

This is an important proposition for the research, which aims to study ethical behaviour through an examination of practitioners' experiences and perspectives, rather than through an examination of codes of ethics. We often hear of social care practitioners breaching confidentiality or being disciplined for misconduct. This is because societies and organisations create rules but individuals can always decide for themselves whether or not to follow those rules (Cuff et al. 1998). Therefore, a study of codes of ethics would not reflect actual behaviour, because these rules can always be broken. A symbolic interactionist perspective for exploring practitioners' understandings enables the researcher not only to *understand the rules*, but also to *understand the process of reasoning* behind the behaviour that leads to a particular course of action:

The methodological position of Symbolic Interactionism is that social action must be studied in terms of how it is formed. (Blumer 1969:57)

Symbols are constructed and institutionalised in society through formal and informal conventions. In this research project, formal conventions can be seen in the representation of behaviour through various codes of ethics. Informal conventions, on the other hand, are behavioural norms that are not necessarily written down, but are adhered to by members of a society.

On a global level, language is known as the most important symbolic system (Winch 1964; Sarantakos 1994). Indeed, as Stone and Farberman put it, it is "through communication processes, [that] people transform themselves and their environment and then respond to those transformations" (cited in Maines 1977:235).

There are a number of reasons for choosing symbolic interaction as an appropriate perspective to explore the various types of ethical reasoning across different fields of social care practice. However, when I started to formulate the research proposition at the beginning of the project, I did not immediately link this perspective to my research. I read widely on different methodologies and perspectives to identify the one that best reflected my understanding of the world around me and the nature of this particular research focus. I linked symbolic interaction to my research only after the first stages of data collection (for more information on the research process, see Figure 1 further below), when the focus of the research became concerned with examining the way that ethics and conduct was understood by social care practitioners. From this stage, it became apparent that symbolic interactionism was an appropriate approach to use, as the research process

aimed, from that point on, to provide an understanding of the interactions between people in relation to ethical conduct by analysing the symbols used to define and resolve a situation.

Using a different research perspective from the start would have led to using a different research methodology as well as interpreting the data differently. For instance, if a critical-theory perspective were to be used from the start, the emphasis would have been on power relationships and inequalities within society. In relation to ethical conduct, such a perspective might explore the differences between men's and women's ethical reasoning and the ways gender can influence the process. Symbolic interactionism does not segregate groups by gender, age or sexual orientation for example, but instead tries to understand the reasoning process behind different sets of rules and symbols. In fact, this is a weakness of the symbolic interaction perspective as applied to this research, because understandings of ethics in social work may indeed be influenced by the gender of the practitioner (which critical theory would address) or by the past experiences of individual social care practitioners (which a psychosocial perspective would consider).

Finally, symbolic interaction was chosen as the research perspective because it is appropriate to use while adopting a Grounded Theory methodology, since both are concerned with the same type of phenomena (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis 1998; Layder 1982; Dey 1999). Layder (1982:105) comments that "Symbolic Interactionism/participant observation are seen to constitute the research tradition par excellence" when researching on the basis of Grounded Theory. Indeed, Grounded Theory aims to "understand the actions of individual or collective actors being studied" (Strauss and Corbin 1994:274)

and it "focuses on how individuals interact in relation to the phenomenon under study" (Dey 1999:1). Grounded Theory as a methodology focuses on the actions and relations of individuals and communities, and thus it takes into consideration interactions and symbols. Benoliel (cited in Dey 1999:18) has also commented that the goal of Grounded Theory is to explain how social circumstances can account for the behaviour and interactions of the people being studied. Therefore, while symbolic interactionism has been chosen as the most appropriate overall research perspective for examining ethics and ethical conduct in social care, it also fits well within a Grounded Theory methodology.

**Research Methodology: Grounded Theory**

This research is exploratory and aims to investigate the experiences of practitioners in England working for statutory social services in comparison with practitioners using social action principles and those who work for the voluntary sector, in relation to their conduct and ethics.

The choice of Grounded Theory as a methodology was justified from the outset because of a lack of focused resources about ethics in social care practice and in particular a lack of information, literature and articles about ethics in social action work. As Dey (1999:4) explains,

> An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of category will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to a different area.

The limited availability of resources on the topic was therefore calling for a methodology "that generate[s] ideas by the evidence itself" (Dey 1999:4). Grounded Theory is particularly appropriate for this research project because, as Dey (1999:3) adds,

> the main point is to avoid "preconceived" ideas. In Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss argued, "initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework" (1967:45). The idea was to start instead with a general subject or problem conceived only in terms of a general disciplinary perspective.

As the introduction explicitly states, this research project emerged from personal and professional experience of social work practice and the utilisation of empowerment as a central principle for intervention. The use of personal experience is important in relation to Grounded Theory, as

> everyday knowledge is an unrenounceable resource, which this theory sets to make a central element of its structure and approach. Primary experience is very significant for the development of Grounded Theory. (Sarantakos 1993:269)

Moreover, as explained above, Grounded Theory as a methodological framework sits well with the symbolic interaction research tradition:

> Grounded Theory refers to theory (or analytic knowledge) generated out of research data, particularly of the qualitative sort. As such Grounded Theory has been predominantly associated with the

Symbolic Interactionist 'version' of sociological analysis, which derived in large part from work of Cooley and Mead. (Layder 1982: 104)

Grounded Theory is therefore a methodology that consists in building an explanatory theory mainly on the basis of data that was in turn generated by previous data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain the use of Grounded Theory in relation to qualitative data. They define Grounded Theory as follows:

> generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from data but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. (Glaser and Strauss 1967:6)

Grounded Theory is therefore a methodology for research that uses the data to produce new data through the validation of the previous data. Grounded Theory is therefore a cyclic process in so far as each individual stage of data collection and analysis serves to produce a new stage that furthers the investigation until the research reaches saturation.

Grounded Theory methodology was used as the sole methodological process throughout the research. In particular, Grounded Theory was essential in developing the data-collection tools and the analysis of the collected data and was therefore central to the whole study. The research therefore began with an open agenda and, after each stage, theories emerged from the data collected and informed the next stage of data collection until an explanatory theory had emerged.

Kemshall (1998) partly explains Grounded Theory as a systematic method of data collection and an interpretative method of analysing data based upon an

inductive approach. The inductive approach can be described as one that examines particular aspects of social life and creates theory in relation to previous data collection. Therefore, research comes before theory according to an inductive approach and seeks to generate theoretical propositions from the data collected. However, Kemshall (1998) continues by explaining that Grounded Theory becomes more deductive later in the process: first it considers a general picture of social life and then it investigates a particular aspect to test the strength of the theory. Kemshall (1998) refers to the process of passing from deductive to inductive and vice versa by the concept of retroductive methodology. The concept of retroductive methodology is also used by Shepperd (1995) and Layder (1985) while referring to this process in relation to Grounded Theory. Sarantakos (2005) and Sousa and Hendriks (2006) also refer to Grounded Theory as a continuous process that evolves from inductive and deductive approaches and ends with verification that refers to "testing of the validity of these hypotheses" (Sarantakos 2005:118).

Figure 1 on the page 98 shows the retroductive aspect of the Grounded Theory process from the beginning to the end of the research. The figure also illustrates the overall research design, outlining the various stages from inductive to deductive approach, until the research reached saturation of data through validation of the final proposition (the figure was adapted from Eckett 1988).

The research began in 1998 with an exploration of some of the literature that covered the various aspects of the topic being researched. The literature consulted at that time included books, and policy and government documents as well as journal articles, and constituted a relatively important source of

information to get the research started, as the researcher was new to the country and, therefore, to English social work practice and research. This preliminary exploration of literature (see below for further information on research methods) aimed at gaining a basic understanding of the structure of social services in England, ethical conduct, social work roles and responsibility as well as moral and legal duties surrounding the social care profession in Britain as a whole. As Sarantakos (2005:350) indicates in relation to beginning a research based on Grounded Theory, "knowledge of the context is most useful in this process". Simultaneously, four unstructured interviews were conducted with practitioners from different sectors of social care practice, with the aim of gathering some initial data in relation to the initial research proposition.

Data from the four interviews were analysed (first-stage analysis – Open Coding (see below for an explanation of this)), and the research proposition was changed in the light of these preliminary data. The preliminary data were also used as a basis for collecting data that would constitute the second stage of data collection. This second set of data collection was actualised through working with three focus groups that aimed at examining practitioners' understandings of ethics and conduct and protection safeguards in their respective fields. The data was then analysed (second-stage analysis – Open Coding) and examined in parallel with existing literature on ethics and regulations of conduct. The emerging themes were then used to develop the questionnaire that would be used as a way of collecting the data for the third stage of the research project.

# Figure 1: Grounded theory process applied to the research

2005

2004

2003

2002

2001

2000

1999

1998

**Saturation:** Only one main category (power) and 2 subcategories

Revise proposition (deductive approach) : in the light of 3$^{rd}$ stage analysis, many codes appear the same across different sectors, but decision making process are different depending on where the intervention takes place. Research proposition There are similar ethical dilemmas across different fields and similar elements that underpin the decision making process of social care practitioners.

Reformulate research question: Field of study too narrow. Focus question in the light of 2$^{nd}$ stage analysis: Research question: What are the elements that influence decision making processes across different fields of practice (Statutory, NGO, Social Action) (Inductive approach)

Formulate proposition (Inductive approach): The research question is too broad. Focus question in the light of 1$^{st}$ stage analysis: 'How are ethics and ethical conduct understood by social care practitioners?'

The research begins (deductive approach) Roles and values in statutory social work are different from those in social action groupwork and therefore new guidelines must be developed specifically for social action groupwork

The research ends: Different levels of power moving between the practitioners and the organisational context of work. (See Chapter 5- Discussion.)

Data analysis (Selective coding: 4$^{th}$ stage analysis – see figure 6)

Semi-structured and vignette based interview

Record data

Data analysis (Axial coding: 3$^{rd}$ stage analysis- see figure 4)

Record data

Questionnaires

Analyse data (Open coding: 2$^{nd}$ stage analysis- see figure 3)

Record data

Focus groups and review of the literature

Analyse data (Open coding : 1$^{st}$ stage analysis – see figure 2)

Record data (see figure 1)

Unstructured interviews and review of the literature

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The research became inductive and aimed to explore the elements influencing the decision-making process of the practitioners in three determined fields of practice. The data were analysed following an axial coding method (third-stage analysis), and the categories and codes that emerged were central to revising the previous proposition and consequently adopting a deductive approach to the inquiry. In the light of the data accumulated through the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and vignette-based interviews were developed in order to test the emerging hypothesis. Data were collected among six practitioners and analysed using a selective coding procedure. The data reached saturation at this point, and consequently the research ended.

This example of applied retroductive methodology (Kemshall 1998; Shepperd 1995; Layder 1985) shows how the research focus moved from deductive to inductive and vice versa. From this process, we can therefore talk about a retroductive approach to data collection. This form of research is also viewed as being efficient in terms of the validity of the research (see the section below on validity and reliability issues).

In addition to being a retroductive methodology, Grounded Theory is also known as a methodology that uses constant comparative methods in data collection and analysis. Indeed, Sarantakos (1993:270) states that one of the main procedures of the qualitative research based on Grounded Theory is that of making comparisons.

Since the aim of this research project was to explore the differences and similarities between social action work, the voluntary sector and statutory services in relation to their ethics and conduct, a comparative method was essential. The process of comparative analysis is examined in Chapter Six – Data Analysis. However, at this point, the comparative methods used within a Grounded Theory framework can be summarised as follows:

> We shall describe in four stages the constant comparative method: (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory. Although this method of generating theory is a continuously growing process – each stage after a time is transformed into the next – earlier stages do remain in operation simultaneously throughout the analysis and each provides continuous development to its successive stage until the analysis is terminated. (Glaser and Strauss 1967:105)

Various types of coding are used in Grounded Theory research in order to achieve constant comparisons (Sarantakos 2005). The full coding procedures used in this research can be found in Chapter Six – Data Analysis. However, at this point, it is important to define what is understood by coding when Grounded Theory methodology is concerned.

Coding "consists of assigning codes to the collected elements" so as to "ask questions about categories and their relationships" (Sarantakos 1993:213,272). Simply put, coding is a process that consists of giving labels to situations emerging from the data collections or findings. Strauss and Corbin (1990:57) explain coding as

the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data.

Coding is an important aspect of Grounded Theory, as it constitutes the main process in data analysis, and it is this that leads to the discovery of the explanatory theory (Sarantakos 2005). It is through constant comparative methods that the research can achieve saturation point, which constitutes the end of the theory-building process (Strauss and Corbin 1991).

Sarantakos (2005) explains that Grounded Theory methodology involves three stages of coding, of which the level of abstraction increases as the research progresses. The three levels of coding are contested in the literature because, while Sarantakos (2005) refers to the three coding stages developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), Glaser and Strauss (1967) have previously argued that there were actually four of them (LaRossa 2005). However, this coding within this research is based on Strauss and Corbin's understanding, and therefore the explanation of coding will be given in terms of 'open', 'axial' and 'selective' coding only.

The first level of coding is 'open', followed by 'axial' coding, and ending with a process of 'selective' coding. Open coding involves identifying a first set of code from the emerging data and examining which ones are important and deserve further investigation. Strauss and Corbin (1990:62) explain open coding as a procedure where "the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena reflected in the data" (cited in LaRossa 2005:841).

For example, during the first stage of data analysis, the information obtained by the interviews and some of the literature consulted were broken into different concepts such as 'statutory social work', 'code of conduct' and 'social action.

Axial coding is the second stage of coding and entails interconnecting the previous codes in order to achieve a higher level of abstraction (Sarantakos 2005). Therefore, in relation to this research, axial coding uses concepts of ethics and power as opposed to the original code of conduct and statutory social work.

Finally, selective coding involves "identifying the higher-order core category" (Sarantakos 2005:350), which means "searching for the central phenomenon and the central category" (idem). As LaRossa (2005:851) explains,

> the core variable (or central category) is the one variable among all the variables generated during the coding that, in addition to other qualities, is theoretically saturated and centrally relevant.

In relation to this research, the core variable, or core category, was identified as the concept of 'power'. Details of the procedure for data analysis and the use of different types of coding can be found in Chapter Six: Data Analysis, along with an exhaustive list of codes developed during each of the stages of coding.

Theoretical saturation occurs when the three stages of coding have ended and when no new properties emerge, with the same properties continually

emerging instead, ensuring theoretical completeness (Glaser 1978, 2001, cited in Sousa and Hendriks 2006). According to the Grounded Theory founders, the research can end only when it reaches saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987). The theory generated at the end should explain what has been found in the data collection:

> Since no proof is involved, the constant comparative method in contrast to analytic induction requires only saturation of data – not consideration of all available data, nor are the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined case. (Glaser and Strauss 1967:104)

The process of Grounded Theory, when reaching saturation of data, leads toward the formation of an explanatory theory. This will be examined in chapters Seven and Eight of this thesis.

Although Grounded Theory can be used both within qualitative and quantitative research designs (Pfeifer 2000, cited in Sarantakos 2005), this research project was generated with a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one. It was hoped to use informants' own understandings of events in analysing a social setting. In qualitative analysis, the researcher's identity, values and beliefs have to be taken into consideration and cannot be entirely eliminated from the process.

This kind of research is therefore highly subjective. However, while this aspect can be perceived as a weakness of Grounded Theory for some commentators (Lamneck 1988, cited in Sarantakos 2005), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (2002) refer to the understanding of subjectivity from the

researcher as being very important, as it generates richer data. Indeed, they point out that researching using a Grounded Theory framework

> does not imply that researcher approach reality as a tabula rasa. If they have a perspective, this will help them to see relevant data and abstract significant categories from the scrutiny of the data. (Glaser and Strauss 1967:3)

Therefore, a qualitative framework of Grounded Theory methodology was used during the whole of the research process. The following section will examine the research methods used for the collection of data.

**Research Methods**

Methods can be considered as the tools for the collection of data. In social research, methods "have to be open in the sense that they can be changed and adjusted while they are employed and while data are being collected" (Sarantakos 1993:153). May (1997) sets out four types of research methods that are used for the collection of data: questionnaires, interviews, observation and documents, all of which can be split into different sub-groups of data-collection tools. The main types of data-collection methods used in this research were questionnaires and interviews. Documentary methods and focus groups were also found to be good sources of information and formed part of the methodology applied in this research project.

Layder (1982) argues that, while participant observation tends to be the research method *par excellence* for a Grounded Theory framework and a

symbolic interaction perspective, it is also appropriate to use a number of methodological adjuncts to, and extensions of, the pure Grounded Theory research methods. The following few sections will focus on the different research methods that were used during all stages of the Grounded Theory process.

## Document Studies

The study of documents was one of the first methods used during the research process as a complement to the first set of interviews for the first-stage analysis (see below for information on interviews). Glaser and Strauss indicate some reservations in using documentary methods during the first stage of the research process. Indeed, they point out that

> An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to ensure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas. (Cited in Dey 1999:4)

However, Dey (1999:4) points out that this "ignoring" of the literature does not mean not using it at all. On the contrary, as Goulding (2002) argues, the use of literature is a way of strengthening both the quality of the data and the ideas extracted from them.

In this light, the literature was consulted in order to gain familiarity with various elements underpinning the research, such as the concept of empowerment and social action work, as well as to become acquainted with the context of social work and social welfare in Britain. Sarantakos (2005) explains that a basic analysis of documents is useful at the beginning of the research in order to gain a representation of life as well as to provide detailed information on specific topics before proceeding further with the research. However, as the research progressed, literature was consulted further and used in relation to the emergence of new codes and categories:

> As discovered, Grounded Theory, then, will tend to combine mostly concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data with some existing ones that are clearly useful. (Glaser and Strauss, cited in Dey 1999:4)

However, the study of documents during the whole research process remained at a descriptive-analysis level (Sarantakos 2005) in so far as it was "rather elementary and entailed summarising data, identifying main trends and presenting descriptions" (Sarantakos 2005:294).

From a more general point of view, there are many advantages related to the use of documentary methods. Denscombe (1998) lists a number of these, including cost effectiveness and broad access to information. Therefore, from the beginning of the research, government documents such as White Papers, internet publications and news releases related to social welfare were used to gather data about the research topic. Studies of such documents were very efficient because they allowed the researcher to define and resolve basic

concepts and to integrate up-to-date material around issues of social policy and social welfare changes taking place during the study. A record of every document was kept, and notes were taken to ensure the validity of the research (Denscombe 1998).

## Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted during the second stage of the data collection (see Figure 1 for the research process). The focus groups were jointly facilitated with another researcher who had been commissioned by the Department of Health to carry out a study about roles and regulations for health support workers in the UK. Since the other research was based upon proposals to create a regulatory body for health services in the UK, it touched upon related aspects of the codes of ethics and regulations. The other research team allowed for participation as well as the collection of data through their focus groups, which consisted of health- and social care support workers in a variety of sectors.

Three group interviews were conducted: one with mental-health support workers from the voluntary sector, one with community health support workers within the NHS and one with domiciliary care workers from the private sector and the local authority. These three group discussions were chosen to access diverse perspectives about a code of conduct and a national professional regulatory body for all health- and social care practitioners (see Appendix 2 for the focus-group interview schedule).

The focus group is a method of data collection that can be defined as

> group discussions that are organised to explore a specific set of issues
> and involve some kind of collective activity. (Becker and Bryman
> 2004:394)

Focus groups therefore consist of discussions that take place in a group and

that are guided by a researcher on particular topic (Sarantakos 2005). As

Munday (2006:95) explains,

> by skilfully moderating the groups, the researcher is able to elicit
> objective facts about the attitude and opinions of the members of the
> group. The researcher is seen as being able to access the 'true' nature of
> the reality of the participants.

The focus group method therefore sits well within the symbolic interaction

perspective used for this research. However, particular problems can occur

with the use of focus groups. For example, the group can bias the opinions of

individual members, the recording can be difficult to achieve, there is the risk

of non-participation of some members and the discussion can diverge from

the main topic (Sarantakos 1993). However, the disadvantages are

counterbalanced by the advantages because, as May (1997) mentions, the use

of group interviews helps in producing different perspectives on the same

issues. Sarantakos (2005:196) adds that another advantage of using focus

groups in research is that

> it is expected that, through mutual stimulation, a group environment
> will encourage discussion; increase motivation to address critical

issues, enable the facilitator to lead the discussion towards focal points and topical issues; and allow significant points of view to be presented in real, emotional and summated form as spontaneous expression.

Focus groups were therefore very appropriate for the research topic, as one of the aims of the research was to gain an appreciation of how ethics and ethical conduct were understood by social care practitioners. Using focus groups, according to Crawford and Acorn (1997, cited in Webb 2002), also allows for the discussion of the views, beliefs, opinions and perceptions of members, which is also particularly relevant when exploring topics such as ethics and conduct.

Data collected through focus groups were used for the development of codes, which consequently informed the development of questionnaires that were used to build explanations on ethics and to explore new ideas in relation to the topic. However, because of the focus groups' "inability to reach in-depth information" (Powell and Single 1996, cited in Webb 2002:30), and because of the Grounded Theory framework involving "constant comparison between the data finding and the emerging concepts and properties" (Sousa and Hendriks 2006:323), the research process continued by using a different research method: questionnaires.

*Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were also used in this study as a means of data gathering (see Figure 1 for the full research process). Questionnaires were used after analysing data collected within the focus groups and were developed to

examine practitioners' understandings of ethics and values in social work and social welfare further. Indeed, questionnaires "offer a considered and objective view of the issues" (Sarantakos 2005:263) and therefore allow the refinement of some of the data collected during the previous stage (focus groups). The use of questionnaires within this project was very successful and allowed the development of new codes and categories (see Appendix 3 for a copy of the questionnaire used).

There are many advantages to the use of questionnaires, but they were particularly appropriate for this project in that they were sent by post and therefore offered respondents time to reflect on the topic and even to consult documents (such as staff handbooks or codes of conduct) if necessary (Sarantakos 2005). Moreover, questionnaires can be viewed as a stable, consistent and uniform system of measurement without variation, an aspect that focus groups cannot offer, because of the interactions taking place between the group members (Webb 2002). The questionnaires also produced quick results that allowed the research to penetrate more deeply during the interviews that followed (Sarantakos 2005), which was very useful for the development of codes using Grounded Theory. Finally, the questionnaires offered the kind of wide coverage that interviews would not have allowed, because of financial constraints (Sarantakos 1993).

To ensure that the respondents remained anonymous, each was given a unique code made up of a letter followed by a number. There were some limitations with the use of questionnaires, such as the lack of clarification of questions and the possibility of partial answers being given (Sarantakos 2005). However, the use of interviews as a subsequent data-collection tool redressed

this situation, as it allowed the researcher to place emphasis on certain matters that needed clarification (Sarantakos 1993).

In total, 60 questionnaires were sent to practitioners from the different sectors (statutory, voluntary sector and social action), and 32 were returned. Reminders were sent once by post (Sarantakos 2005), and the remaining non-respondents were contacted by telephone. All the other questionnaires were chased, but none came back, even though the deadline was extended.

For this stage of the data collection, 30 social care practitioners from different fields returned completed questionnaires, which were analysed. Two questionnaires were discarded, as they were incomplete. Although 30 respondents out of 60 represents only a 50% response rate, the amount and the quality of the data found in them was sufficient for the research analysis. In relation to qualitative data, Sarantakos (1993:269) explains that

> the centre of its [qualitative research] interest is not on collecting volumes of data but organising the variety of thoughts and experiences the researcher gathers during the analysis of data.

The questionnaires used were semi-structured, giving the opportunity to gather precise data at the same time as offering depth to the answers. The sampling for the distribution of questionnaires was carried out using a purposive method. Sarantakos (1993:138) describes purposive sampling as a technique whereby

> the researchers purposely choose subjects who, in their opinion, are thought to be relevant to the research topic.

The purposive method was used in order to successfully build a theoretical sample (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Sarantakos 2005), which was aimed at building a comparative element with practitioners from different fields of social care practice. Theoretical sampling refers to the "process of data collection for generating theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967:45) and is determined by the knowledge that emerges during the study (Burgess 1984; Strauss 1991, cited in Sarantakos 2005). This method of sampling was also chosen because social care practitioners from the three different fields were difficult to reach. Therefore, various social care practitioners were called and asked if they would be interested in participating in the research; where this was the case, a questionnaire was sent.

Snowball sampling (May 1997) was also used for the distribution of the questionnaires because there are few social action practitioners in this field and they often practice without labelling their work as social action. It would therefore have been difficult to establish the sample in another way, and it was constructed as follows: First, a list of well-known social action workers and researchers was provided by the Centre for Social Action. Each social action worker was called and asked to participate in the research; at the end of the telephone conversation, they were asked to give the contact name of another practitioner/researcher in social action work. These people were then contacted and asked to participate by completing a questionnaire, and they were also asked to provide further contact names.

*Interviews*

There were two distinct stages of the research process when interviews were used as a tool for data collection. The first set of data was collected by using unstructured interviews. This first set of interviews took place at the very beginning of the research. A second data-collection point, based on another type of interviews, was conducted at the end of the research process during the fourth stage of the data collection: a combination of vignettes and semi-structured questions formed the basis for this second interview stage.

May (1997:112) suggests various reasons for the use of unstructured interviews, such as the fact that this tool "provides qualitative depth by allowing interviewees to talk about the subject in terms of their own frames of reference". Unstructured interviews are also a useful technique to consider at the beginning of the research process, as they are useful tools with which to build a broad picture, which is helpful when the research is still exploratory (Kane and O'Reilly-De Brūn 2001). Consequently, the use of unstructured interviews at the beginning of the research was relevant for finding out about the general views of different practitioners in relation to ethics and the codes of conduct within their agency (see Appendix 4 for the unstructured interview schedule).

The sampling used for selecting participants to the unstructured interview was purposive, that is to say, participants that were "relevant to the project" (Sarantakos 2005:164). Indeed, because the study began with a proposition that intended to examine the roles and values in statutory social work with the roles and values in social action groupwork, participants from both areas

were chosen. Consequently, four unstructured interviews were conducted at the beginning of the research: the interviewees were a practitioner from the voluntary sector, a manager from the voluntary sector, a director of a voluntary organisation having spent much of their working year in statutory social work, and a statutory social worker.

Vignette-based and semi-structured interviews were also used later in the research process and proved to be an effective tool for data collection. In total, seven vignettes and semi-structured interviews were conducted in the practitioners' workplaces (see Appendix 5 for interview- and vignette-based schedules).

These vignettes and semi-structured interviews were conducted in different ways with different respondents and for specific reasons. Indeed, the interviews (including the vignettes and semi-structured interviews) were lengthy in duration, and respondents were at risk of being exhausted and giving less clear answers towards the end of the interviews. Kane and O'Reilly-de Brün (2001:204) explain that semi-structured interviews use questions that are "tailored to the individual or category of person and to the circumstances". Therefore, some respondents began with the semi-structured interview, exploring different issues from their practice, while others began with the vignette and finished with the semi-structured interview.

The semi-structured interview was organised mostly around open questions aimed at examining a participant's characteristics that influence the occurrence of ethical dilemmas in work settings. However, the interview

schedule also included a section where participants had to comment on different elements affecting ethics in practice. This combination offered a wide range of material that fit well within the semi-structured interview schedule, and which May (1997:111) qualifies as allowing

> people to answer more on their own terms than the standardised interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused interview.

The semi-structured interview method appeared to be relatively efficient for this type of research, although the limitations must be highlighted. First, as the interviews and vignettes were very time-consuming, some respondents did not finish the whole interview with the same enthusiasm. However, to overcome this, some respondents answered the vignette first and then proceeded with the interview. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed onto the computer to facilitate the data analysis. Though respondents were free to refuse to be taped, none of them refused, and all the scripts were therefore analysed.

The other part of the interview was built around the use of 'vignettes'. Hughes (1998, cited in Hughes and Huby 2002) explains that vignettes add a significant focus for discussion during individual interviews, and therefore, vignette techniques were very useful within this stage of the data collection.

Finch (1987:105) describes a vignette as

> short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond'. In other

words, the participants have to give their opinion on different case studies of possible ethical dilemmas to analyse and understand how it would be resolved for the person, and within the sector of social care practice. (Barter and Reynolds 2000:2)

Vignettes can be used within both a qualitative and a quantitative research framework. Taylor (2006) shows the many strengths of using vignettes in quantitative social work research, but Barter and Reynolds (2002) assert that vignettes are also appropriate within qualitative research frameworks, as they allow participants to

> respond to a particular situation by stating what they would do, or how they imagine a third person, generally a character in the story, would react to certain situations or occurrences, which often entail some form or moral dilemma. (Barter and Reynolds 2000:2)

Indeed, vignettes are an efficient tool for gathering data, as this technique does not generate socially desirable responses (Hughes and Huby 2002). Vignette-based interviews also provide the opportunity for comparison of the practice of ethical social work in each sector. As Finch (1987:111) describes, vignettes

> offer the opportunity to explore normative issues in a way which approximates to the complexities with which such issues are surrounded in reality, or at least, comes closer to reflecting those complexities than other techniques commonly used in surveys.

However, Faia (1980), Farkinson and Manstead (1993) and Kinicki et al. (1995) voice notes of caution about the use of vignettes and warn that they can never

fully represent the reality of people's lives (cited in Hughes and Huby 2002). Nevertheless, the use of vignettes allows the researcher to access data that could not be gathered by questionnaire (Gould 1996, cited in Hughes and Huby 2002). Vignettes are often used as complementary techniques alongside other research methods of data collection (Hazel 1995; Hughes 1998) and can be employed "either to enhance existing data or to generate data not tapped by other research methods (such as observation or interviews)" (Barter and Reynolds 2000:2). The interviews ended when the research arrived at theoretical saturation: "When additional analysis no longer contributes to discovering anything new about a category" (Strauss, cited in Denscombe 1998:216).

The method of choosing respondents was again based on the concept of theoretical sampling, as introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967:45):

> Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory. (Cited in Dey 1999:5)

In other words, determining the sampling strategy for participants in the next stage of the research was only possible in the light of the previous phase of data collection (the questionnaires). Respondents were chosen in the same way, regardless of their field of social care practice.

Of 30 respondents to the questionnaires, 12 agreed to interview. From these 12, six respondents were chosen according to their field of practice and their answers. Because Grounded Theory incorporates the research of exceptions or negative cases (Strauss and Corbin 1990), participants offering different points of view were invited to interview. As it had already been identified from the questionnaires that there are similar ethical dilemmas across different fields and similar elements that underpin the decision-making processes of practitioners, practitioners with answers different to the majority of respondents were invited to share their views about ethics and ethical dilemmas as experienced within their practices.

## Validity and Reliability of the Research

Validity and reliability are two very important elements of good qualitative research. Kirk and Miller (1986:19, cited in Sarantakos 1993) explain validity and reliability with an interesting metaphor:

> A thermometer that shows the same reading of 82 degrees each time it is plunged into boiling water gives a reliable measurement. A second thermometer might give variations around 100 degrees; the second thermometer would be unreliable but relatively valid, whereas the first would be invalid but perfectly reliable.

In terms of research, this analogy could be illustrated in a set of interviews conducted by a researcher. If the researcher gains similar answers for each question asked, their instrument could be considered to be reliable. However, if the way they ask the questions is biased, the answers could appear reliable but would not be valid. Validity and reliability are therefore two very important

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elements in the research process. The next section will examine the elements of validity and reliability in the present research report.

*Validity*

There are several ways to test the validity of research, though in this particular case, the triangulation method was chosen (Denzin 1970; Denscombe 1998; Dey 1993; May 1997; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Sarantakos 1993; Pandit 1996; Layder 1982). Triangulation ensures the validity of the research and is important because

> each method approaches the collection of data with a certain set of assumptions and produces a kind of data which needs to be recognised as having certain inherent strengths and certain inherent weaknesses in relation to the aim of the particular research and particular constraints (time, resources, access) faced by the researcher. (May 1997:84)

In other words, it allows the researcher to look at things from different perspectives. Questionnaires bring a degree of uniformity to the data, as each respondent has to answer the same set of questions. On the other hand, interviews allow the researcher to go into greater depth with regard to certain elements. Consequently, using different methods produces different data (May 1997). The research can be validated by inter- and intra-method triangulation (Sarantakos 1993).

Inter-method triangulation involves the use of three methods of different methodological origin and nature, for example interviews, questionnaires and documentary methods. Intra-method triangulation uses three techniques

within the same method, for example semi-structured interviews, vignette-based interviews and focus groups. These research methods are employed together for the validity of the research because each element complements the others and each has its advantages and limitations. As Sarantakos (1993:155) argues,

> normally, the research will employ one basic methodology and one basic method, but if the research condition requires it, a combination of methods of data collection will be employed. Triangulation of methods is therefore used for the validation of the data because it allows a variety of information on the same issue, uses the strength of each method to overcome the deficiencies of the other, and to overcome the deficiencies of single method studies.

However, triangulation of methods is not sufficient for validating the research. Silverman (2001:166) suggests that "data triangulation and member validation are usually inappropriate to validate field research". He suggests that testing propositions and generalising to a larger population can be claimed to be more appropriate. Moreover, triangulation for the purpose of validating research has been criticised by Grounded Theory authors (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Dey 1999). They have claimed that, because the research passes from inductive to deductive (and vice versa), triangulation is not necessary for validation. Consequently, inter- and intra-method triangulation were both used during the research for validity, although communicative validation was also applied.

Communicative validation means returning to the field and asking respondents to comment on the results. Communicative validation is outlined by Sarantakos (1993:76), who states that

> the validity of the findings can also be ensured through additional questioning of the respondents; the researcher is then expected to re-enter the field and collect additional data.

An applied example of communicative validation can be illustrated by vignette-based interviews. From the third-stage analysis, a temporary explanatory theory was discovered and then tested with the use of vignette-based interviews.

The sampling for the vignette-based interviews was constructed from respondents to the questionnaires. Of the six respondents, three had given different answers to the majority of respondents. For example, among the statutory social workers, a newly qualified respondent gave different replies to those given by the other social workers. This respondent's overall value position was that the organisational context of work (one of the themes) was not having an impact on her work. This respondent was therefore chosen to verify the answers given in the questionnaires, as communicative validation means returning to the respondents to check previous data.

This research does not claim to be representative in terms of population or in relation to the views of all social care practitioners. Instead, the study aimed to explore the experiences of social care practitioners from different fields of practice. The explanatory theory outlined in chapters Seven and Eight is more

than likely applicable to all social care practitioners from the three sectors, but in order to demonstrate this, another research project would need to be developed, incorporating a broader sample. However, this study is still valid and reliable for the population studied.

As Reason and Rowan (1981) argue,

> good research goes back to the subjects with the tentative results, and refines them in the light of the subject's reactions. (Cited in Silverman 2001:159)

This technique was used within the research; through the vignette-based interviews, this form of validation was achieved. From the data gathered from the questionnaires, an interview schedule was built, incorporating both vignettes and semi-structured questions to ask respondents their opinions in relation to the data previously gathered during completion of the questionnaires.

As explained above, the research moved from deductive to inductive and vice versa. Silverman (2001) suggests that analytic induction research based on comparative methods and research into deviant cases is a good way to avoid over-simplifying the research. From the third-stage analysis, a temporary explanatory theory was raised, which was then tested through the use of vignettes and semi-structured interviews. After gathering data by vignettes and semi-structured interviews, and then transcribing them, the data from the respondents were analysed in relation to the impact of the organisational

context of the work. This was also part of the validation process of the research.

*Reliability*

The reliability of the research is as important as its validity, as explained by Kirk and Miller's (1996) metaphor. However, in the social sciences, reliability does not mean the same in quantitative and qualitative research (Sarantakos 1993). Reliability in social research implies consistency and objectivity, coherence and openness (Denscombe 1998; Sarantakos 1993). Sarantakos (1993:78) suggests setting up a list of possible errors or distortions that can occur during the research process so that reliable results can be ensured.

The potential distortions in this research were the following:

*English as a second language*. The researcher's mother tongue is French, and this has probably slightly influenced the data analysis. For instance, with regard to an interview transcript, some "glossing over" was done. However, this flaw was overcome by seeking help from English colleagues when a sentence was not clear during transcription. In addition, the research has benefited from the input of proofreaders to read through the thesis and discuss some changes with the researcher. However, the original ideas of the researcher were always present, even after proofreading.

*Different cultural background*. The cultural background of the researcher is totally different from the respondents' cultural background. It is important to

note that, although Canadian culture shares some similarities with British culture, the overall socialisation and training of the researcher is different to that in Britain. One of the possible consequences is distortion in the analysis of the data. For example, while undertaking the vignettes and semi-structured interviews, humour could be misinterpreted as a serious statement by a researcher with another cultural background. However, the researcher (being conscious of this) asked the respondent to explain their answers in more depth by asking "can you tell me more about that?", by asking "why" questions and by summarising and repeating the respondent's ideas back to them.

*Subjectivity with regard to the topic.* The researcher had experienced some of the ethical dilemmas raised in the research and, therefore, even while trying to keep an open mind during the research process, assumptions could threaten to overtake the analysis of the data. However, being conscious about this possible flaw, the researcher tried to achieve detachment from the data and remove bias, although Glaser (1969) would argue that this is not possible and even that it is preferable to be involved in the topic.

*Building the sample.* Qualified and unqualified workers took part in the research at different points, which could have caused problems in terms of sampling. Indeed, as the title 'social worker' was not protected in the UK when the data collection took place, the researcher could not choose the 'social workers' for the statutory sector sample solely by the qualifications held by respondents. Instead, many social care practitioners were calling themselves 'social workers' without having formal training in the social work field during the data-collection stages, until April 2004 when the title became protected in

England and Wales. However, as their training and the interpretation of their professional values base were identified as important elements of ethical dilemmas during the data analysis, general understanding of the profession appeared to be more important than formal qualifications. Consequently, choosing respondents regardless of their qualifications appeared to be a strength rather than a weakness, because of the range of answers provided. However, during the data analysis, the training of the participants was taken into account because this may have had an impact on their understanding of professional values.

Another point to make in relation to building the sample concerns the difficulty in accessing respondents, especially those working within statutory social work. Indeed, some city councils would not allow the researcher to contact the social workers directly; therefore, permission had to be sought from the Director of Social Services before distributing the questionnaires. Consequently, some respondents from the statutory social work section were not briefed about the questionnaire and were thus returned incomplete.

*Changing social care services in Britain.* Another methodological issue occurring within this research was the fact that, since the beginning of the research in September 1998, the government has restructured social services in Britain with the creation of the General Social Care Council and its related organisations for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. As described in Chapter Two, the publication of the new White Paper on the modernisation of social services in Britain and the formation of the General Social Care Council for the regulation of social services practice in England have affected attitudes towards the practice of ethics within the social care sector. However, the

impact of the new regulations do not affect the overall explanatory theory (see chapters Seven and Eight), as the conclusions of the research are more concerned with the elements that influence ethical practice in social work and the impact of regulation on social care practitioners than with the application of one particular Act or Code of Ethics. Therefore, the changes occurring in social care practice should not influence the ideas explored and analysed within the discussion chapter (Chapter Eight).

## Research Ethics

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has published a Research Ethics Framework (REF) to be used by students and researchers in order to comply with nationally recognised ethical guidelines for research, effective since the 1st of January 2006 (ESRC 2005). This section on research ethics will examine the possible ethical issues related to this research using the ESRC framework.

Research proposals must usually be assessed by an ethics committee unless the research has been identified as posing minimal risk to participants. The category 'minimal risk to participants' would be granted on the grounds that the research does not involve

> vulnerable groups identified as 'children, and young people, those with learning disability or cognitive impairment, or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationships; on the ground of research involving sensitive topics (sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health or their gender or ethnic status), or research involving groups where permission of a gatekeeper is normally

required for initial access to member (for example ethnic of cultural groups, native peoples or indigenous communities); involving deception or which is conducted without participant's full and informed consent; Research involving access to records of personal or confidential information; Research that would induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation; and finally, research that would involve intrusive intervention (such as administration of drugs or other substance. (ESRC 2005:8)

When the research began in 1998, no such guidelines existed in relation to research ethics in the social care sector. However, this research project would probably have been approved as presenting 'minimal risk to participants'. Nevertheless, this section will examine some of the research ethics implications and the ways they were addressed at the time to ensure that the research was conducted ethically. The ESRC REF (2005:25) identifies six core principles of ethical research that must be fully considered before undertaking qualitative social research, which are discussed in turn below.

### Integrity and Quality of the Research

To ensure the integrity of the research, many steps were taken, and these will be explored further under the various ethical principles below. However, quality was ensured by the way that the research was undertaken and designed and finally with the use of reviews. The research was conducted using a clear methodological framework and was based on a solid research perspective, which ensured that flaws were avoided and that the validity and reliability of the research was questioned (and therefore ensured) as part of the process.

*Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation*

The notion of informed consent was paramount during the whole research process. For example, before filling in the questionnaire, the content of the research was verbally explained over the phone, and participants were invited to ask questions about the process. Those who verbally agreed to participate in the research process were then sent a questionnaire with a cover sheet explaining the aims and purpose of the research a second time (and in writing); they were also told that their participation should be voluntary. Consent was also sought from the statutory social services departments, and emphasis was given to the confidentiality of the data. Finally, it was made clear that participants were free to opt out of the research process at any time, and no form of incentive was given to any of the research participants.

*Confidentiality and Anonymity of the Data*

Steps were taken in order to ensure the confidentiality of the data collected during the research process through anonymisation of the research results. For example, each participant was given a unique code made up of a random number (from 1 to 10) and a letter indicating their field of practice ('S' for the statutory sector, 'C' for the voluntary sector and 'A' for social action settings). No names, organisations or personal details that could lead to the respondent being recognised were added to the data-collection tools, and all raw data were kept safely locked in a filing cabinet at the researcher's home. The raw data (paper and tape-recorded) will be safely discarded at the end of the research process. The data will also be anonymised when the research results are published.

*Avoiding Harm to Research Participants*

The research process did not discriminate against participants from any race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender or in relation to any other characteristics (ESRC 2005). Participants were chosen according to their suitability for the sample, which included men and women from various parts of the UK. Because the research deals with the sensitive topic of ethical practice, some minimal risk to the participants could have been an issue. Indeed, as ESRC (2005) explains, risk to participants can occur when delicate topics are at the forefront of the research objectives. However, all respondents were adult and had to give their informed consent in order to participate in the research, and therefore, participants were fully aware of their choice to participate. Consequently, the researcher did not judge that major harm could arise for the participants and felt that, if a low level of risk was present, that "minimal personal risk could produce results that will have longer-term benefit to the respondent and others" (ESRC 2005:25).

*Possible Conflicts of Interest*

No conflicts of interest were envisaged during the research process, because the funding was provided by an independent overseas source.

This chapter explored the research perspectives and the methodologies used to conduct this research project. It has discussed the data-collection tools and briefly explored the data analysis processes (these will be further detailed in the next chapter). It has also questioned the validity and reliability of the project.

The next chapter, outlining the data analysis, complements the methodology chapter in illustrating some of the analysis techniques that were paramount to achieving saturation and completing the research process. It contains the discussion of the data analysis and will cover all the data gathered during the whole of the research process.

# Chapter Six

# Data Analysis

This chapter has two aims: to present the methodological procedures while at the same time following the Grounded Theory methodology, and to present the data accumulated during each stage of coding. This chapter follows the sequence used during the data collection, and each section will begin by examining different approaches to coding and will then be followed by an examination of the data collected during the research process. The first stage analysis comprises data collected from the preliminary interviews and the background literature review. This will be followed by the second-stage analysis, where data were collected by focus groups and a return to the literature. Third-stage analysis will consider the data collected through the use of questionnaires, and finally, the fourth-stage analysis will examine the data as it reaches saturation while being collected by semi-structured interviews and vignette-based interviews. Different methods of coding will be examined concurrently with the data at each stage of the data analysis.

**First-Stage Analysis: Preliminary Interviews Analysed through Open Coding**

*Methodological Procedures: Open Coding*

The first step in analysing data using a Grounded Theory framework is to examine data through an 'open-coding' procedure. Sarantakos (1993:272) describes open coding as a process that "serves to initiate coding, is rather

'open' and general, and allows further refinement and reinterpretations". Strauss and Corbin (1990:61) define open coding as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data". Glaser (cited in Dey 1999:10) explains open coding as involving "coding of the data in every way possible [...] for as many categories that might fit".

Open coding is the first step in data analysis using Grounded Theory and can be achieved through breaking down the first set of data in order to create as many codes and categories as possible, keeping a record of all the words used by people or literature in relation to the research topic. Open coding is the first step in the comparative method of data analysis and can be described as "comparing incidents applicable to each category" (Glaser and Strauss 1967:105).

Codes can be described as words that indicate different elements of the general topic. Glaser and Strauss (1978:70) explain open coding as *in vivo* in that it is very close to the original data (cited in Strauss and Corbin 1990). Codes are also complemented by different themes, which can be considered as 'labels' and aim to give an explanation of the codes. Sarantakos (1993:272) explains that

> coding refers to asking questions about categories and their relationship. It consequently helps to discover categories and subcategories, which are then named and further processed.

Open coding was used within the first-stage analysis (see Figure 2) and was done via *line by line* and *sentence* analysis of data from the first set of

interviews and then compared in the light of the background review of the literature (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The main aim of open coding is to generate as many codes as possible (Gibson, cited in Miller and Brewer 2003:133). This first step of open coding used in the first-stage analysis provided a series of codes representing words or themes expressed by the interviewees and/or found in the literature at the time consulted.

Figure 2, below, outlines the first set of codes that appeared during the first stage of data collection and analysis:

## Figure 2: First-Stage Analysis

| Statutory Social Work | Social action Work / Voluntary Sector | Ethics and Conduct |
|---|---|---|
| *General Social care Council* | Assessment of needs | *General Social care Council* |
| *Welfare State* | Staff handbook | Assessment of needs |
| *Government policy and regulations* | Social relation in intervention | Staff handbook |
| Assessment of needs | Protection of the public | Social relation in intervention |
| *Modernisation of the social welfare system* | Social work values | Protection of the public |
| Staff handbook | Facilitation | Social work values |
| Social relation in intervention | Social work role | Professional interests |
| Protection of the public | Absence of decision making structure | Social work role |
| Social work values | Empowerment | Empowerment |
| Professional interests | Social justice | Dignity |
| Social work role and tasks | Social action confidentiality, empathies | Equality |
| Dignity | | Social justice |
| Equality | Being non-judgemental | Integrity |
| Social justice | Oppression | Sustainability |
| Integrity | *Self-directed groupwork* | Social justice |
| Sustainability | Labels | Social action |
| Anti-discriminatory practice | *Social exclusion* | Confidentiality |
| *Vested interest* | *Social education* | Empathy |
| Eligibility criteria | Anti-discriminatory practice | Being non-judgemental |
| Intervention | Feminism | Ethical dilemma |
| | Boundaries | Norms of behaviours |
| | Advocacy | Anti-discriminatory practice |
| | Intervention | Right / wrong |
| | Vested interest | Code of ethics |
| | | Code of conduct |
| | | Good / bad behaviours |
| | | Boundaries |

*\* Codes in italics are solely from the review of the literature on the topic*

Theoretical sensitivity was also important in the first stage of analysis, as some codes were created on the basis of the personal experience of the researcher.

> Personal and professional experience is another source of [theoretical] sensitivity, if a researcher is fortunate enough to have had this experience. (Strauss and Corbin 1990:42)

Therefore, all the codes were identified through the preliminary interviews, the literature review and the personal and professional experience of the researcher. As many of these codes had similar meanings, the codes from Figure 1 were classified under three main categories: 'Statutory Social Work', 'Social action Work/Voluntary Sector' and 'Ethics and Conduct', which constituted the first-stage analysis.

A category is defined as a classification of a concept. Strauss and Corbin (1990:61) explain that

> this classification [category] is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon. Thus the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called category.

Categories are therefore broader names that regroup codes following a logical procedure. The names for the three categories below were chosen on the basis of the concepts people referred to during the preliminary interviews and on

the literature as well as on the researcher's own understanding of the material. Glaser and Strauss (1967:17) support the personal understanding of the researcher in the definition of categories:

> As categories and their properties emerge, the analyst will discover two kinds: those that he has constructed himself; and those that have been abstracted from the language of the research situation.

Therefore, the categories of 'Statutory Social Work' and 'Ethics and Conduct' emerged from comparing the data with the literature, but the category 'Social action Work/Voluntary Sector' was given by the researcher as a means of categorising the codes under a broader meaning.[9] This is partially due to the fact that no social action projects were visited but some organisations nevertheless based their intervention under the social action principles. A symbolic interactionist perspective also supports the involvement of the researcher in the research and coding process, as Blumer (1969:86) explains:

> To try to catch the interpretative process by remaining aloof as a so-called 'objective' observer and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectivism – the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it.

The three preliminary categories as illustrated in Figure 1 were therefore constructed from the analysis of the data as well as from the examination of

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[9] Dey (1999:67) explains that categories are "always approximate, provisional and relative to the particular context of confusable alternatives encountered to date". In the light of the corrections made to the thesis in 2006, I have decided to leave the categories of this 1st stage of data

the literature, but also from the researcher's own perspective on the research statement, which involves an examination of boundaries between service users in statutory social work and in social action settings.

The following section of this first stage of data analysis will examine the data that emerged from the interviews with the participants from both the statutory and the voluntary sector. The data will be presented using the three main categories illustrated in Figure 1.

*First-Stage Analysis: The Data*

The first stage of data collection was completed using a set of questions constituting a preliminary interview schedule with four respondents and aimed to explore the initial proposition. This consisted of verifying whether or not the proposition was acceptable: *'roles and values in statutory social work are different from those in social action groupwork and therefore new guidelines must be developed specifically for social action groupwork'.*

Purposive sampling was used to make up the first group of respondents (Sarantakos 1993); practitioners' names were suggested by the first and second PhD supervisors and then chosen according to their type of work (statutory social services and voluntary sector / social action setting). Of the respondents, one worked as a statutory social worker within the 'Access' team of a social services department, two worked for national voluntary

analysis in their original state (1999) as opposed to changing them in the light of new knowledge acquired since then.

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organisations but had several years of experience within the statutory sector and were identified through the Centre for Social Action and one was working in collaboration with the Centre for Social Action.

The interview questions explored different elements of practice, such as the work setting, fit between work title, role and task of the respondent, and the place of anti-oppressive practice and empowerment within the organisation's core values and principles (Appendix 4 contains the interview schedule). All the interviews were relatively short in duration; most participants agreed to have the interview tape recorded and then transcribed, apart from the interview with the statutory social worker, where only written notes were made.

These preliminary data were analysed by open coding and mainly served to build the second stage of the data collection. The following section aims to examine the data collected during these preliminary interviews. The data are presented in various categories, as shown in Figure 1 above.


Statutory Social Work


Statutory duties were considered very important for the social worker working within the Access team of an adult social services department area office. Among the legislation used within her work, the Community Care Act was considered fundamental, but the respondent also referred to the 'Staff Handbook' as well as the 'Provision for [city name] Social Services' documents as being important within her work.

For the participants coming from the voluntary sector, however, the concept of statutory social work, statutory duties and regulations were considered less important in their day-to-day work than in the work of the statutory social worker, although it did have an impact to some extent, as a manager of a national voluntary organisation explained:

> I think with the recent legislation, the Children Act has been important to us because it has brought a clear separation of what is the responsibility of Social Services, basically to supervise and assess child protection issues, whereas before, perhaps, the role was somehow more blurred. Organisations like us can find themselves being asked to do that sort of work by the Local Authority social services offices, but we have a different identity.

From the interviewee's comment, it therefore appears that, although statutory duties do not have the same impact for workers from the voluntary sector than from the statutory sector, they nevertheless affect their day-to-day work. The impact of statutory duties did not feel as something imposed upon them, but as rendering their roles clearer. However, the interviewees from the other voluntary organisations felt that statutory duties did not affect their work, as the director of a national voluntary organisation explained:

> We have got nothing to do with the State.... We don't work for local government or for the National government it is a charity and the services are provided to families by volunteers.... So not only are we a voluntary organisation, the services are also provided by volunteers.

Nevertheless, two respondents expressed that statutory duties and other external pressures such as independent and state funding, in the context of the work carried out by the voluntary sector, could sometimes appear to hinder

some of the organisation's values. For example, a manager of a national non-voluntary organisation explained:

> They [big organisations] might want to be led by their values but they also want to remain the biggest. If you are the biggest, it is like Tesco.... So they are pushed in some ways by their size to remain big ... because it is getting money from people as well as government.

Therefore, the need for funding, according to this participant, had the potential to impact upon the organisation's values. Nevertheless, there are still great differences between the voluntary and the statutory sector in terms of the impact that statutory duties have overall upon the organisations and the way work is carried out. A participant explained the difference he perceives:

> I was a director of social services so I used to run the whole of the social services department for [name of the county] ... and I was very much caught up in Government regulations and child protection procedures ... and everything was so prescribed... the rules and regulations set by the national government. In [name of the current organisation] apart from child protection what we do isn't prescribed at all ... there is no regulation, there is not a piece of law that says what we have to do and that is why it is so special because our volunteers can be themselves ... they can be human beings ... they don't see themselves as social workers ... they see themselves as human beings working with some parents. (Director of a national voluntary organisation)

Therefore, from the data presented above, it can be summarised that, while statutory social work within social-service area offices are largely influenced by legislation and statutory duties, this impact is lessened among voluntary organisations. That said, statutory duties can have an impact on the work carried out by some of the big voluntary organisations, especially in terms of child protection and funding.

## Codes of Ethics and Codes of Practice

As for the application of statutory duties and regulations, the application of codes of ethics and codes of practice differed slightly from one sector to another. While the interviewee from the statutory sector did not refer to a particular code of conduct or code of ethics, she was clear that the organisation's staff handbook was affecting her practice greatly. The participant explains that, as her role was to assess new cases within the Access team, it was difficult to refer to a code of ethics for social workers. This difficulty, according to her, was partly because of the nature of the work, which involves a very limited contact with service users, but also because only 20% of the workforce that constitute the Access team were qualified for social work. Therefore, the participant explained that she did not perceive the unqualified staff as having the need to refer to the code of ethics. However, the participant explained that the Access team staff were provided with a staff handbook in order to help them to deal with ethical dilemmas. The participants explained, however, that, when an ethical dilemma occurs, for example in the case of a client who has needs that do not meet the criteria, the social workers have to follow the rules of the organisation instead of the client's needs. The participant explained that, if a client has an important need but does not fit the criteria provided by the local authority, he or she will not be able to receive the service needed and will therefore be referred somewhere else.

In regard to the other sector, none of the three organisations visited during these preliminary interviews based their practices upon recognised code of ethics to guide their work. However, all voluntary organisations visited also

produced at least a staff handbook that included, for example, the values of the organisation and various internal policies. The reasons for not using a code of ethics such as that produced by BASW differed from one organisation to another. A project worker explained their reasoning for not using such a code:

> We don't use the BASW code of ethics because until recently it was not even updated and the 1975 edition is extremely sexist because it is written like if all social workers were men where the vast majority of social workers are women so it is unusable.

Other participants explained that their staff handbooks were appropriate to the type of work they did and that they were more specific to the context in which intervention took place as opposed to a general code of conduct. For one particular organisation, the organisation's value base was more important than formal guidelines found in codes of conduct. As the director of a voluntary organisation explains, "we are not looking for our volunteers to be all the same, we are looking for diversity".

Another interviewee explained the importance of core values as opposed to a simple code of ethics:

> We are very keen that there is a very clear ethical and anti-oppressive practice strand in [our work] so people actually know where it is and people are very clear about what it means so they can actually put in into practice instead of just finding it on a piece of paper. Our code is not written down – it is implicit rather than explicit. (Project worker for a voluntary organisation)

Similar to one of the reasons given by the statutory social worker, a voluntary organisation explained they were not using a code of ethics such as the one

produced by BASW, because the majority of their employees were not qualified for social work. Indeed,

> no 'social workers' are employed – some of the organisers are social workers but we are looking in the qualities of organisers, not their qualifications. Non judgment, good managers, and some of the people who are employed are nurses, teachers, social workers, hair dressers, a housewife, but it is the human qualities that they have rather than the professional qualification that we look for. (Director of a national non-governmental organisation)

Therefore, for the voluntary sector organisations, a value base, as opposed to a code of ethics, was perceived as being more appropriate and useful for the type of work carried out by their organisations.

Nevertheless, from the data gained during this first set of data, and regardless of the sector, it was clear that, while staff handbooks and value statements were important to their unique social work practice, codes of ethics and codes of conduct were considered less of a foundation on which social work roles and duties were based. However, it is important to note that the data were collected in 1999, before the launch of the General Social Care Council and the compulsory codes of practice for employers and employees published in 2002 and that the information collected could possibly have changed since.

## Social Action and the Voluntary Sector

Each of the organisations visited had a set of values specific to their organisation. The organisations from the voluntary sector were mainly based on values of social justice and on principles such as confidentiality, empathy

and being non-judgemental, whereas the statutory social worker mentioned a similar set of values but with additional components: dignity and equality, social justice, integrity and sustainability.

None of the interviewees from either sector referred to their project or organisation as being one based on social action. However, all organisations from the voluntary sector included the value of empowerment and social justice as being central to their work. Nevertheless, some voluntary organisations felt that their intervention was not always fostering the development of empowerment or anti-oppressive practice in every situation:

> Our record on equal opportunity and anti-oppressive practice is perhaps not as good as it could be ... most of our volunteers and most of our organisers are white ... and most of them are women ... and we now want to encourage more black people to become organisers or volunteers and more men... not primarily because of equal opportunity, but because as an organisation we want to reach all sections of the community. (Director of a national non-governmental organisation)

One particular interviewee felt that, although working within a social-justice value based organisation, upholding a high priority on values such as empowerment and anti-discriminatory practice was sometimes difficult to achieve:

> I try to highlight that it may be difficult to promote anti-discriminatory work and sometimes it can be a huge problem. In many groups, there is a big gap between talking about it [empowerment and social justice] with people from ethnic minorities or disabled children, for example, but often the actual work does not achieve that. (Manager for a national non-governmental organisation)

This was particularly felt by a worker employed by a Christian organisation where, for example, employing gay and lesbian people was perceived as problematic by the organisation's management.

However, values such as empowerment, social justice and anti-oppressive practice were paramount to the voluntary sector organisations' value bases. As a manager from a voluntary organisation explains,

> we make sure that all the bits of work we do incorporates anti-oppressive practice throughout everything we do.

One particular organisation did not only aim at empowering service users, but also at empowering workers and volunteers as well. This was illustrated by the interviewee telling the researcher about many volunteers and employees taking steps in order to gain qualifications as a result of their positive work-experience for the organisation:

> First, the volunteers themselves get something out of the service. It is not only the service user who gains in the service. Some of the volunteers go on to training to become social workers or teachers. (Director of a national voluntary organisation)

In addition to a focus on empowerment for volunteers and employees, this same organisation felt that voluntary organisations in general tend to promote service users' empowerment more than is possible within the statutory sector:

There are some advantages in the voluntary organisation ... from the family point of view it feels much more comfortable to them, people don't get visits because they are inadequate parents. Social services in the UK have become very stigmatised since maybe 5 or 10 years. It is not seen as a good thing to have a social worker. Because there have been quite a few bad cases where social workers were seen as 'snatching' children away from their home. (Director of a national voluntary organisation)

The concept of 'not labelling' was therefore an important value that was underpinned by the value of empowerment and anti-oppressive practice. Another concept that emerged from the data was that of 'relationships' and 'boundaries' between the service user and worker. One particular voluntary organisation mentioned the importance of relationships built between the worker and the service user:

The actual chemistry of the relationship is unique to 'that' volunteer and 'that' family and that is what makes it work very well indeed. (Director of a national non-governmental organisation)

It was also pointed out, however, that there are limits to the relationships between service user and worker and that perhaps some codes of conduct would be valuable in certain cases:

We would not match a single male volunteer with a single mother. There have been a couple of cases where the volunteers were visiting couples, and the mother felt in love with the volunteer and the relationship broke down [...] but there is no code of conduct. (Director of a national voluntary organisation)

Therefore, while some voluntary organisations do not use a code of conduct or a code of ethics, or are not affected by statutory duties or regulations, it appears that some service users may be more at risk in certain situations. On the other hand, having rigid handbooks, guidelines or statutory duties can hinder the social care practitioner's work, as illustrated by the social worker from the Access team above. Indeed, the social worker mentioned that she felt she had to follow the rules of the organisation instead of the client's needs. Ethics, conduct, and right or wrong behaviour seem to be understood differently by the participants of this first set of interviews.

Consequently, in the light of these data, the research calls for further questioning: how are ethics and ethical conduct understood by social care practitioners? Therefore, the second stage of data collection and analysis will aim to examine the social care practitioners' understanding of guidelines, codes of ethics, codes of conduct and other mechanisms for the protection of the public and the worker.

## Second-Stage Analysis: Focus Groups Analysed through Open Coding

### Methodological Procedures: Open Coding

As the research continued, more data collections took place. The literature was explored further, and focus groups were initiated to add depth to the previous data analysed through the preliminary interviews and the first literature review. Because new codes appeared during the data collection from the focus groups, some codes from the first-stage analysis were regrouped with new codes from the second-stage analysis. Some codes were

eliminated because they were unrelated to the main research topic (Strauss, cited in Sarantakos 1993:272). The categories were also renamed, as the names from the categories from the first-stage analysis were too broad (see Figure 3 for these new categories). Strauss and Corbin (1990) support the concept of renaming categories during research and changing the originals for more appropriate ones.

## Figure 3: Second-Stage Analysis: Open Coding

| Ethics | Regulation | Vested Interest of the Policy Maker | Empowerment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ethical dilemmas | General Social Care Council | Government policy making | Social exclusion |
| Norms of behaviour | | | Social education |
| | Care Standard Act 2000 | Public protection | Self-directed groupwork |
| Conduct to adopt | | Public interest | |
| Social work values | Social policies | Professional interests | Oppression |
| Issues in social work | Politics | | Social relation in intervention |
| | Needs assessment | Social work values | |
| Roles and tasks of the social worker | Modernisation of the welfare state system | | Absence of a structure for decision-making |
| Codes of ethics | | | |
| Codes of conduct | Staff handbooks | | Consultancy |
| | Eligibility criteria | | Advocacy |
| | Statutory duties | | Anti-discriminatory practice |

The procedure for data analysis, that is to say 'open coding', was repeated. However, the following changes were made between the first and second stages of analysis: From the first-stage analysis, *statutory services* was replaced with *regulations* and *vested interests of the policy maker* during the second-stage analysis because the first category could lead to confusion with the 'sector of

social care practice' and could also incorporate codes from other categories. The category *social action work* from the first-stage analysis was replaced with *empowerment* during the second-stage analysis because some codes from the first-stage analysis could then be regrouped in different categories, such as *statutory services*. An example of this is *anti-discriminatory practice*: this code could be placed in *statutory services, social action work* or even *ethics*, as anti-discriminatory practice is a value base for many social care practice settings. Fielding (1993) states that codes must be mutually exclusive. This means that, for example, the code *vested interest* was not allowed in more than one category. However, during the first-stage analysis, some codes were found under different categories: for example, codes such as 'vested interest', intervention', and 'anti-oppressive practice' could not be placed under a sole category. In order not to replicate codes from one category to another (Glaser and Strauss 1967), the names of the categories were thus changed during the second-stage analysis.

After putting the new codes into different categories, the next step was to conceptualise – in other words, to build up explanations for the labels. During the second-stage analysis, many new codes had appeared, and some codes had merged with the new ones. These new codes led the researcher to adopt a more inductive approach. The researcher recognised at this stage that the previous research proposition was too strict and that a more open approach to the research had to be considered. From the different codes gathered during the second-stage analysis, a new data-collection tool was developed in the form of questionnaires, so as to explore the codes further.

## Second-Stage Analysis: The Data

The second-stage analysis aimed to explore the following reformulated research question: *'How are ethics and ethical conduct understood by social care practitioners?'* This new question emerged from the analysis of the interview scripts (first-stage analysis) and constituted the second-stage analysis of the research project.

The focus-group technique was employed to gather the data, and the sampling method used was 'opportunistic'. Indeed, an opportunity had arisen to join existing focus groups that had been organised in order to identify the roles of health and other care support workers. The research project in question had been commissioned by the Department of Health (DOH) with the aim of reviewing health support workers' roles and responsibilities and exploring regulations that might be appropriate for the health care workforce. This adjoining project was conducted between October 1999 and April 2000 (Better Regulation Task Force 1999). The researcher used three of the eight focus groups consulted for the DOH research project (these groups consisted of about eight social care assistants/support workers). The other five groups were not consulted in regard to this particular research because they were mainly composed of health professionals as opposed to social care workers. Specific questions related to the present research were incorporated in order to gather the data specific to this research project. For example, although the groups were set up to discuss a number of topics (see focus-group schedule in Appendix 2), the researcher joined these focus groups exclusively to gather data around codes of conducts, voluntary registers, external inspections/regulations and complaints procedures (exercise: protecting the public). This joint focus-group tactic was organised in order to minimise the respondents' involvement within both research projects. Below is a summary of the data accumulated during the

focus groups.

## Codes of conduct

Codes of conduct were considered important in shaping the culture of the workplace and the values of employees by laying down basic standards of attitude and behaviour. Setting principles for confidentiality and for the respectful treatment of service users was an important aspect, and there were general rules about such matters as smoking, language and dress. Because the code had to be sufficiently flexible to cover all groups of employees, detailed guidance about practice was not generally included, nor was it felt to be appropriate. Most of the focus group participants had become familiar with their own code of conduct at induction, although few claimed to have consulted it regularly once they had become established within the organisation; they nonetheless felt it to be a valuable reference point for themselves and for people receiving the service. The importance of publicising the code to service users and carers was therefore recognised, and this was felt to be adequately achieved through the distribution of leaflets and handbooks prominently displayed. Although the code of conduct was not a robust safeguard in its own right, it was seen as an essential component of a safe working environment for the social care workers.

## Voluntary registers

There was very little knowledge or experience of voluntary registers among the focus group participants. When examples of such registers were given and their operation outlined, the general view was that, although useful in those instances where both applicants and employees had chosen to use the register, they would provide an extremely limited safeguard for the workforce as a

whole because of their optional nature. There were questions about the standards adopted for operating these registers and concerns that, if poorly run, unsuitable people might be included. Questions were raised about the sanctions available: being 'struck off' a voluntary register would have little meaning for the person who could immediately gain employment elsewhere.

## Complaints procedures

Rather like codes of conduct, while complaints procedures were not at the forefront of attention from day to day, they were seen to be important in setting the tone of the workplace or service. They signalled to users and their families that they had an independent right to question what was being provided. The support workers said that, although it was not always easy to view complaints positively rather than defensively, it was important that the staff learned to do so. To this end, it was essential that senior management took a strong lead and promoted the procedures through notices, brochures and leaflets. Several workers said that, although they would try to deal with issues informally in the first instance, they would have no hesitation in encouraging users to make a formal complaint if appropriate. Complaints procedures were seen to work most effectively in user-sensitive and well-run environments. Where conditions were poor and the needs of users given low priority, the procedures in themselves were thought unlikely to provide much protection.

## External inspection

Many examples of external scrutiny were given (for example, Investor in People, NVQ assessment, and health and safety). At the more formal end were the local authority inspections, the monitoring reports that a voluntary organisation had to provide for its funders, and health and safety inspections

and audits. Formal inspection was generally viewed as necessary and fair and as a vital safeguard for the public; however, one group pointed out that they would welcome formal inspections as long as they encompassed a flexible approach and that their organisation's values would not be undermined. For this particular group, it was therefore important that the organisation's value remained central to the work carried out.

Examining the case for an additional regulatory mechanism

The participants were asked whether the existing employment safeguards, if properly implemented, were sufficient on their own to protect the public against abusive individuals and incompetent practice or whether an additional level of regulation, probably involving a register of workers, was needed. The balance of opinion across the three focus groups was in favour of supplementary regulation, although levels of support varied. Participants qualified their support with a range of questions and doubts.

For example, a national system could be good to protect the public and maintain standards of practice, but participants also raised questions such as

- Would the system be accessible and user-friendly for service users and carers?
- Who would pay?
- What would be the basis for registration?

In addition, if there were to be a detailed code of practice and standards of training, some smaller and more specialised organisations, particularly in the voluntary sector, could go under. There could thus be the danger of

undermining choice for service users.

To sum up, while most participants welcomed the principle of supplementary regulation, they recognised a number of issues around its implementation that would need to be carefully worked through if the benefits of a new system were to justify the cost.

In the light of this data collection, a number of new concepts (codes) emerged, such as the perceived importance of regulations and safeguards for the protection of the public or the public interest, and the organisational and professional values.

Each code accumulated during the first two stages of the data collection and analysis so far served as the basis for the development of the questionnaires, which constituted the third-stage analysis. Since the first and second stages of analysis were considered to be preliminary data, the focus of this chapter will be aimed at the third and fourth stages of analysis, as explored below. For an exhaustive list of the codes that informed the development of the questionnaires, see Figure 3 above.

**Third-Stage Analysis: Questionnaires Analysed through Axial Coding**

The data for the third-stage analysis were collected using a questionnaire that was designed in the light of the second-stage analysis. The preliminary data accumulated during the first two stages of analysis had shown differences in understandings of ethics, values and empowerment, and also in public protection, regulations and the utilisation of guidelines. The decision was then taken to collect data in various fields of social care practice and to analyse the

data according to field of practice and by comparing the data between the fields in order to identify differences and similarities. It was decided, at that stage, to determine three distinct sectors of the provision of social services where data was to be collected: the statutory sector remained the same as for previous data-collection points, but a distinction would be made between the voluntary sector (which includes small groups and national charities) and specific social action projects, which can take place in either statutory social services projects or within a voluntary organisation but that are characterised by the strict adherence to social action values (see Literature Review: Social action Setting for further details).

As already explained in the methodology chapter, over 60 questionnaires were sent out; 32 were returned and 30 were retained for analysis, with 10 usable returns from each sector studied (statutory social work, voluntary sector and social action settings).

*Methodological Procedures: Axial Coding*

From the data collected via the questionnaires, a third-stage analysis was developed. At this stage, a different type of coding was used: 'axial coding'. Axial coding is defined as a method of data analysis that "concentrates on issues related to the axis of a category, and involves more intensive analysis" (Sarantakos 1993:272). Strauss and Corbin (1990:96) explain axial coding as

> a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by utilising coding paradigms involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences.

In other words, the codes and categories themselves are not only analysed in terms of meanings, but are also compared with one other. The three sectors examined during the research were statutory social services, voluntary organisations and social action settings. In order to achieve axial coding, the codes were not only compared in terms of categories (as with the open coding at the earlier stage), but were also examined in relation to the different sectors. Figure 4 illustrates the axial coding constructed in the third-stage analysis.

Again, as for the second-stage analysis, some of the category names were changed for more appropriate labels. Additionally, some of the codes were regrouped to form sub-categories. Because of the nature of the axial coding, codes and categories were also analysed according to social services sector (statutory sector, voluntary sector and social action). Figure 4 below explains how the axial coding was achieved:

## Figure 4: Third-Stage Analysis – Axial Coding

| Category | Codes | Statutory Sector | Voluntary Sector | Social Action |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ethics | Understanding of ethics | Examination of the understanding of the concept of ethics within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action understandings of ethics | Examination of the understanding of the concept of ethics within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action understandings of ethics | Examination of the understanding of the concept of ethics within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector understandings of ethics |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Values** | Examination of the values in ethics within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action values in ethics | Examination of the values in ethics within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action values in ethics | Examination of the values in ethics within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector values in ethics |
| | **Conflicts and dilemmas** | Examination of the different ethical dilemmas within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action dilemmas/conflicts | Examination of the different ethical dilemmas within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action dilemmas/<br><br>conflicts | Examination of the different ethical dilemmas within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector dilemmas/<br><br>conflicts |
| | **Codes of practice / ethics** | Examination of the application of different codes of practice within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action applications of codes of practice | Examination of the application of different codes of practice within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action applications of codes of practice | Examination of the application of different codes of practice within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector applications of codes of practice |
| **Power** | **Empower-ment** | Examination of the concept of empowerment within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action concepts of empowerment | Examination of the concept of empowerment within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action concepts of empowerment | Examination of the concept of empowerment within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector concepts of empowerment |

| Interests | Examination of the different interests in decision-making within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action interests in decision-making | Examination of the different interests in decision-making within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action interests in decision-making | Examination of the different interests in decision-making within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector interests in decision-making |
|---|---|---|---|
| Regulation | Examination of the impact of regulation on decision-making within statutory social services<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary sector and social action impact of regulation on decision-making | Examination of the impact of regulation on decision-making within the voluntary sector<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the statutory sector and social action impact of regulation on decision-making | Examination of the impact of regulation on decision-making within social action<br><br>&<br><br>Comparison with the voluntary and statutory sector impact of regulation on decision-making |

The axial coding was achieved by examining each code for each sector, developing an understanding of the concept within the sector and comparing each code between different sectors. For example, the concept of power and empowerment was examined in relation to the statutory sector, but also compared with the examination of the concept of power and empowerment within the voluntary sector and social action settings. As Strauss and Corbin (1990:97) stress, axial coding "puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories".

The analysis by axial coding was carried out to discover whether there were any links, patterns or relationships between each code (or the sub-categories) and the categories from different sectors of the provision of social care services. Because the main methodology used was Grounded Theory, the search for exceptions or negative cases within the comparison was considered to be essential:

> It is just as important in doing Grounded Theory studies to find evidence of differences and variation, as it is to find evidence that supports our original questions and statements. The negative or alternative cases tell us that something about this instance is different, and so we must move in and take a close look at what this might be. (Strauss and Corbin 1990:109)

Special attention was given to the negative cases during the analysis of the questionnaires (in the third-stage analysis) and served in building the interview schedule and vignettes that were used during the fourth stage of the data collection (see below). The vignettes and interviews were also developed through axial coding; indeed, questions and vignettes were developed to validate the new codes and categories from the third-stage analysis.

*Third-Stage Analysis: The Data*

Statutory Social Services

All the respondents were based within a social services area office and worked within the remit of Personal Social Services (PSS), as discussed in the literature review. All called themselves 'social workers'. Most of these participants were

qualified to the DipSW level or equivalent, apart from two (of whom, one had a Youth and Community Work Diploma, while the other had no qualifications relevant to social care practice). Only two of the respondents belonged to the BASW, and of these two, only one used the title of 'social worker'. One respondent used the title without being qualified to the DipSW level (note: these data were collected in the year 2000, before the General Social Care Council came into force and recognised the title of 'social worker').

Their day-to-day work was similar to their job descriptions, and they had all been given either a staff handbook, a code of conduct or policies and procedures to follow within their work. Their agencies' internal regulations were said to have a very important impact on their practice. One respondent noted on the questionnaire:

> I follow them all the time but mostly from memory. The things I look up are usually to do with the more politically sensitive areas e.g. mistreatment of older adult, guardianship under the Mental Health Act, access to record. (Statutory social worker – adult with disability/older adult)

Each respondent was also strongly influenced by at least one of the following items of legislation: Community Care Act 1996, Chronically Ill and Disabled Persons Act 1976, Mental Health Act 1983, Carer and Disabled Children Act 2000, and Children Act 1989.

Practitioners understood the concepts of ethics and ethical dilemmas as being influenced by regulations such as agencies' internal policies and regulations, statutory duties and admissibility criteria. Respondents to the questionnaire noted, for example, that ethical dilemmas occurred "when your personal belief

system tells you what is the right course of action but it conflicts with your statutory duties" (statutory social worker – children and family) or "when you are required to take a particular course of action that conflicts with your own personal values or belief" (statutory social worker – residential care). One respondent noted that an ethical dilemma was when one has to make a decision that affects "whether you keep your job or not" (statutory social worker – intensive support team). This comment emphasises the importance of the internal policy, regulation and overall work settings on the understanding of ethics and ethical dilemmas.

Examples of conflict between professional values and the use of statutory duties were often used to illustrate the kinds of ethical dilemmas that emerged from their practice. Among the elements that were said to cause ethical dilemmas, participants mentioned

- conflict between their professional values and the agency's policy,
- conflict between users' wishes and risk assessment,
- conflict between budget restrictions and users' needs,
- conflict in regard to flexibility and fairness in providing services (including admission criteria), and
- tension between their roles (enabling or controlling).

According to participants, the most important elements to consider in resolving ethical dilemmas were statutory duties and regulations, agency policies, risk for the user, their own values or their professional values, and others' opinions. One respondent, in relation to resolving ethical dilemmas, commented:

I suppose I would adopt the Standard Service 'mantra', 'everyone has choice', 'you could have done this differently'. I sometimes may not believe it but I suppose I would end up using it to cover-up my own sympathy with their predicament. (Statutory social worker – probation services)

Legal duties and agency policies were highlighted as having the most impact on their practice.

The term 'empowerment' was understood on an individual level (Gutierrez and Ortega 1991). Respondents perceived empowerment as being translatable into practice by offering choices, sharing power with the service user, providing information and resources, and enabling and promoting independence. Examples of definitions provided by the respondents included the following:

Assisting people to make choices, giving people information, listening to what people say, working with people, enabling independence, increased confidence and self-esteem. (Statutory social work manager – older adult)

Empowering practice I feel is where you encourage the service user to take control of any assessment procedure/meeting that they are taking part of. It should not be a process that I, as a social worker, am in charge of. It is an equal partnership where the service user should be enabled by practitioner to take control of their life. (Statutory social worker – adult commissioning)

These definitions of empowerment therefore highlight the personal level without any reference to social changes as suggested by Mullender and Ward (1991).

All respondents perceived themselves as 'empowering practitioners', but they also mentioned that many aspects of their work had a disabling effect on their ability to work in the way they wished. One newly qualified social worker noted:

> I do try to be an empowering practitioner – being newly qualified I feel gives me the opportunity to emphasise the rights of the service user whereas I have actually witnessed older, longer qualified workers to be more discriminatory in their manners. I try to evaluate the service user[s] to express themselves freely in my assessment process but inevitably, when completing paperwork as mentioned previously, negative [aspects of the client's life] have to be cited in order to get the most appropriate service. (Statutory social worker – adult with disability/older adults)

Therefore, the organisational context of social services, for example the policies and the agency's values, seemed to be the foremost cause of ethical dilemmas at this point in the research. This was a result of the 'internal and external regulations' that social care practitioners had to comply with and that were qualified as being either too numerous (and therefore leading to confusion), or being too prescriptive (and consequently not allowing them to take full account of the needs or rights of individuals using the service). Nevertheless, social care practitioners identified that ethical dilemmas often took two forms: on one hand, struggles between their professional values and the agency's values and procedures, and on the other, struggles between users' needs and the agency's capacity to respond to identified needs.

## The Voluntary Sector

All the respondents were paid employees working for a voluntary organisation: eight of them worked for a national voluntary organisation, while two practiced

within small local charities. Six respondents were DipSW qualified, and four had no formal qualifications relevant to social care practice. Half the respondents believed that their job description was different from their day-to-day work. None of them belonged to a professional organisation that provided guidelines for ethical practice (for example, the BASW). Internal guidelines were often provided by their agencies, and these guidelines were said to have a strong influence on their work. This was particularly the case among workers from the national voluntary organisations. Most of the practitioners who participated in this study as part of the 'voluntary sector' group were regulated to some extent by statutory duties.

Participants understood the concept of ethics as being concerned with conflicts about moral judgements and standards of practice and also with respect, individual needs, rules, principles and boundaries. A respondent expressed their understanding of ethical dilemma as

> having to make a choice between undertaking a course of action that could be contrary to your beliefs, values or morality – or principles. Doing something that may have benefits for ourselves but costs for others. The conflict between the 'rightness' of a course of action and its potential 'benefit'. The sense that one 'should' do something means that you 'ought' to do it – the moral imperative. This also relate to power and authority. That you can do certain things, but should you really? (Project Leader from a national voluntary organisation)

When respondents reflected on their experiences of ethical dilemmas, half believed that agency policies were very important to consider when making a decision over an ethical dilemma. One respondent noted that

personal values, personal and professional judgement, user's needs, agency policy, code of conduct from my agency, although personal values should always be excluded when being objective in providing a service. Important that agency policy is taken into account so I am covered if there are difficulties. User needs should be at the forefront. (Mental-health worker within a small voluntary organisation)

It is important, however, to point out that they mentioned their adherence to agency policies, regulations and values as being driven not by obligation but by belief in the values of the organisation. Nonetheless, the concept of rules and principles was said to have an important impact on their decision-making in relation to ethical dilemmas.

There was no apparent agreement between practitioners from this sector as to what the concept of empowerment meant. Nearly half the respondents understood empowerment on a personal level, while the other half understood it on a structural level. A respondent explains that empowerment ought

to enable people to make independent choices, whilst at the same time being aware of the consequences of those choices both for themselves and other people. (Social worker within a small voluntary organisation)

Another practitioner comments that empowerment is a practice that

enable[s] the service user to control the situation and that develop a sense of power. It focuses on society rather than on the individual. (Worker within a local project attached to a national voluntary organisation)

Practitioners from the voluntary sector perceived the organisational context of their employing agency to be an important element in relation to achieving or

not achieving empowerment. However, most of the respondents perceived themselves as empowering practitioners.

Practitioners identified several areas where ethical dilemmas were likely to arise in relation to the concept of empowerment. The most important dilemma was identified as occurring in relation to the 'agency's expectations'. The emergence of this dilemma implied that, within the voluntary sector, empowerment can only be achieved if the agency supports and promotes it in practice. Other areas where ethical dilemmas occurred (in relation to empowerment) were identified as relating to confidentiality, boundary issues, fairness in the provision of services and budget constraints. Therefore, many of the areas identified as including dilemmas related to empowerment were areas of interaction with external factors, such as agency policies and regulations.

Social Action

Ten practitioners using social action work completed questionnaires: four of these filled in postal questionnaires, and six provided a tape-recorded interview based on the same questionnaire. All the respondents worked for the independent sector, apart from one, whose project was directly funded by the local authority. However, despite the fact that the majority were working for the independent sector, many of these projects were partly funded by the local authority, even though the participants were not directly employed by the local authority or statutory social services. One respondent had social work qualifications, nearly half had youth and community work qualifications (BA Hons or MA) and one had no particular qualifications in social work/social care practice. None called themselves 'social workers'. None of these practitioners belonged to professional organisations such as the BASW.

Nearly all the respondents were working within 'guidelines' provided by their agencies. All the respondents who had such guidelines said that they had an influence on their work. Nearly all the respondents stated that the guidelines supplied by the organisation provided them with the agency's core values, for example social action principles (or values derived from them), confidentiality policies, and anti-oppressive practice and equality of opportunity statements. They mentioned that these guidelines were not generally perceived as being too prescriptive. One respondent noted:

> We have not got a 'handbook' but we have a team meeting every week where we talk about the practice and what's happening with the group. It is a kind of brainstorming session. We have got a kind of code of practice if you like, we do our core value exercise e.g. confidentiality statement. So we have processes which have been developed within the last 7 years. I try to keep that but there is nobody to 'kick my ass' and I would perhaps need it because if I don't make sure it is not kept, nobody can help it. We also have a values exercise and everybody needs to unanimously agree for a value to be accepted and if someone does not totally agree, it becomes a secondary value. (Project manager – youth project)

Statutory regulations (such as the Children Act) were often mentioned, but were not perceived as having an important impact on their work. Social action workers stressed the importance of focusing on users' needs instead of merely following the guidelines given to them. A youth worker commented in relation to child protection:

> I think generally we do good practice and it is sort of pain to have to do a checklist before going to see a young person. I don't think these regulations have been a major problem really. With child protection for example, we have got the duty to report, but our values are about

working with the young people first ... stuff around confidentiality, data protection ... but if we see something we think it has to be reported, we talk with the young person first. We decided not to get involved with 'inter agency' as we feel uncomfortable with that ... I think it keeps us out of all these duties really. (Project manager – youth project)

Dilemmas around the disclosure of information and statutory duties were identified as being the most common among practitioners from this sector. In particular, because social action workers were not compelled to work directly with statutory duties, they needed to ensure that their actions were professional and accountable. A youth worker explained:

A lot of people were telling us they were going around this man's house and he is 50 or so. And nobody seems to know why young people wanted to go to this house so we got suspicious that he was giving them money, sweets and stuff like that, buying clothes so social services started to ring up about that. We tried to find out more about it through the person who was telling us, but we have to be careful because this estate runs on gossips! Gossips are really interesting! But you have to be careful because they are often a lot of crap. So we always try to find more about that before we do something. However, we are not supposed to do that ... we would be supposed to chop them away but if we did that, it would not help our reputation in any good.

Another type of dilemma faced by the social action respondents was in relation to funding. Indeed, it was often felt that, even though they worked for the independent sector, the source of their funding was often an issue, because the aims and objectives of the organisation that provided the funding did not always fit with the values of social action work:

We want the active involvement of the community in the project that we do and we believe that the community can change things for themselves. But we do it within a very strict time frame and I think

personally that in some occasion, I have created some enthusiasm within the community without having time or money to finish everything. Sometimes you get people started, you created excitement and then, contract is finished and you have to leave them. The real ethical dilemma in that is how quickly you forget about that. (Project worker – independent sector)

Although funding was identified as an important source of ethical dilemmas for most participants, dilemmas around their roles and the boundaries with service users were also mentioned by some participants.

Social action workers understood the term 'empowerment' as being part of social action or self-directed groupwork principles. They positioned the concept of power and empowerment on a structural level rather than on a personal one. For them, empowering practice was about "making changes and working for social justice" (housing support worker – independent sector). However, one practitioner mentioned that empowerment was sometimes hard to achieve in reality because of their agency's policy:

It is sometimes difficult [to be empowering] because of the agency policy, but I try to put young people's needs first and listing to what they have to say. (Project manager – youth project)

Despite identifying funding as a block to empowerment, most respondents believed that their agency promoted the empowerment of users.

In the light of the data collected so far, and the axial-coding analysis, it appears that some differences can be perceived regarding the ways that ethics, empowerment, regulations, interests, dilemmas and values were understood by

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social care practitioners from the different fields. The following list gives a summary of the key points that emerged from this analysis:

- Understandings of ethics and empowerment are influenced by the organisational context of the employing agency and the ways that regulations are perceived and understood by practitioners and then applied in practice;
- The more an organisation is regulated, the more empowerment will be achieved on a personal level;
- Practitioners from all sectors feel that most of the ethical dilemmas are provoked by something external to them or the user;
- Even when the practitioner works within a small organisation without apparently oppressive structures, the funding element of the project has the same impact as the organisational context of work within more regulated agencies such as social services.

The key points above served to inform the construction of the interview schedule and the vignette-based interviews used for the fourth-stage analysis.

**Fourth-Stage Analysis: Semi-Structured Interviews and Vignette-based Interviews Analysed through Selective Coding**

The fourth-stage analysis was the final phase of the Grounded Theory process before the research reached saturation. One interview schedule was developed and piloted, which incorporated two well-defined sections: an interview based on four vignettes, and several semi-structured questions. An important aspect of the Grounded Theory process in relation to sampling concerns identifying

and researching negative cases. The sampling for this stage of the data collection was carried out by contacting participants who had previously participated by filling in the questionnaire and whose answers were marginally different from the majority of practitioners in their respective settings. This constituted an important element of the Grounded Theory process.

The following section intends to examine the methodological procedure used in order to analyse the data on the one hand and, on the other, to summarise the data that appeared during analysis of the answers to the vignettes and semi-structured interviews. This second section on the presentation of the data will cover the data collected from the vignette-based questions, and the second part will focus on data gathered in the semi-structured interviews. Again, comparative methods were used to examine the data, and selective coding was used to analyse it.

*Methodological Procedures: Selective Coding*

Selective coding was used to analyse the data gathered by vignettes and semi-structured interviews. Selective coding can be described as an approach that "concentrates on coding key categories" (Sarantakos 1993: 272). Strauss and Corbin (1990:116) describe selective coding as

> the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.

Because the data from the vignettes and semi-structured interviews validated the data gathered through the use of questionnaires, only the key categories were analysed. The pattern of data analysis used for the fourth-stage analysis was the same as that used at the third stage (see Figure 5), although different

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names were given to some categories, and some other key categories were merged together.

**Figure 5: Codes Becoming Categories between Third- and Fourth-Stage Analysis**

| 3rd Stage | 4th Stage |
|---|---|
| Understanding | Practitioner |
| Values | Practitioner |
| Dilemma | Practitioner |
| Empowerment | Practitioner |
| Vested Interests | Practitioner |
| Regulations | Organisational context of work |
| Codes of Ethics / Practice | Organisational context of work |

Therefore, during the third-stage analysis, a number of codes (*understanding, values, dilemmas, empowerment* and *vested interests*) became the sub-category *practitioner*, and the codes *regulation* and *code of ethics* from the third-stage analysis became *organisational context of work* for the fourth-stage analysis. Figure 6, below, shows the codes that further merged into sub-categories.

The categories *practitioners* and *organisational context of work* merged during the third and fourth stages of analysis into that of *power*.

There are therefore only two main sub-categories and one core category (story line) (Glaser and Strauss 1967) for the fourth-stage analysis; these are as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Core category (story line):* | Power | |
| *Sub-categories:* | Organisational context of work | |
| | Practitioner | |

In order to arrive at the final results for the fourth-stage analysis and therefore to achieve saturation, the remaining codes were allocated to different sub-categories, and both sub-categories were regrouped under one core category: *power* (Figure 6 above). Indeed, as will be explained in the next chapter – Theorisation of the Core Category (Chapter Seven) – levels of power between organisational contexts of work and practitioners create different types of ethical dilemmas.

The fourth-stage analysis was therefore conducted through selective coding. The codes were used for the main comparison, and the themes were used to gain a clearer understanding of the codes.

## Figure 6: Fourth-Stage Analysis

| Category | Power | |
|---|---|---|
| Sub-categories | Organisational context of work | Practitioner |
| Codes | Funding | Training |
| | Budget | Vested interests |
| | Structure of the agency | Professional expertise |
| | Statutory duties | Religion |
| | Culture of the agency | Personal beliefs |

| | |
|---|---|
| Resource | Personal values |
| Hierarchy | Ethics |
| Pressure of the outcomes | Professionalism |
| Criteria | Responsibility |
| Control of resource | Protection of the user |
| Procedures/guidelines | Respect for diversity |
| Services | Enabling |
| Accountability | Empowerment |
| Agency's expectation | Self-determination of user |
| Risk assessment | User's trust |
| | Anti-oppressive practice |

The following section intends to examine the data as it appears in the light of the interviews and vignette-based interviews.

*Fourth-Stage Analysis: The Data*

Data from the Vignettes

From the analysis of the questionnaires, seven core categories were discovered: *understanding of ethics, values, dilemmas, empowerment, vested interests, regulations* and *codes of ethics*. From a general point of view, it was also identified that social care practitioners were affected on a day-to-day basis by statutory duties and the organisational context of work (in its broadest sense). Therefore, while developing each vignette, an attempt was made to include elements from the organisational context of work and statutory duties in relation to the work of social care practitioners from various fields of practice.

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From the analysis of the questionnaires, it appeared that 'regulation' and 'statutory duties' were not separate from the concept of the 'organisational context of work'; all three were therefore amalgamated under the term *organisational context of work.* Indeed, all the concepts above appeared to have the same impact on the day-to-day work of practitioners. For example, statutory duties did not appear to have more impact than agency constraints and the organisational context of work in general.

Each of the vignettes used during the interviews incorporated one or more of the elements identified as the seven core categories that had emerged during the analysis of the questionnaires. Regulation and vested interests were most often presented as dilemmas that could trigger different courses of action. Particular attention was also paid to analysis of the impact of the organisational context of work on workers' decision-making processes. Vignette A was developed to measure the impact of statutory duties and child-protection issues on the proposed dilemma. Vignette B was constructed to measure the impact of budgets and the importance of the agency's expectations on the worker's decision-making process. Vignette C was developed to measure the impact of statutory duties on the proposed situation. Finally, Vignette D did not have any elements relating to statutory duties, but could trigger issues with regard to funding and equal-opportunity policies.

Each vignette was accompanied by a set of questions for respondents to answer. This aimed to verify the remaining codes that had appeared in the third-stage analysis:

> **Question 1: What do you think [name of the worker] should do?**
>
> *This aimed to verify the respondent's spontaneous decision on the dilemma and allowed the researcher to monitor changes in the answers according to the different values exposed in questions 2, 3 and 4.*
>
> **Question 2:** According to your **personal values only**, what would you do in [worker's] situation or a similar situation?
>
> **Question 3:** According to your **professional values only**, what would you do in [worker's] situation or a similar situation?
>
> **Question 4:** According to your **agency's expectations, guidance and core values**, what would you do in [worker's] situation or a similar situation?
>
> *These questions aimed to gather data in order to compare the impact of different values in the decision-making process.* The following third-stage analysis codes were examined: values, dilemmas, vested interests, regulations and codes of ethics.
>
> **Question 5: Do you perceive this vignette as an ethical dilemma?**
>
> *This question aimed to discover the respondent's understanding of ethics and ethical dilemmas and to reveal their perception of the vignette.*

The following section presents the main findings from the vignette-based interviews, compared across the sectors.

## VIGNETTE A

### Self-determination of the user, protection of the user, statutory duties

**Statutory duties** were identified as an important cause of ethical dilemmas during the analysis of the third-stage categories. Vignette A was specifically designed to explore the issues of self-determination of the user and empowerment against protection of the user (enabling versus protecting) and the effects of statutory duties on the decision-making process.

They are very young ... so ethically ... the welfare of the children ... I'm not tempted initiate to quickly procedures that once you initiated you can't go back on ... and also she might be out for a very good reason ... you have to believe what the children say ... they don't know where she is and they don't know when she will be back so I think we need to believe what the children tell us ... yeah ... if she went to get a coffee down the road, she would probably have said 'I'll be back in half of an hour'... yeah. (Voluntary sector worker)

When social care practitioners considered their agency's expectations, the answers given by respondents from the three fields of practice were also similar to those given previously: an expectation that they would initialise formal procedures in order to ensure the safety of the children. Safety of the children was considered to be paramount for all the agencies involved. Two respondents (one each from the voluntary and statutory sectors) mentioned that the agency would probably be concerned about media attention in this case. These respondents thought that they would have to intervene quickly to protect the interests of the agency and their profession as well as the children.

All the respondents thought that this situation was difficult because of a conflict between applying the 'rules' (and consequently initiating formal procedures in order to protect the children) and their professional values, which would then lead them to keep a good relationship in place and empower the service user (Vicky, in this case). This vignette was identified as one posing an ethical dilemma for the respondents from the voluntary sector and social action settings, but not for the statutory social workers:

The conflict of values in this dilemma would be about protecting the children...and it would also be about not putting somebody into trouble. (Social action worker)

She is a new single parent and this role is very, very stressful. You know, if you do that [initialising formal children protection procedures], you will probably damage the relationship pretty quickly ... but you can't walk away and leave the children locked up in a house ... so it is to find the balance as an individual worker ... and I would be prepared if I had to take some action ... but it may break the relationship ... but policy are rules in a sense ... they are not there to attack the worker or agency ... they are there to give guidance so at the end, the individual always has to make some decision ... and weigh them up. (Voluntary sector worker)

Statutory social workers, on the other hand, did not perceive the situation as an ethical dilemma because their agency was providing them with very clear procedures and guidelines to intervene in similar situations to the one exposed in the vignette.

No, it would not be [an ethical dilemma] because I would follow the agency procedures ... I sound like a robot, don't I? You know, I know exactly what procedures I have to follow ... she knows that I am not a friend. (Statutory social worker)

I would feel very disappointed if she didn't feel able to talk to me ... but the children are not old enough to look after themselves ... so they would need protection ... She is old enough to look after herself ... the children aren't. (Statutory social worker)

The difference between the statutory social workers and the voluntary and social action practitioners, in terms of identifying the vignette as an ethical dilemma or not, was very important. Statutory social workers did not perceive the vignette as an 'ethical dilemma', because there was an absence of choice in the course of action due to the procedures and policies expected by their agencies. They did not perceive the situation as an ethical dilemma, as their course of action would be prescribed by the agency rather than them having to make the decision. However, taken out of a work context, the vignette would have been resolved differently by respondents from the statutory sector and thus could have posed an ethical dilemma:

> Me, as a person, if I was going there ... if I was not working for the Local Authority, then I would be more sympathetic.... She is a single parent ... she probably just nipped to the shop or done something really quickly. I think personally it is not appropriate to do what she has done, but I could maybe understand why she had to do that.... Personally, I would not report her if it was ... you know...[if it was not from the Local Authority]. (Statutory social worker)

Although not all social care practitioners from the different sectors would follow the procedures and guidelines 'by the book', they were all influenced by them to different degrees. Because of the procedures they have to follow within their work, statutory social workers did not express concern in resolving the situation, but did mention a certain degree of awkwardness in carrying out the decision, because their personal and professional values sometimes conflict with the regulations.

On the other hand, social care practitioners from the voluntary and social action sectors faced a dilemma, because their decisions were not imposed by guidelines and procedures, and therefore they had to decide how to intervene in balancing "two unwelcome courses of action" (Banks 1995).

> As a social action worker, you have got so much responsibility, because there are no structures in terms of social action that give you any kind of guidance at all ... and you could be a social action worker working with deprived children or single mums on an estate ... and what if there is an issue of child protection there? What happens? As a social action worker, you won't have all the structure and legislation to hand that a social worker would have ... you know? Where do you go back? You can't go back to the process because the child's life is involved ... and you can ask 'what, why, how, action, and reflection', but it can blow up in your face! Social action workers have none of that [statutory duties] and that's why it crosses over a very dangerous territory. (Social action worker)

## *VIGNETTE B*
### Organisational context of work and empowerment of the users

As discovered during the third-stage analysis, budget and organisational context of the work were important elements leading to ethical dilemmas. This vignette was developed in order to explore decision-making processes when the organisational context of the work and budget come into conflict with user empowerment. The same questions as those in Vignette A were explored.

or from national organisations. Respondents from the voluntary sector responded similarly in that they would challenge the organisation and continue to support the young people.

> John should not try to negotiate with the group I think so ... John should be there to support the group ... I mean I think if the group wants to protest, they should protest ... they have the right to do that ... it is what happens with our groups ... the organisation doesn't know what the groups are doing in this area ... the organisation commit, they say we want to work with you and in the middle of the agenda, they ask the group to leave. (Voluntary sector worker)

Social action respondents all agreed to continue to support the young people in their decision, as long as this was done through peaceful action. One respondent showed further support to the young people by supporting them in going back to the process of social action and developing their tactics for getting their resources.

> John [the worker involved in the vignette] should work with the group and refine the tactics! Yeah! The demonstration is good ... but they also need to get some petitions up ... yeah ... they need to go to action more than that! So work with them around the process... what... why... how... action... reflection... that is what he needs to do! And it is the only way for them to see that John is supporting them. It is the only way to get back to that kind of trust and the relationship! I can only tell you something ... my line manager would not be happy! She would tell me 'you are better off now!' (Social action worker)

This respondent therefore mentioned that the situation would cause personal problems with the agency. However, none of the respondents saw the action as

wrong, and they all thought that it would be important for the group to carry on with their project.

> I would try to engage with them and I would say 'identify your issue' and if the group want to take action, I don't think there is anything wrong with that, as long as it is done in a reasonable way and that they don't inflict danger or damages to somebody else. I don't see anything wrong with that ... because they are voicing their concerns and I think everybody should voice their concerns. And sometimes, people don't listen to you until you do something like that ... so I don't think it is a big thing! (Social action worker)

Supporting the young people was therefore at the forefront of their spontaneous decision-making.

In terms of personal values, regardless of their sector of practice, respondents mentioned that they would support the young people and that empowerment was at the forefront of their action.

> So personally, if I was not involved or employed, I would empower them to do as much as they can. (Statutory social worker)

> Personally, I would create so much trouble ... so much trouble ... that I would get sacked! (Statutory social worker)

> I would really encourage them to demonstrate and to take the action that they decided to take! As a social action worker, I probably have to work with them to come to this decision and you know, to drop them down ...(long pause) ... I think this is where social action falls down in many ways. Wherever you work, for a small charity, a statutory organisation or a non-government organisation, they are always bound by their rules. But as a social action worker, you come from the other

> end of the ethical spectrum ... you are there to work with young people ... and if you read literature about social action, a lot is about revolution ... it is about revolution for making things happen! So for me to dump the young people in the shit ... telling them "I've got a new job with the under 5s so f**k off' I would not feel comfortable at all in doing that ... ethically ... and I think the social action process work ... I think it is a good process ... so yeah, I would help in organising the action! (Social action worker)

Personal values, in this case, would influence the workers to take a different course of action to the one the agency would want them to take. This finding supported some of the findings from the third stage of data analysis, in that empowerment can be difficult to achieve within an organisation driven by budget.

In terms of professional values, both qualified social worker respondents thought that they would still have to support the group towards their goal. However, they said they would need to be careful, as if they went along with the group too much, they could get into trouble themselves. Both said they would go to challenge their line manager and try to get recognition by campaigning for the group.

> I would still more less do the same ... but I would do it probably in a more professional way ... yeah ... If I could not get any satisfaction from my line manager, I would do a presentation for his line manager.... I would do anything to get recognition really ... because I think this decision is wrong ... yeah ... professionally, I would do that! (Statutory social worker)

Workers from the voluntary sector and social action workers said that they would take the same action according to their personal values. Therefore, on

personal and professional values-based decision-making, both respondents from the statutory sector, in different ways, said that they would support the group of young people.

When respondents had to make a decision solely based on their agency's expectations, the course of action was slightly different. Respondents from the three sectors all thought that they would continue to work with the young people, but that they would also have to challenge the agency they worked for in order to do so. Some respondents thought that they would have to be careful in their actions, because they could cause some trouble for themselves.

> I think I would face serious difficulties with the agency ... because ... if you are seen as supporting the agency, the young boys, the young offenders would see you as letting them down ... I think I would have to go with the young people I work with this time ... I don't think I could support the agency ... I would support the young offenders.... if I didn't have choice to follow my agency, I think I would have to make sure that the agency knew that I am very unhappy and I would have to take it further. (Voluntary sector worker)

Another respondent remarked:

> I would attempt to persuade my own organisation and erm ... that they need to talk to the young people ... I mean there may be a real issue about funding I don't know.... but I suppose if you feel very strongly about it at the end you have to put yourself personally on the line ... but depends how strong you feel.... These organisations are normally supposed to work for social justice ... that's an issue of social justice. (Voluntary sector worker)

In the example above, even though the respondents had to respond only with regard to their agency's expectations, their personal values were still very strongly present in the answers given, and they said that they would not simply do what the agency asked them to do.

> If they [the agency] already decided they shut it [the project] and that they want to go for another project ... they might not like that you are co-ordinating some campaigns against them ... but you see what I mean ... He needs a job ... but I think the agency has got a problem really ... but then it is their problem and it is for this reason that we need to support the young people. (Social action worker)

Respondents from all sectors agreed that their actions, although influenced by the agency's expectations, would still aim at empowering the young people.

Social workers from the statutory and voluntary sectors thought that the vignette was an ethical dilemma. Indeed, their personal interests were at stake. Going along with the young offenders would cause them trouble with the agency, while going along with the agency would make them feel bad about letting the young offenders down. The organisational context of work was therefore an important element in their decision-making process. The elements mentioned in their decision-making were about their responsibility towards the agency and the fact that the agency pays their wages, but also concerned the users' needs and the empowerment of the group of young offenders.

> It is an ethical dilemma because I can see the position that John's in ... but I can also see the position and the need of the young people really ... what they are currently saying ... erm ... I think it is [an] ethical

> [issue] because again, they set these people up and then they withdraw the budget ... the money ... to end it ...so that's [an] ethical [issue] because you promised something and it is not delivered ... and I know that it happens all the time ... you know ... you can't give them any choices. (Statutory social worker)

Therefore, the main conflict occurs between the users' needs, the personal interests of the worker and the agency's policy.

> It [the vignette] would end up as a kind of ethical dilemma because it would end up like ... possibly being in a big conflict situation ... you know when you work for an organisation you normally believe in principles ... cause what happens is that you start with an issue that comes out from here ... and then you talk about it and do a bit of discussion ... and it comes a little bit further.... It comes a bit closer to you and then you try something and you realise that it hasn't worked ... so at the end you are left with your own ... yourself ... aren't you ... it is just you at the end ... so what happens in a lot of those situations is that you strip away ... kind of professional ethics ... standards ... and policy ... at the end you are the person that make the judgement. (Voluntary sector worker)

On the other hand, the social action workers did not think that the vignette posed a straightforward ethical dilemma. For them, it was normal to encourage the young offender to carry on their actions and to support them, even though the agency was asking them to behave differently. The elements in their decision-making process were that it was wrong to go with the agency because it would only reinforce the young people's views about adults not providing services for them, plus the empowerment of the users. Social action workers were aware that the situation could cause trouble for them, but their personal and professional values were more important than the agency's expectations in this particular case. For social action workers, the personal and professional

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values (social action principles) were more important than their own personal interests.

Therefore, there is a difference between the social care practitioners from the voluntary sector, the statutory sector and the social action settings. Social care practitioners from the voluntary sector and statutory social workers would want to protect their interests as well as empowering the young offender, and so would find themselves with a very difficult ethical dilemma to resolve, whereas the social action workers would not feel an ethical dilemma in this situation, because of their beliefs in social action principles, but they would probably have to live with the consequences of their choices.

Again, from this vignette, it can be concluded that the organisational context of work is a very important cause of ethical dilemmas in the social care profession. Even though the ethical dilemma is not apparent to the same degree and extent, it is still there, and it leads the social care practitioners to a dilemma between two unwelcome courses of action, or knowing what direction to take but having to live with the consequences of such actions.

The responses to this vignette highlighted the fact that the decision-making process is based on a wide range of interests. Although policy and regulations influence the ways workers solve ethical dilemmas, they are free to choose what seems to be ethically just for them, but that can put them in conflicting situations.

Spontaneously, workers from the voluntary sector replied that they would think about disclosing the information to Laura if Mark did not do it himself. Respondents from the voluntary sector agreed that there are limits to confidentiality and that it would be their duty to disclose the information to Laura if, after some discussions with Mark, Laura was still unaware of the situation.

> I think I would try to work with Mark on the fact that if he really values Laura's life ... it is working through the emotional thing and if he really loves her then he wants the best for her and that perhaps he is being a bit selfish ... try to work it around that way ... you know try to talk about the emotional side of the relationship, love, and what it all means ...and ... but ... I would have to say that because in social work ...confidentiality can only be conditional ... so I think I would have to set out the boundaries ...erm ... Set out the boundaries and try to work with Mark to again ... try to persuade him to tell her but I think I would have to say that if he won't, as a professional, I would have to do that ...and also that he will have trouble if he infected her with the law. (Voluntary sector worker)

> Tell Laura ... this is my immediate response! (Voluntary sector worker)

Answers differed in the field of statutory social work and in the social action settings, where most of the respondents agreed that they would not breach the confidentiality.

> I would probably talk to Laura.... In one to one intervention ... about relationships ... having sex... etc. Without mentioning that he has got HIV ... and if you are having all these chats with her ... he will probably think that you told her anyway.... It is a bit like the school-yard syndrome ... if they see you having a chat with someone ... they think that you give away something about them ... so I think you've

got to be very clear about what you are doing. But I would not tell her.... I would give her information about the fact that it is illegal to have sex before she is 16.... I would get a bit of time here. (Statutory social worker)

I would consider some groupwork sessions around sexuality ... a whole group.... I would discuss HIV and AIDS as part of that. Because Mark talked to me in confidence ... confidentiality is important ... so I would try to get around it without going to tell Laura. [...] So I would try to arrange a session around sexual health, and try to make sure that both of them are there ... that would be the ideal situation ... and because it is about sexual health, encourage Mark to talk to his GP about it.... Encourage him to come back to me to talk about it ... but [I would not tell] not telling Laura. (Social action worker)

However, one social action worker said that, after agreeing an ultimatum with Mark, they would feel forced to disclose the information.

When respondents were asked about how they would solve the dilemma according to their personal values, their professional values and the agency's expectations, all respondents maintained the same course of action as that mentioned in their spontaneous decisions.

So we have a real issue of confidentiality ... and an issue like that ... and on the other hand, you've got some personal ethics ... and a very personal issue like that bring to ... you need to act very, very quickly... but I have to say I make the assumption ... my reaction to Mark would be ... if at the end of the process of talking through he would still not do it ... there are limits of confidentiality ... this is my personal ethic. (Voluntary sector worker)

However, there were some uncertainties about how some of the agencies who employed the statutory social workers would expect them to intervene in such a situation. It was not clear whether or not the agency would ask them to report

it as a child-protection issue, although their answers were the same for every set of values explored.

> I think if it is perceived as a Child Protection issue because of the age of Laura ... then my organisation's policy ... I would have to take some actions on this. If it is not perceived as a Child Protection issue ... I don't see how it cannot be perceived as a Child Protection issue ... but then, I think my organisation would ask me to be a bit more liberal about how to approach it ... in the way to have some discussion ... to resolve it. (Voluntary sector worker)

The organisational context of work and statutory duties did not seem to influence dramatically the answers of the respondents from each sector. Issues of confidentiality therefore appeared, in this particular case, to be related to professional and personal values rather than to the organisational context of the work. Yet, confidentiality issues cause ethical dilemmas for respondents, regardless of their sector of practice. Confidentiality is an important element causing ethical dilemmas. Although not all the respondents resolved the ethical dilemma in the same way, elements such as openness, transparency and awareness of the confidentiality issues were present in all sectors.

## VIGNETTE D
**Welfare of several users versus an individual's welfare, anti-oppressive practice, and empowerment**

Vignette D was developed to assess the importance of concepts such as anti-oppressive practice and users' needs in relation to dilemmas between the welfare of one user and the welfare of several people. Under the same framework as the vignettes above, respondents had to reflect on solving the

leave, depending on how they actually use the group ... it is their decision really. (Statutory social worker)

I would probably get the group together ... I would educate them ... I would first ask if it is all right with Rachel ... I would ask her if it is OK to explain a bit more about the operation ... how she felt ... I would ask her if it is ok for her to share it with the group.... Because I feel it is important that everybody is included ... but I would try a sort of education like this because quite often people are frightened about things they don't know ... things they don't understand. (Statutory social worker)

Social action workers said they would prioritise the group rather than Rachel, making sure that other resources were available for her. They would, however, try to include her initially before moving on to any other types of intervention with her.

You know, they [members of the group] might exclude Rachel because someone in the group was abused by her husband, you know, it could be any of these things that go on in the group. (Social action worker)

Another respondent discussed the concept of oppression from another perceptive:

Basically, although it is about gender issues, they [members of the group] are discriminating in regard to gender and I would remind them of that.... If I was satisfied that there isn't a discrimination issue, then I would plan to work with her on an individual basis because obviously, Rachel needs some help and support. (Social action worker)

Discrimination issues were therefore identified as being important for social action workers. Nevertheless, they said that they would not stop working with the group, even though some members expressed their disagreement with

working in the same group as Rachel. As an alternative, they would explore the issue of discrimination with the group, asking "why" and going through the social action process. Through the process, respondents mentioned that it would perhaps become possible to include Rachel.

> Talk to the group first ... and look at the issues ... look at why they have a problem ... kind of using the social action approach ... What is the situation, why is it a problem ... how can we take it forward. (Social action worker)

Workers from the voluntary sector were unclear about what course of action to take spontaneously. However, they identified some elements that were making their decisions uneasy, such as Rachel's lifestyle, as well as her gender identity, the group dynamic and its ground rules, and the fact that no other resources existed in the area. Their chosen course of action became clearer when different values were explored in isolation. When they were asked to explore their personal values base only, they thought that they would try to support Rachel within the group and that, even though their personal values were not necessarily telling them to do so, they would still include her.

> I would try to work with the group to see... although they might not like this person's lifestyle ... Rachel ... that as a person she is valued even you think about somebody's lifestyle.... My personal values are that I don't really approve of gender change or things in that book because it is my own religious belief, but at the end of the day, I think my values are about valuing the person despite the lifestyle ... so it would be the same. (Voluntary sector worker)

Despite deciding to include Rachel in the group, respondents were aware of personal values that would make their course of action different. However,

from the respondents' answers, it was clear that they would not act upon only their personal values in this particular vignette.

Respondents from the other sectors (statutory and social action) maintained their spontaneous answers when asked to decide on a course of action based upon their personal values. They thought that both parties had the right to be included in the group. However, priority was still given to Rachel, and if other members wanted to leave the group, it was seen as their choice. Social action workers, on the other hand, all said that they would work with Rachel at the same time as working with the group, but would continue the group and not try to force members to include Rachel. For them, the group was very important, especially because of the duration of the group (which had been running for two years).

Differences in the answers given were not marked when exploring each sector's responses with regard to professional values. A different course of action was marked when respondents explored their agency's expectations.

Social workers from the statutory sector thought that the agency's expectations would have a lot of influence in this particular case. Because of the pressure of funding, respondents mentioned that they would probably have to exclude Rachel from the group. The agency would ask the workers to get as many people as possible and, therefore, to exclude Rachel from the group if the members did not accept her after discussion.

> I would be panicking that everybody wanted to leave ... but I know that the agency would put me under a lot of pressure in my group to function with full group members ... otherwise ... if I say 'Oh... it is

your choice ... don't come', I would just be in so much trouble with the line manager ... so that would be ... for them ... for the agency ... their priority would be ... to keep as much people as possible ... so I would be struggling. (Statutory social worker)

Even though the agency would pressurise the worker to recruit and maintain enough participants for running the group, they could not discriminate against Rachel, because of the Equal Opportunity Policy (EOP). The only action that the agency could take to counteract the EOP would be to withdraw the funding, which would, indirectly, put the interests of the worker and the viability of the group at risk.

It is funded by the Local Authority ... erm ... Local Authority would probably want as many people as possible to attend the group otherwise they would withdraw funding ... So it might be slightly different if you as a worker know that ...the amount of women who left the group ... your funding ... your job ... would be put on the line ... so the agency would probably want to say good bye to Rachel. (Statutory social worker)

Therefore, the agency's expectations, as explored with statutory social workers, conflicted with the workers' decision-making in this case. Funding appears to be a big issue in this ethical dilemma, as it leads the workers to decide on a course of action against their personal values and reasoning, since their jobs could be compromised. However, even though the other interviewee raised the same issue, she said she would not go with the agency in relation to this case.

I would go with Rachel though ... but I would do it in a very positive way ... in a right way ... because my agency could not discriminate against Rachel.... So I would make sure that if they discriminate against her ... I would make sure they can't do that ... I would make

sure they are not allowed to do that ... yeah ... I can be pretty loud when I need to be. (Statutory social worker)

The workers from the voluntary sector also thought that the agency might not want to get involved with Rachel, but this was because of religious rather than budget issues. However, even though the exclusion would not be for the same reason, it can be concluded that the organisational context of work would also impact on the decision of the workers from the voluntary sector.

> I think my agency would be fairly similar to my professional values really ... but... I don't know how some people in the agency would respond ... to Rachel ... to the issue really (long pause). Well, it is associated with the Christian faith ... there are a lot of issues about gay and lesbian carers ... and this may raise a lot of other issues really ... yeah ... well I think the policy would probably say ... well I hope the policy would probably say to try to work these issues through and try to resolve it. (Voluntary sector worker)

The social action workers' decision-making was about staying with the group and finding another resource for Rachel. They did not think that the agency would have a great impact on their decision. Since they would try not to discriminate against Rachel, the agency could not influence their decision-making by using the EOP. This course of action would be similar to those suggested by the voluntary and statutory sectors, as it would be in the interest of the agency to function with full members.

Respondents from the statutory and voluntary sectors perceived Vignette D as an ethical dilemma. The main elements identified as causing the dilemma were about their responsibility towards Rachel and the other members of the group.

The welfare of one user versus the welfare of the majority of users is therefore an ethical dilemma that is present in practice in the provision of statutory social services. Anti-oppressive practice seems to be a priority for both practitioners, but budgets and funding can be a barrier. Respondents from the social action settings did not see the situation as posing an ethical dilemma, because they felt clear about their course of action.

## Data from the Interviews

In addition to the vignettes presented above, interviewees were asked specific questions that constituted the semi-structured element of the interview. Within these interviews, respondents were invited to comment on elements that were said to cause ethical dilemmas and that had emerged from the third-stage analysis. They were also given the opportunity to explore the impact of the organisational context of work and statutory duties on their work in general, in the specific context of ethical dilemmas and in relation to empowerment (see Appendix 4 for the interview schedule). This section presents the findings that emerged from data collected via the semi-structured interviews.

## Ethical Dilemmas in Social care Practice

Budget and funding was not only recognised as the most important element that hinders the empowerment of the user, but was also identified as the most important cause for ethical dilemmas within the different fields of social care practice.

Budget and funding ... erm ... I think it is the biggest cause for ethical dilemmas ... because that's what we are driven by! We are supposed to be user-led and needs-led services ... we are not! We are driven by budget! So even when we are assessing a user who needs a service, if there is no money in the pot, they don't get it ... there is no service available. (Statutory social worker)

A social action worker explained their position:

You are working within a society which is based on market principles ... you have to deliver a service, but you have a budget plan and that budget is for everything. Sometimes, because of budget, users are offered options that are not the best for them ... and a lot of organisations are controlled by funding, social services are controlled by funding ... but you can't say to an organisation that pressures you because of money 'let just talk about the process. Give us a whole year ... you will see it is marvellous to empower young people.' It is not going to happen ... it is not possible! So I think it has a hell of a lot to do with ethical dilemmas because my principles say 'f**k the money and lets work with the young people', but because I am so pressured by the money and the time, there is only a certain level of stuff that you can do! (Social action worker)

A worker from the voluntary sector also explained their perception of the budget as having an impact on the emergence of ethical dilemmas:

Who controls the organisation? Who wants to take the decision? It is not controversial when we start a group discussion.... It gets controversial when a senior manager will say 'stop the discussions.' So I would say that [name of the organisation] has been a positive organisation ... so it tries to develop, it has been innovating in practice... and let projects develop yeah ... so I would be positive about the organisation but also recognise that like in any organisation it has some big limitations.... Finance bit is a big, big one! And sometimes you will get into conflict. (Voluntary sector worker)

Budget and funding have an impact across the different sectors of provision in social services and often lead to the emergence of ethical dilemmas. This was identified during the third-stage analysis and has been confirmed by respondents across the three fields as being an important cause of ethical dilemmas.

Lack of clarity about roles and conflicts between professional expertise and self-determination of the user were two causes of ethical dilemmas that were also identified during the third-stage analysis.

Social workers did not identify 'lack of clarity about role' nor 'conflict between professional expertise and self-determination of the user' as a cause of ethical dilemmas, as they felt very clear about what they had to do within the remit of their work. For example, they were clear about the fact that they control the services, and therefore they perceived themselves as 'gatekeepers' at the same time as enabling service users in their interventions.

Social action workers and workers from the voluntary sector thought that the above elements were present in their day-to-day practice and were indeed causing ethical dilemmas. Practitioners from both fields perceived themselves as trying to enable service users, but they felt very restricted in their action because of certain elements in the organisational context of work, which made them act more as the controller in certain cases. This controlling role was felt particularly strongly when practitioners were faced with dilemmas that occurred in relation to resource allocation.

However, workers from the voluntary sector and social action settings expressed the view that the dilemmas also occur in relation to the very nature of the work they do.

> Lack of clarity about role ... again I would say that it could be linked with professional expertise and self-determination of the user.... Again, if you take example of managing risk ... for instance, particularly with mental health, you know that the person you know might hurt someone else ... obviously you might have to take more of a controlling role ... particularly if they are not taking any medication or things like that ... but other times we can enable.... I think it just depends.... I don't think that role will ever be clear ... there will always be times where you have to take a more controlling role and other times where you will be more enabling and I think that will always be the case. (Voluntary sector worker)

Therefore, these two identified causes of dilemmas are, to a certain extent, linked with the overall organisational context of work, but they also occur in relation to the very nature of social work and social care practice. An illustration would be that the Code of Practice produced by the GSCC (2002) states, in Principle 3, that "as a social care worker, you must promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm". This principle clearly reflects the respondent's reflection above. Indeed, social care practitioners want to be enablers for the service users, but also have a duty of protection that leads them to adopt a more controlling role from time to time.

Disclosure of information was perceived differently across the different sectors of social services. For the statutory social workers, disclosure of information was not perceived as being a possible cause for ethical dilemmas, as they were clear about they way they work. For the workers from the voluntary sector,

disclosure of information was not seen as an important cause for ethical dilemmas, as long as they were careful about what they disclosed to whom. For them, disclosure of information was a matter of reflecting on the possible consequences of their actions. However, for the social action workers, disclosure of information was identified as a definite cause for ethical dilemmas. For them, maintaining the relationship with the service user was the most important element to consider in making their decision, but in some cases, they were aware that not disclosing could also affect the way that they are perceived by the agency in terms of accountability, going against the law or even affecting their own interests. A respondent explained how important the relationship with the service user is within their work:

> I will not break my relationship with the young people because it took me 1 year to built this relationship and now they trust me ... and if I do this, all the relationship is going out of the window, and it doesn't only affect me and the young people, but also all the rest of the team ... this project is supposed to be different from social services and built upon a good trust relationship and you want to break this relationship? ... You will have to sack me! (Social action worker)

Another social action worker illustrated their experience in relation to disclosing information and the importance of the relationship with the service user:

> I caught a young person skinning up [making a cannabis joint] and he was terrified that I was going to tell his mother! But I didn't tell his mother and that helped the future relationship.... Maybe he was doing something illegal and perhaps I should inform his mother but I don't see the point in that ... because it is following the law for the sake of following the law ... It will not do your work any good. (Social action worker)

Disclosure of information is therefore a very important cause of ethical dilemmas among social action workers. It was not, however, identified as an important cause by workers in the other two sectors.

Pressure of the outcomes and expectations from the agency were identified as important causes of ethical dilemmas within the social care profession, but their impact was felt differently from one sector to another. Statutory social workers did not identify them as key causes of ethical dilemmas during the interview. They identified that they came across this in their practice from time to time, but because they were clear about their role within social services and what they can offer as a service, pressure of the outcomes and expectations from the agency were not identified as causing many ethical dilemmas. However, during other parts of the interview, statutory social workers mentioned that the guidelines and procedures had led them to experience very awkward situations.

> You know, personally I find that just unacceptable. I go home and I worry about people ... and what's going to happen to them.... I think the system is poor ... but how I get around that ... I make people fill in complaint procedures ... and they don't attack me as a person, they try to show that the system is unfair because they are frustrated that they can't get what they want ... We don't do any preventive work ... we don't do anything like that ... so ethically ... I mean personally ... I find it very difficult ... difficult to go to see someone to tell them that they don't meet the criteria. (Statutory social worker)

Another social worker expanded on this:

> We have ethical dilemmas but I think the policy makes us very clear
> about what we have to do and what we don't do.... If you are not there
> and not seeing people that you've got to see, then it is quite easy to
> make that decision. What's hard is when it comes to us ... when we've
> got to go out and say, "sorry you can't have that". But how we get
> around that is because we don't make that decision ... my manager or
> her manager ... we ask them to say no ... I am not doing that any more.
> (Statutory social worker)

These 'awkward situations' were defined by the respondents as *not an ethical
dilemma* (unclear course of action resulting from a conflict between unwelcome
alternative courses of action), but as a *personal dilemma* (the consequence of
having to take a course of action based on already agreed guidelines, even
though another course of action would have been more beneficial for all parties)
instead. This difference will be explored further in the discussion in Chapter
Eight.

On the other hand, workers from the voluntary sector expressed a different
opinion with regard to the pressures of the outcomes. For them, it appeared to
be an important cause of ethical dilemmas, as all their work is outcome-
orientated:

> Pressure of outcomes ... and expectations from the agency... I think
> yeah.... Sometimes if you ... erm ... it is like sometimes if they are
> expecting you to get so much work done ... you know that you need to
> take time to build a relationship with that person otherwise you will
> not get much information out of them and you are certainly not going
> to establish their needs. (Voluntary sector worker)

For the social action workers, pressures of the outcomes and expectations from the agency can also lead to ethical dilemmas. However, they did not see the pressures of the outcomes as being the most important cause of ethical dilemmas in the social action settings.

> There is always pressure on people I think ... people who have to follow the criteria and so on ... sometimes what might happen is that the organisation have got vacancies and they are losing rent ... so the management wants that place filled very quickly ... they don't care ... even though the person don't quite fit with the place ... but I don't agree with that ... I think that criteria are there for a reason ... if a person don't need something they don't need it ... you don't just put somebody in just to fill the vacancy and collect the rent. (Social action worker)

For the social action workers, conflicts between their personal values and the regulations were more important as a cause of ethical dilemmas than were expectations from the agency. What social action workers understood to be their personal values were in fact related to social action principles. They often found that the agency guidelines or regulations did not embrace these principles, and this created conflicts between what their personal values told them was right and the regulations. Conflicts between personal values and regulations were also identified as an important cause of ethical dilemmas within the statutory and voluntary sectors. For the statutory social workers, conflicts between personal values and regulations occurred mostly in relation to admissibility criteria.

> We struggle ethically because of the restraints put on us by outside policies which we can't change ... or whatever it is ... criteria or whatever ... we can't change that. (Statutory social worker)

According to workers from the voluntary sector, conflicts between personal values and regulations were also present, but they were seen as being a positive rather than a negative aspect, because this discharged them from a certain level of responsibility in their intervention, which was similar to the experiences of statutory social workers.

> I think it affects in a positive way ... because ... you know ... it relieves us from a responsibility... [...] although it might seem more controlling sometimes you know. (Voluntary sector worker)

However, they still perceived regulation as controlling part of their interventions, without emphasising the fact that it can lead them to experience ethical dilemmas.

Because of the different understandings of the effect of regulation in relation to their personal values in the cause of ethical dilemmas, it is not possible to identify this dilemma as occurring across sectors of social care practice. Nevertheless, the concept of regulation clearly has a substantial impact on their day-to-day work.

The organisational context of work appeared to affect the level of empowerment that service users can expect to gain during an intervention. Indeed, the organisational context of work can help or hinder with the development of empowerment, depending on whether or not the organisation's core values, policies and resources prioritise empowerment as an approach to intervention. The use of vignettes also helped to demonstrate that, even where

social care practitioners understand and believe in the principles of empowerment, if the organisation does not promote them (by putting into practice the elements essential to achieving them), empowerment is difficult to achieve. For example, all the social care practitioners qualified the guidelines as being too strict, too vague, old-fashioned or very restrictive. They all agreed that the guidelines were important and could not be ignored, as they ensured a certain level of accountability (as well as, in many cases, protecting the user). However, at the same time, they were considered as tending to interfere with achieving at least the structural level of empowerment, because of inflexibility in the ways they are applied.

> Everything that we are told and everything in our policy guidelines… and everything we train is about empowerment … in the books … but the reality is that when we try to deliver that is very difficult because our services with older people are very much 'doing for' instead of 'doing with'. (Statutory social worker)

This was also the case for workers practicing within the voluntary sector.

> You've got to operate out there in a way of saying 'what you say is important to me' … or 'it's your right to do that' … empowerment … people have skills … etc … and then turn around and operate in a totally different way you know … you know, projects have to face the organisation and the world out there … so in a way, we have two faces … we say 'this set of principles should apply inside and outside' yeah? But the organisation wants to be higher up and seems to be pressured. (Voluntary sector worker)

Statutory social workers and workers from the voluntary sectors said that they were held back in achieving empowerment because of the organisational

context of work. Social action workers also work within an organisational context and had experienced the same issues in relation to empowerment as their fellow workers from other fields. However, some organisational contexts of work related to the social action settings were less rigid than the one found within the statutory sector. This enabled the social action workers to be more flexible and, consequently, to attain better results in using empowerment as an approach. In practicing in such a context, social action workers can bring the concept of empowerment to the forefront of their decision-making processes. However, where the organisational context of work is not favourable to achieving it, social action values are not sufficient to ensure empowerment of the user, as this social action worker explained:

> In terms of empowerment, it [organisational context of work] is a sort of pain in the neck ... no, but I should not say that because in terms of being an Equal Opportunity Employer, in terms of being responsive to youth work, in terms of disabled people, women and black people working for the Council, they probably lead the field.... [...] But sometimes you get hung up with the policy and procedure that you have to follow.... For example, you have to be over 18 to hire the Hall ... but there might be some very responsible and mature 17 year olds ... but if they are not 18, there is no chance that they are allowed to hire the Council Hall ... is that completely necessary? But the Council is so rigorous that this can be a block to empowerment.... But on the other hand, it makes people go through the procedures ... it makes people learn about the procedures ... and maybe that's not a bad thing. (Social action worker)

Consequently, in the light of the answers gathered during the interviews, in order to be successful in achieving empowerment, the worker needs several elements in place during their intervention:

- A commitment to the value of empowerment;

- An understanding of the concept at different levels, and a suitable approach to achieving it;

- A flexible organisational context of work;

- An organisational context of work that promotes empowerment in their policies and practices.


In most cases, however, the organisational context of work was not supportive of workers trying to use empowering approaches in practice, especially those that aimed to achieve structural changes. From this data analysis, there are two different concepts that can be explored and discussed further. These are the impact of the organisational context of work on the cause of ethical dilemmas and the concept of an ethical dilemma itself. The following chapters will therefore explore these themes and develop an explanatory theory that will allow for a better understanding of ethics in social care practice. Chapter Seven will aim to examine the sole category of 'power' through the concept of the organisational context of work and how social theory helps in understanding the situation experienced in social care practice in regard to ethical practice. Chapter Eight will then build on the theorisation of the power given in Chapter Seven to examine various levels of ethical dilemmas as experienced in social care practice and suggest ways for counteracting the effects of power on ethical decision-making processes.

# Chapter Seven

# Theorisation of the Sole Category: 'Power'

This chapter aims at theorising the concept of 'power', the sole Grounded Theory category at saturation point. To do so, I will consider the contribution that some social theories make to understanding the concept of power as experienced between social care practitioners and their different organisational contexts of work. Building on the examination of the concept of power found in the Literature Review Chapter, the first section will briefly examine the sole category in the light of the work of Anthony Giddens and will then move on to theorising power using a Foucaultian analysis. This theoretical examination of the concept of power will then establish a framework for further discussion of findings in Chapter Eight.

## The Concept of Power

Thus far, the data that have emerged from the process of Grounded Theory have led to the discovery of the concept of power (understood by practitioners as reflected in the organisational context of work) as the sole category. Indeed, wherever ethical dilemmas are experienced (in the fields of statutory social work, the voluntary sector or social action settings), the main element influencing the decision-making processes of practitioners is the operation of power. This operation of power influences the ways in which practitioners intervene with service users, either in relation to their capacity for empowering practice, or in relation to the ways they approach ethical dilemmas and ethical issues in general.

The data collected during this study demonstrated that the decision-making process experienced by social care practitioners from all three fields is mainly influenced by the power exerted by the organisational context of work in which the intervention takes place. In statutory agencies, the regulations were felt very strongly, whereas in social action settings, power relationships were perceived as more limited because of, on the one hand, a quasi-absence of organisational rules and regulations, and on the other, a strong social action value base that underpinned social care practitioners' actions.

Nevertheless, the power relationships present through the organisational context of work were noted as contributing toward the creation of ethical issues in practice and to the way in which they were resolved. The concept of the 'organisational context of work', being referred to by social workers and social care practitioners, was therefore central to the research participants' discussion of ethics. In order to clarify the following discussion, I will define, in the light of the codes and categories previously examined in chapter Five, the concept of 'organisational context of work': *any elements that can be found in a particular place of work, that regularise, and therefore influence, the practice of social workers and social care practitioners. It includes elements such as: organisational values, budgets, admissibility criteria and methods of resource allocation; agency policies and procedures (including codes of conduct), and statutory duties and regulations. It also includes those who contribute to its implementation, such as managers and other staff who are perceived as having power over social care practitioners.*

The research findings have shown that the organisational context of work wields a very strong influence upon ethical practice within social care in direct

and indirect ways. The effects that the organisational context of work had on social workers and social care practitioners were minimal when power relationships between practitioners and their work context were limited, and maximal when the networks of power between social worker and agency were omnipresent. In order to examine the effects of power on social care practitioners, it is important to recall the main findings according to sector:

Statutory social workers identified that clear practice guidelines are beneficial, as they justify the professionalism of their actions, but at the same time, they felt constrained by them. They often felt that another course of action would be more appropriate for the service user when resolving ethical dilemmas, but as the organisational context of work was so clear about how to operate in particular cases, practitioners felt they had to follow the prescribed course of action. This type of dilemma is closely related to what Banks (2006) labelled as 'ethical issues'. Indeed, most of the time, the statutory social workers identified that their chosen course of action was directly influenced by their organisational context of work, and that this took precedence over their professional values or the user's needs. It is important to point out that these practitioners emphasised that the organisational context of work was not always alien to their professional values and the user's needs when making decisions. To summarise: statutory social workers stated that the organisational context of work and the power operating through it has a significant impact on their interventions and simultaneously influences their decision-making processes.

Similarly, practitioners from the voluntary sector also tended to make decisions in relation to what the organisational context of work suggested, though the power exerted by the agency varied according to the size of the organisation

and the weight of the organisational context upon workers. Indeed, the more voluntary sector practitioners were regulated by their organisational context of work, the more impact it had on their decision-making processes in relation to ethical dilemmas. Practitioners from this sector clearly indicated that the organisational context of work influenced their decision-making processes with regard to ethical interventions. Yet in situations where their professional values directed them towards a different course of action, they felt that there was some room for manoeuvre and therefore more freedom to deviate from the procedures and the organisational context of work. Practitioners from the voluntary sector indicated that, depending on the level of power exerted by the agency (experienced through the organisational context), decisions could be adapted for the benefit of the service user. However, in many cases, especially when the agency was large and closely related to the statutory sector (by funding or being commissioned to provide a service by the Local Authority for example), the organisational context of work would put pressure on their decision-making processes about ethical dilemmas.

Again, the findings clearly demonstrated that the power felt through the organisational context of work within voluntary organisations impacts directly on the workers' decision-making processes. Therefore, the more structured the voluntary organisation was, the more the workers found themselves in similar situations to those experienced by statutory social workers. On the other hand, the smaller the organisation, the more flexibility the workers had in resolving ethical dilemmas. The power felt through the organisational context of work in a voluntary organisation also clearly had an impact on decision-making processes for practitioners in this field.

At the other end of a continuum, social action workers tend to work in more flexible organisations, due to the social action principles that underpin their work. Therefore, respondents who practise social action in smaller, less structured (and often independent) organisations, also experienced ethical dilemmas as being influenced by the organisational context of work, but the impact was not considered to be as important as it was for practitioners from other sectors. For example, practitioners who worked within an agency with close links to the statutory sector, or to a national voluntary organisation, experienced dilemmas in relation to the organisational context (as did practitioners from the other sectors). However, their decision-making processes still tended to be more influenced by their social action values and the user's needs, rather than by the organisational context of work, as was the case in the statutory and voluntary sectors. Therefore, social action values and users' needs took precedence over the organisational context of work in this particular sector.

Consequently, it is clear that regardless of the setting in which social care practitioners operate, the power relationships between them and the social care agency (operationalised through the organisational context of their work), to varying degrees and extents, has an real impact on their ethical practice and decision-making processes. The more power is felt, the less choice the worker has in terms of ethical decision-making. The next section will explore how the work on power of Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault helps in understanding the impact power has on the decision-making processes of social care practitioners faced with ethical dilemmas.

# The concept of power as key element in decision-making processes

To theorise the findings above, different concepts of power could be used. Indeed, the literature review on power and empowerment (Chapter 2) examined a number of models for understanding power such as those of Barnes, Lukes, Foucault, Weber and Giddens.

Giddens' Structuration Theory appears appropriate to use in attempting to establish the theoretical framework for understanding the concept of power. Indeed, Structuration Theory was developed in the light of the interpretivist methodology (Layder 1994; King 2005) and therefore applies coherently to methodologies such as Grounded Theory and research perspectives such as Symbolic Interaction.

As explained in the literature review, Structuration Theory attempts to overcome the micro and macro perspectives by explaining social realities as being part of a dualism which is mainly maintained by the actors. Indeed, according to Structuration Theory, people cannot be excluded from the formation of the structure as they are seen as knowledgeable and creative beings (Layder 1994). This feature of Structuration Theory closely relates to symbolic interactionists who envisage actors as being active producers and reproducers of meanings in society. Therefore, using Structuration Theory to understand the sole category power enables the researcher to examine power as being part of a dualism where both the social care practitioners and the organisational context of work, operate together in defining each other's meaning, and therefore shaping the social context in which social services are provided. Indeed, for Giddens, structure is not external to action and therefore action can always influence the structure (Layder 1994; Elliott 2001). Thus,

applying Giddens' Structuration Theory to this study, the organisational context of work could be understood as both a medium and an outcome of social workers' activities.

That said, Giddens' Structuration Theory poses one particular issue in regard to this study and, specifically, in relation to conceptualising 'power'. Indeed, social workers from the statutory sector described their experiences of resolving ethical dilemmas as being largely influenced by their work context and the power relationships felt through it, and therefore did not identify themselves as being capable of changing the organisational context of work. For example, many of the participants explained that, by challenging the structure, they would themselves feel the impact on a personal level. Indeed, some social workers and social care practitioners felt that the structure was such that not pursuing a particular course of action could result in them being disciplined, or even sacked. Therefore, social workers portrayed themselves as not wielding much power over their decision-making, and thus, their experience does not, as they view it, illustrate well what Giddens suggests; that is to say that human beings are creative and knowledgeable and have the capacity to influence the structure of their social environment (Giddens 1976). As Layder (1994:132) explains, according to Giddens, "human beings create meanings and social reality from within social settings and therefore social forms such as institutions and structure have no existence apart from the activities they embody." On the other hand, the data that emerged from this study have clearly indicated that social workers and social care practitioners, especially from the statutory sector, in many cases, believed that courses of action were imposed on them regardless of their professional values and expertise or the service user's needs.

Giddens' Structuration Theory therefore emphasises that human beings and structure both shape the other. However, as King (2005:229) explains, "if individuals are free at any moment to do otherwise, it is possible that structure does not really constrain what they do." The data offer quite an opposite view of the situation in so far that the organisational context of work was perceived by social workers as having a strong impact on their decision-making. The power relationship therefore appears to be stronger on the structure side than on the human action side.

It is, however, important to bear in mind that the research perspective used during the research was Symbolic Interactionism. Blumer (1969:2) explains that symbolic interactionism is based on three premises:

> First, the human beings act toward things on the basis of the *meaning that the things have for them*. [The second premise of symbolic interaction is that] the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the *social interaction that one has with one's fellows* [and finally] these meanings are *handled in, and modified through*, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer 1969:2 - own emphasis)

The symbolic interaction perspective, which Giddens offers, applied to understanding the category of power (the sole category emerging from the Grounded Theory process), still demands an understanding of power that is relational; in other words, power is experienced through social interaction. However, as pointed out earlier, Giddens' perspective on power tends to be "thin on the structure or institutional side of the action – structure problem" (Layder 1994:143). In this research, the data indicated that the structure (organisational context of work) wielded more in the balance of power than individual actions. A social theory that emphasises more the macro aspect of understanding behaviours would therefore be more appropriate for

understanding the data emerging from this research.

However, Symbolic Interactionism is a micro perspective, in the way that it stresses the importance of *interaction between actors* and thus, it links, in a complementary way to the macro concept of power as developed by Foucault (1985). Power, for Foucaultian scholars:

> is not a thing that is held and used by individuals or groups. Rather, it is both a complex flow and a set of relations between different groups and areas of society which change with circumstances and time. (Danaher et al. 2000:xiv)

This definition of power highlights the same components identified by Blumer (1969) in relation to Symbolic Interaction: a set of relationships or social interactions that are interpreted, and therefore change according to different situations. Thus, linking Symbolic Interaction and Foucaultian analysis of power allows for a greater understanding of the relationship of the micro and macro and therefore provides a viable basis for exploring power in the context of this particular research. Indeed, although utilising Symbolic Interaction with a Foucaultian analysis may appear unusual, it is consistent with Layder's (1994:74) encouragement on the use of macro and micro theories in combination:

> the belief that knowledge and social analysis generally is based on direct observation and experience (empiricism) severely limits the Symbolic Interaction contribution to the macro-micro issues since it has both empirical and theoretical dimensions. Nonetheless, I believe that much of what Symbolic Interaction has to say is complementary to, and thus may be fruitfully integrated with, other strands of thought. That is, on its own, it does not provide an adequate account of macro-micro links. However, if its strong features are properly integrated with more

structural theories, then some aspects of Symbolic Interaction could be brought to bear upon our understanding of the links between macro and micro phenomena.

My central point in theorising power and setting the explanatory theory is therefore to utilise both a Symbolic Interaction perspective and a Foucaultian understanding of power to develop the discussion on ethical dilemmas resolution and ways forward in practice. Using a macro perspective to understand the concept of power as experienced by social workers and social care practitioners acknowledges the weight that structure wields on their staff while resolving ethical dilemmas.

Nevertheless, Foucaultian analysis of power does not generally give a full account of the interaction between structure and human activity (Layder 1994) although, in Foucault's later work, the concept of the subject as being capable to change and even to influence milieus, started to appear in his theory of power (Dreyfus 2004b). Foucault (1988a:19) states:

> Perhaps I have insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am now more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self.

Nevertheless, most of Foucault's theory gives a greater emphasis on the structure rather than the human subject. Therefore, the Symbolic Interaction perspective complements the use of Foucaultian analysis of power as it allows for explanation of the effect of the power at a micro level. This understanding of power and its effect at micro level is very close to Foucault's suggestion for analysis of power, as Smart (1985:79) explains,

Foucault has argued that analysis should proceed from a micro-level in order to reveal the particular histories, techniques and tactics of power. Such an ascending analysis of power would in addition be able to reveal how mechanisms of power have been appropriated, transformed, colonized and extended by more general or global forms of domination.

Therefore, Symbolic Interaction allows us to examine the experience of social workers between them on one level, while Foucaultian understanding of power allows examination of the effect of power on the group of practitioners. Figure 7 below illustrates the combination of symbolic interaction and Foucaultian analysis of power. Although the theories are from very different schools of thought (macro and micro theories), there is still an element that links both perspectives together, that is the concept of relationships.

Figure 7 - Contribution from Symbolic Interaction and Foucaultian analysis of power in understanding ethics and ethical issues in social work
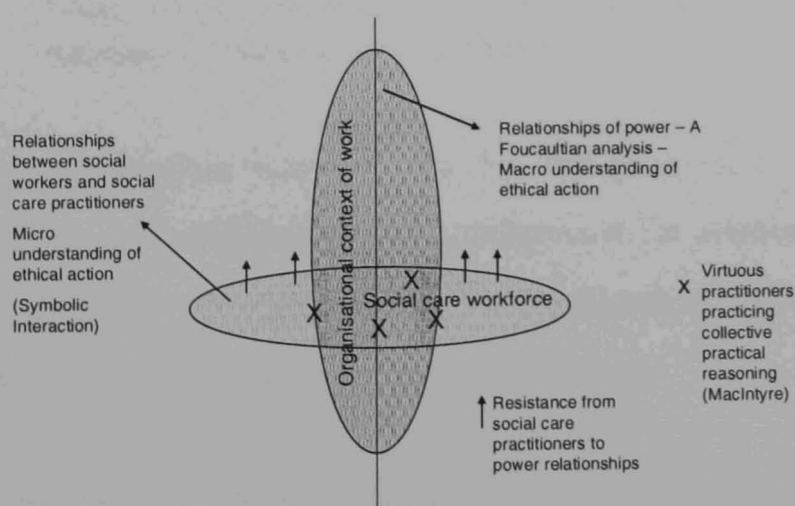


The relational element present in both perspectives will therefore constitute my main argument for understanding, as well as counteracting the effects of power. It will constitute the theoretical underpinning for a framework, inspired by the

work of Alasdair MacIntyre and of virtue ethics, by which it becomes possible to increase resistance of social workers to challenge power. However, at this point, it is important to examine the data in the light of a Foucaultian analysis of power. By Foucaultian analysis of power, I include the work of Michel Foucault, but also the work of other contemporary sociologists who have furthered his theory of power.

Foucault defines power as:

> [...] relational, something that is exercised from a variety of points in the social body, rather than something that is 'acquired, seized, or shared'. Relations of power are not considered to be secondary to other relationships but are immanent in the latter (Foucault 1979:94 in Smart 1985:112)

Danaher et al. (2000:ix) adds that a Foucaultian understanding of power covers:

> the technologies, knowledge, discourses, politics and practices used to bring about the production and management of a state's human resources. (Danaher et al. 2000: ix)

Power is therefore *relational* and has the purpose of controlling, analysing, regulating and defining society's behaviour. In relation to this study, power was especially perceived within the relationship between the organisational context of work and the social care practitioner.

One limitation of using a Foucaultian understanding of power is that the concept of 'institution' was not given much attention in his theory, apart from the indirect reference to governance and the place of the state in power relationships (Elliott 2001). However, and despite the fact that Foucault does

not refer to institutions directly, a Foucaultian understanding of power can nevertheless help to situate the elements that constitute the 'organisational context of work' as these elements all comprise what Foucault refers to in his notion of 'discourse', 'knowledge' and 'discipline', and which, in relation to this study, fosters the power relationships in social care. It can therefore be argued that through a Foucaultian understanding of the concept of power, the formation and resolution of ethical dilemmas can be understood, among social care practitioners from different fields.

Indeed, Webb and McBeath argue that a Foucaultian perspective on power is valuable for understanding the 'nature of social work':

> Following Foucault, we argued that, in the nature of statutory social work, client and social workers are caught within networks of power emanating from institutions, alliances between discourses of social sciences, and techniques of intervention. (Webb and McBeath 1990:68)

Many of the social care practitioners interviewed for this research stated that in various cases, ethical dilemmas are out of their control, and their ways of resolving them are mostly influenced by elements external to them. These elements have an impact at different levels, depending on the way power operates within an organisation. In order to gain further understanding of how power operates in the different sectors of social care, and the impact it has on practitioners' decision-making processes in relation to ethical dilemmas, it is important to analyse the features that constitute 'power' for Foucault, and the ways they impact on social care practitioners' experiences of ethical dilemmas. The following section explores three features that contribute to maintaining power relationships in social care organisations, and their practical impact on social care practitioners.

## Power through Knowledge and Discourse

Knowledge, as understood by Foucaultian scholars, can be defined as:

> perspectives, ideas, narratives, commentaries, rules, categories, laws terms, explanations, definition produced and valorised by disciplines, fields and institutions through the application of scientific principles. (Danaher et al. 2000:xiii)

As explained earlier, Foucault (1983) explores the concept of power as emerging from the relationships between partners. For example, social workers are not more powerful than service users per se, but the position the state puts them in, and the knowledge they acquire through formal education, gives them a relationship of greater power over the users they interact with in providing services. Consequently, the power relationship to which Foucault refers is understood to be unequal. These inequalities are in turn maintained by the production of knowledge, and knowledge is maintained through the use of different discourses.

Foucault (1992) understands the notion of 'discourse' to be very important in the formation of power relationships. Discourse can be understood as:

> language in action: they are the windows, if you like, which allow us to make sense of, and 'see' things. These discursive windows or explanations shape our understanding of ourselves, and our capacity to distinguish the valuable from the valueless, the true from the false, and the right from the wrong. (Foucault 1992:49)

A discourse is therefore a way to form, change, or maintain people's perceptions of what is right or wrong in society. It is a form of communication that maintains order and practices.

The General Social Care Council is a good example of an organisation that promotes a 'discourse' in Foucault's sense; this will be explored further below. However, using a Foucaultian analysis of power, it becomes clear that social care practitioners do not simply 'hold' power, but instead work within the context of a complex, layered power relationship that exists between themselves, the organisational context of work and the service users. Therefore, practice within a statutory social work framework (as in the present system), for example, becomes naturalised and legitimised by reference to the organisational context of work, which maintains the knowledge of 'how to do things' through the discourse used (in the form of policies, procedures, laws and regulations).

Foucault's explanation of the discourses used to maintain power relationships also helps to explain the bad press that some social workers have received over cases of misconduct. Indeed, according to Foucault and in relation to discourse, when a problem occurs, society tends to look for the immediate enemy rather than the 'chief enemy' (Foucault 1983). In the context of social care practice and ethical misconduct, the Foucaultian analysis explains that although social workers often take the blame directly, it would be more appropriate to examine the context in which practitioners have taken decisions and then identify the ways in which the organisational context of work impacted on the case. Indeed, too often the effects of power can be felt as issuing from the individual social worker (which Foucault refers to as the 'immediate enemy'), instead of being perceived as coming from the structural level (which Foucault refers to as the 'chief enemy'). Social workers can be blamed for not taking appropriate

decisions, but Foucault's understanding of discourse and power proposes that answers should be sought within the organisational contexts of work instead.

Danaher et al. (2000:xv) explain that:

> power, which Foucault takes from Nietzsche, refers to the notion that meanings, ideas, rules, discourse, knowledge, and truths do not emerge naturally, but are produced in order to support, advantage or valorise a particular social group.

Translated into the social care practice setting, the power Foucault refers to is maintained by social care policies and procedures and the overall management system, which implicitly maintains knowledge about 'how to behave' and 'what is accepted within the setting' through a general discourse that social workers and social care practitioners have to promote. Therefore, those who are perceived as powerful (for example line managers over social workers) are perceived in this way because of the discourse they articulate, the knowledge they have acquired and the rules they apply. This perception of their power is created through the discourse they articulate, and thus discourse is not just the act of speaking, but the practices that form the whole reference system.

Discourse is therefore very important in relation to the concept of power within social care practice. Because discourse is 'taken for granted', it can only be challenged by making people aware of their perceptions and the relational nature of discourse. For example, it is easier to blame a social worker in relation to misconduct than to blame the agency, the social policies and the overall culture and structure of the organisational context of work:

At the same time, these principles [discourse] are more or less unconscious – we don't go around thinking about them, or referring to them. They are the grounds on which we base everything, so we more or less take them for granted. (Danaher et al. 2000:17)

Discourse is therefore closely related to the organisational context of work and sustains the power relationships between workers, agency and service users.

Foucault (1983) also relates power to knowledge, competence and qualifications, and argues that society as a whole defines what an acceptable qualification is, through the maintenance of a discourse. Power and knowledge are therefore reciprocal, in that knowledge is a way to access powerful positions and powerful positions are a way to form and define knowledge. A Foucaultian analysis of the experiences of social care practitioners in resolving ethical dilemmas in their practice would therefore imply the following: a social care practitioner can be perceived as exercising power over a service user, for example in providing or not providing the service needed. However, the rationale for this behaviour is not solely the responsibility of the social care practitioner. It arises not only with the professional skills, knowledge and core values of an individual, but also in the organisation that places the practitioner in a relationship of power over the user, via the agency policies that underpin the practitioner's work. What makes the social care practitioner 'knowledgeable' is in fact the context in which they practice. They are directly influenced by the way the agency operates and the organisational context of work.

Power, as understood by Foucault, is relational, not a possession. It is a relationship between different partners, organisations, and structures, which is transmitted by the culture and structure of institutions. A social worker

working for an agency is therefore influenced by many elements that can justify a course of action with regard to the service user. However, as the data have shown, the same situation can present itself very differently if the context of intervention is changed:

> The person is a container whose self-identity and psychological interior is largely a product of the relations of power, discourse and practice in which he or she is enmeshed. (Layder 1994:103)

Discourse and knowledge are very important for maintaining power relationships, according to Foucault. The data analysis has indicated that social care practitioners tend to comply with regulations and the overall organisational context of work. Their power is therefore partly maintained through the use of discourses that make certain values and knowledge more acceptable than others, and which consequently provide practitioners with a definition of what is considered to be right or wrong.


## Power through Discipline

From the discussion above, it is clear that knowledge and discourse are very important in sustaining power relationships in social care practice. However, discourse and knowledge cannot maintain the power relationships in an agency without some form of discipline. Discipline is understood by Foucault as:

> the notion of punishment or coercion and second to the notion of a set of skills and knowledge which must be mastered in order to achieve success in particular field. (Danaher et al. 2000:x)

The notion of discipline is the third element that has an impact on the decision-making process in relation to ethical dilemmas and it can also be felt as a consequence of the regulations that are embedded in the organisational context of work. Regulation is defined as:

> The act of regulating: The state of being regulated; an authoritative rule dealing with details or procedure; to bring under the control of law or constituted authority. (Webster 1996:985)

In examining the definition of regulation, it becomes clear that it is in fact closely related to the concept of discipline. Indeed, if a regulation is not followed, discipline can be used to punish the 'deviant'. Therefore the concept of discipline is very important in the overall discussion of power, because even though discourse and knowledge are embedded in (and maintained by) the organisational context where interventions take place, without discipline, practitioners are free to act in line with, or against, the regulations and procedures transmitted through the organisational context of work.

In examining the impact of the organisational context of work on practitioners' decision-making processes, it appeared from the data analysis that practitioners who were highly regulated in their practice were more likely to follow the regulations than, for example, their professional values, when resolving an ethical dilemma. The following comment was made in relation to a conflict between professional expertise and regulation:

> You've got to tread carefully ... because obviously ... if you step over the line ... you will make trouble for yourself.... (Statutory social worker)

This social worker's comment echoes Foucault's thoughts when he asserts that:

> I think a number of individuals in this situation are saying no and denouncing the system. This does not protect them against exclusion or the fact that their exclusion is now accepted by everyone, not only obviously by the bureaucracy but also by their colleagues. This proves the extent to which social work has become programmatic and institutionalised. (Foucault 1972:91)

The concepts of discipline and punishment are important components of institutionalisation and can be understood as:

> a corpus of law and texts that must be remembered; that operates not by differentiating individuals, but by specifying acts according to a number of general categories; not by hierarchizing, but quite simply by bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden; not by homogenizing but by operating the division, acquired once and for all, of condemnation. The disciplinary mechanism secreted a 'penalty of the norm', which is irreducible in its principles and functioning to the traditional penalty of the law. (Foucault 1991:183)

The concept of discipline as found in today's social care system is applied in a subtle way, through the organisational context of work where social care practice takes place and by regulatory bodies in health and social care:

> Disciplinary power moved the focus of control to individuals themselves. That is, by understanding that they are constantly under surveillance, individuals begin to oversee themselves, to regulate their own behaviour in the light of its assumed visibility to others.
> (Layder 1994:99)

The notion of discipline takes place in the context of the *normalisation* of action (Foucault 1991). Applied to the context of social care practice, and in particular

to these research findings, the disciplining of action takes place through the organisational context of work (rules, organisational culture, regulations, criteria) and through the sustainability of power relationships (the use of discourse and knowledge) between agencies, users and practitioners. Indeed, many social care practitioners mentioned referring to the staff handbook, eligibility criteria and overall regulations when making a decision about ethical dilemmas. Layder (1993:99) adds that:

> in effect, the principle of surveillance became internalised. In this sense, the functioning of power becomes automatic rather than the result of a conscious exercise by some external agency.

The General Social Care Council is an example of regulatory body that uses disciplinary routines and programmes. Social workers have to follow a rigid curriculum in order to gain their qualifications. They then have to work within a framework of eligibility criteria, statutory duties and budgetary constraints, all of which helps to discipline social workers to behave in a particular way. As Layder (1993:101) explains, in relation to a Foucaultian analysis of the effects of power:

> individuals in particular social settings and contexts are affected by power relations in terms of their self-identities, attitudes and their (psychological) predisposition.

In other words (and in relation to this particular research), the institutions social workers gain their qualifications from, and the organisations which employ them, impose a set of prescribed guidelines through the organisational context of work, and this takes precedence over the user's needs in some cases. For example, if a practitioner judges that the rule needs to be challenged for the

benefit of the service user and therefore acts in a manner that differs from expectations within the organisational context, the practitioner can be sanctioned. The concept of disciplinary power is therefore important in solving ethical dilemmas.

Disciplinary power, together with discourse and knowledge, play an important part in the decision-making processes of practitioners when faced with an ethical dilemma. Disciplinary power, discourse and knowledge are all maintained by the organisational context of work in which interventions take place. Nevertheless, the organisational context of work is also very important in maintaining a standard of intervention and service that is fair and of a good quality. However, as the research findings have indicated, when the 'organisational context of work' exerts heavy pressure on practitioners experiencing a dilemma and the course of action required by the agency is different from the service user's needs or interests, the dilemma tends to be resolved by putting the agency's priority first. On the other hand, in an organisation where the organisational context is looser, practitioners feel they have more freedom to behave in the best interests of the user and according to their professional training and values. Indeed, many of the practitioners perceived the organisational context of their work as oppressive. The concept of power, as understood by Foucault, is helpful for understanding the situation in which social care practitioners make ethical decisions, in terms of the context of power relationships between themselves and their agencies.

The discussion above has outlined how power relationships in social care agencies are maintained by the use of discourses, knowledge and discipline, at

a micro level, that is to say, over social workers and social care practitioners. As English (2006:87) explains,

> Foucaultian poststructuralism focuses on the technologies (practice) of power and the ways in which power becomes present and capillary, that is, working its way through systems of human interactions. (...) In a Foucaultian sense, the emphasis is on the how of power and not the what or the why or the when.

This exploration has therefore led the researcher to acquire an understanding of *how* power operates within social work and consequently develop a typology to understand different levels of ethical issues among social workers and other social care practitioners across different types of settings. Symbolic Interaction has complemented the Foucaultian analysis of power in so far that, while Foucault offers a macro perspective to understanding how power is operated through the organisational context of work as well as how it affect social workers, in their daily ethical practice, Symbolic Interaction shines light on how social workers, by their semi-autonomous capacity to create for themselves meaning for their experience of ethical issues in practice, can counteract the effect of the power and act ethically at micro level.

Although Foucaultian analysis and Symbolic Interaction are two theories that share more differences than similarities by their nature (macro and micro perspective) they nevertheless share the element of *relationality*, that is to say that both perspectives use the concept of relationships as central to their arguments. Indeed, the element of *relationality* renders the combination of both social theories possible as it is through different 'levels' or 'types' of relationships that 'construction of meanings' are developed and negotiated according to both theories. For example, while relationships of power develop

between institutions, the organisational context of work, social workers and social care practitioners and service users, it is also through relationships and interactions that social workers interpret and construct their understanding or their positions. This combination of Symbolic Interaction and Foucaultian analysis of power resembles Structuration Theory as developed by Giddens, but also shares differences, in so far that while Giddens believes that human agency shapes structure by interacting directly with it, the combination of Symbolic Interaction and Foucaultian understanding of power does not necessary imply that the structure will change, but at least, may allow social workers, though their interactions and relationships, to develop some mechanisms of resistance to power.

Therefore, Symbolic Interaction and Foucaultian analysis within this research complement each other and bring a fuller understanding of how power operates at a macro level and is felt at capillary level, as well as how it can be counteracted. The combined application of both perspectives is fundamental to the development of the discussion in Chapter Eight.

It has been argued above that a Foucaultian analysis offers an appropriate framework to understanding the emerging core category 'power', felt through the organisational context of work. The next chapter will build upon the conceptual understanding of the core category power, that is to say, a concept that is 'relational' because of an intersection between discourse, knowledge and discipline.

# Chapter Eight

## Discussion

Thus far, the data analysis in Chapter Five and the theoretical examination of the core category in Chapter Six have clearly identified the central role that the concept of power plays (through the organisational context of work) and how it has the capacity to influence practitioners' decision-making processes with regard to ethical conduct. Indeed, the organisational context of work and the way power operates within an organisation have emerged as the most important elements. These strongly affect the ways that practitioners resolve ethical dilemmas and adhere to ethical conduct and principles in general.

The first section of the discussion will draw on the concept of power developed above in Chapter Six and will develop a model to understand the similarities and differences in relation to the resolution of ethical dilemmas in social care practice.

The second section aims to explore the ways in which the work of Alasdair MacIntyre can assist in understanding the experience of social care practitioners in relation to ethics and ethical dilemmas and how this applies to the model of power discussed in the first section. It will be suggested that a return to 'virtue ethics' in relation to ethical dilemmas can counteract the effects of relational power and increase the resistance of social workers facing ethical dilemmas towards the organisational context of work. The relationship between Foucault's theory of power and MacIntyre's understanding of ethical conduct is crucial to this thesis and made possible by the contribution of the symbolic interaction research perspective. The use of virtue ethics as understood by

MacIntyre (1995:1999) will be central to this section, as it helps to shine light on a different way of practicing ethically in social work and social care.

Finally, the third section will explore some practical applications of MacIntyre's concept of virtue ethics in counteracting the effects of relational power. It will begin by discussing the concept of *collective practical reasoning* (adapted from MacIntyre 1999) and its importance in developing and cultivating the virtues on the one hand, and how the Socratic Dialogue approach (Saran and Neisser 2004; Kessels 1999; Morrell 2004) constitutes a suitable framework for nurturing a collective practical reasoning practice and, thus, cultivating social work virtues on the other hand. It will be argued that Socratic Dialogue can provide social work students and already qualified social workers with a greater opportunity to develop and maintain ethical conduct regardless of the organisational context of a given intervention. It will emphasise how the development of 'virtues', acquired during collective practical reasoning and developed through the practice of Socratic Dialogue, can enable social work students and practitioners already employed to work more ethically and thus to improve the overall ethical practice in social care.

## Social care Practitioners' Experiences of Ethical Dilemmas: Levels of Ethical Issues and Consequences on Their Well-being

The data collected during this research, and the previous section on discourse, knowledge and discipline, clearly indicate that a Foucaultian understanding of power can help to cast some light on the ethics of social care and social work. Furthermore, the research has so far demonstrated that ethical dilemmas and decision-making processes occur in relation to the different organisational contexts of work, and that, depending on the field of practice, some patterns

appear in the ways the dilemmas emerge and are resolved. This section will therefore examine different levels of ethical issues that appeared within the practice of those who participated in the research. Figure 8, below, illustrates patterns found through the process of the research.

Figure 8- Levels of 'power' and impacts on the ethical reasoning and perception of ethical dimensions
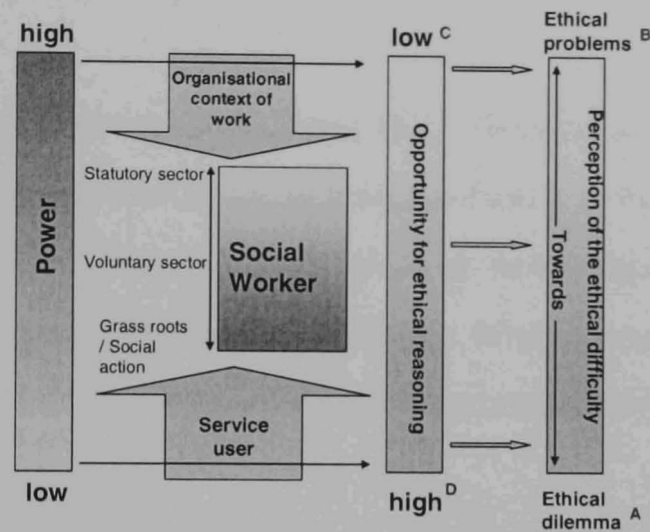


The experience of social care practitioners fitting within the lower part of the figure (low level of power), fits the definition of an ethical dilemma (A) as defined by Banks (1997:218): "A choice between two equally unwelcome alternative courses of action." This particular definition applied particularly well to social action workers and to some workers from the voluntary sector. Practitioners from these settings defined their experience of resolving ethical dilemmas as having to choose between two courses of action, for example as experienced in dilemmas between care and control. Of course, as Banks (1997) explains, none of the values are really seen as 'welcome', because whatever the decision, any person involved can be left with negative consequences. The

vignettes used in the fourth data-collection phase explored this type of ethical dilemma. Practitioners were unhappy with the alternative solutions and, in the end, were making decisions likely to impact the least on every user, practitioner and agency involved in the situation. Because social care practitioners from social action settings and the voluntary sector are not as closely regulated by the organisational context of work compared to those in the statutory sector, they have more flexibility in the decision-making process and therefore have more scope for ethical reasoning (D).

However, because practitioners from the voluntary sector and social action settings do not experience as much pressure from the organisational context of work, they are left with complex ethical decisions to make, instead of being able to rely on regulation to make their decisions. When discussing their experience of ethical dilemmas in practice, one respondent stated the following:

> As a social action worker, you have a lot of responsibility, because there are no structures in terms of social action that give you any kind of guidance at all ... and you could be a social action worker working with deprived children or single mums on an estate ... and what if there is an issue of Child Protection there? What happens? As a social action worker, you won't have all the structure and legislation to hand that a social worker would have ... you know? Where do you go back? You can't go back to the process because the child's life is involved ... and you can ask 'what, why, how, action, and reflection', but it can blow up in your face! Social action does not have any of that and that's why it crosses over a very dangerous territory. (Social action worker.)

Therefore, although experiencing ethical dilemmas in Banks' terms, and having an *opportunity* for ethical reasoning because of the limited impact of the organisational context of work on their practice, social action workers and some

practitioners from the voluntary sectors found themselves in difficult situations when resolving ethical dilemmas.

On the other hand, within statutory social work and for some practitioners from the voluntary sector, the experience of ethical dilemmas is somewhat different. Some practitioners referred to the concept of ethical dilemmas as defined by Banks (1997), but others indicated that they rarely experienced ethical dilemmas in practice. A statutory social worker mentioned that no ethical dilemmas were apparent within her practice, but referred to her experience in terms of 'personal dilemmas':

> I just don't think we have the dilemmas ... apart from personal dilemmas ... I don't think we have ... because it is out of our control ... so it is not our ethical dilemmas is it ... really ... you know we are a huge organisation ... and I am just a little person at the bottom ... it is all this structure of other people that make the decision[s]. (Statutory social worker.)

The notion of a 'personal dilemma' was defined as referring to a situation where the practitioner has no choice about the course of action because of the pressure from the organisational context, but where the practitioner nevertheless feels awkward because another course of action (not prescribed by the organisational context of work) could have greater benefit for the user. Therefore, the concept of 'personal dilemma' occurs when practitioners perceive themselves as being helpless in regard to a situation. This concept of personal dilemma resembles the concept of 'ethical problem' (B) as suggested by Banks and Williams (2005). Indeed, Banks and Williams (2005:1011) explain ethical problems as "where a decision has to be made, but where there was no dilemma for the person making the decision – i.e. it was clear which course of

action to take". However, in the case of the social workers' accounts collected during this research, the perception of the ethical problem was slightly different. Indeed, despite the clarity of the course of action imposed through the organisational context of work, it was not always perceived as morally right by the respondents. Therefore, by acting according to the prescribed way, social workers felt 'awkward' and even 'unethical'. In so far as no alternative course of action was perceived as possible, they were morally unhappy with the outcome. Although social workers demonstrated a level of reflection while resolving the dilemmas presented to them, the scope for ethical reasoning was constrained by the pressure of the organisational context of work (C).

This experience relates to a second definition, which can be linked with the concept of power developed by Foucault (1983). Indeed, 'personal dilemmas' (as expressed by one of the participants) or the concept of ethical problems as defined by Banks and Williams (2005) occur when the practitioner has a prescribed course of action to follow, through the knowledge, discourse and disciplinary mechanisms maintained by an agency in the organisational context of work. This pressurises the individual to follow a particular course of action in the face of other important values, such as users' needs or the values of the professional. Foucault (1983) explains that this sort of power (here sustained by the organisational context of work) is most effective when it is 'hidden from view'. Indeed, knowledge and discourses are being used to control and regulate individuals and populations:

> The official version of things is that they are 'working in our interests', 'taking care of us', looking after us and watching over us 'for our own good'. (Danaher et al. 2000:68)

This explains why social care practitioners, when reflecting on the impact of the organisational context of work on ethical decision-making, emphasised that 'regulations', 'admissibility criteria', 'agency policies and procedures' and 'statutory duties and regulations' made them clear about the way to behave. Thus, most social care practitioners from the statutory sector who have experienced 'personal dilemmas' have not seen the need to challenge features in the organisational context of work, but instead have dealt with the consequences on an emotional level. Therefore, the individual experiencing the 'personal dilemma' does not experience this within the first definition of ethical dilemma given by Banks (2006), as they do not have a real choice in relation to the course of action to take. Practitioners experience no apparent 'ethical dilemma', as the course of action to take is clearly suggested by the organisational context of work. They feel an absence of choice but, at the same time, are left with the consequences of the imposed course of action and thus experience a personal dilemma. This notion of personal dilemma affects the practitioner, but in contrast to the 'ethical dilemma' defined by Banks (2006), this type of dilemma does not affect the course of action per se. Resembling the notion of ethical problems to which Banks and Williams (2005) refer to, it affects the practitioner's own values and principles and therefore has consequences for the well-being of the practitioner.

A Foucaultian analysis of power therefore has much to offer for understanding ethics in social care practice. By understanding power as something structured for individual, group, organisational or class purposes, and as something being exercised in human interactions (Foucault 1981), it is possible to see that ethical dilemmas and problems take place in the context of power relationships. These relationships are structured within the organisational context of work.

Starting from an understanding of Foucault's analysis of power as a structural one, it would be relevant to assume that any conclusions emerging from a Foucaultian understanding of power should emphasise a 'structural' strategy to counteract the effect of power. Nevertheless, following the symbolic interaction approach, the strategies proposed in this research tend to reach into a micro-interpersonal perspective, in so far as it is argued that, by understanding power as relational, a strategy for counteracting its effect could be achieved by changing the perceptions that people have of power relationships and, thus, increasing resistance. As Kaufman (2003:240) notes,

> Foucault's theory is helpful for supplementing our understanding of the power of institutions with an understanding of how power relations are carried and constituted in knowledge system, in interpersonal relations, in the ways our bodies are positioned by social forces, in the ways we are catalogued and categorised, and in processes of self-exploitation.

It therefore becomes arguable that changing the perceptions that people have of power relationships can affect the way that ethical situations are perceived and, thus, in the context of this research, can contribute to modifying the pattern of ethical practice. Blumer (1969:59), adopting the symbolic interaction perspective, remarks:

> The actor is seen as one who is confronted with a situation in which he has to act. In this situation, he notes, interprets, and assesses things with which he has to deal in order to act.

In relation to this research, the findings have shown that social workers are involved in different relationships of power (depending on their work context, for example) but also *interpret* these power relationships differently from one setting to another. This interpretation in turn affects their ethical practice. For

example, while one social worker from the statutory sector noted that ethics is understood as "something related to whether you keep your job or not", (which indicates an (unconscious) mechanism of power through discourse and discipline), another practitioner from the statutory sector defined ethics as "behaving wrongly or rightly" (which does not explicitly imply a perceived power relationship in the definition). Yet, Rhodes (1986) is clear that social work ethics is undermined by the overall procedures of an agency that tend to weaken ethical practice and moral responsibility, especially within the statutory sector.

Therefore, the difference between both social workers above is more related to their *interpretation* of their positions within the various relationships of power as opposed to different relationships of power. Indeed, English (2006), in relation to an analysis of Foucaultian power in the context of her own research, emphasises the fact that actors can resist power by creating their own knowledge. Symbolic interaction helps us to understand that, regardless of the omnipresence of power in society, there is a possibility that agents can interpret situations differently and, thus, change their reaction to power relationships.

In order to further explore relationships between the concept of relational power, the capacity to act on the relation of power, the organisational context of work and the notion of ethical practice, MacIntyre's *After Virtue* perspective (1985) will be invoked. It is intended that the use of MacIntyre's theory of 'virtue ethics' will provide a possible approach aimed at counteracting the effects of power felt in relation to the emergence and resolution of ethical dilemmas.

## Applied Moral Perspectives to Counteract the Impact of the Relationships of Power on Ethical Decision-making

We have seen from the previous section that ethical practice is influenced to different degrees by the organisational context of work and the power relationships that are felt within it. However, although a link between the concept of power and the experience of ethical decision-making has been demonstrated, it is still unclear as to how the issues raised might be resolved in order to improve ethical social care practice.

In the field of social care ethics, it is very common to resolve ethical conflicts using mainstream moral philosophies such as the Kantian and utilitarian approaches. Indeed, Banks (2001) suggests that most of the writing on social care ethics is related to Kantian or utilitarian perspectives, where the Kantian prioritises the self-determination of the user, and the utilitarian focuses on achieving the greatest good for the greatest number. Osmo and Landau (2006) support Banks's findings that social workers usually make decisions related to ethics supported by utilitarian or Kantian theories, and also add that arguments based on virtue theories are infrequent. Therefore, while Kantian and utilitarian approaches to ethics were explored in the literature review and fit well within some of the principles of social work practice, it is rare that an ethical dilemma can be solved using one or other approach, as they are often conflicting. For example, while the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number (utilitarian) could very well apply to a particular situation, the concept of self-determination of the user (Kantian) can rarely be acted upon simultaneously (McBeath and Webb 2002). Consequently, mainstream moral philosophies are

not always appropriate for resolving ethical dilemmas in social care practice, especially when the ethical conflicts reveal complex relationships of power.

While the value base of social work reflects a Kantian approach through the value of self-determination of the user (see CCETSW Statement of Values 1995, Appendix 6), the welfare state tends to prioritise a utilitarian approach because of limitations in human and financial resources (Almond 1985; Banks 2006). One of the critics of a principles-based approach to ethics is that it is distant from 'human experience' and that it is too abstract and theoretical to assist social workers in resolving ethical dilemmas practically (Abramson 1996). A Foucaultian understanding of power, the symbolic interaction perspective and the Grounded Theory process have led the researcher to search for ethical perspectives that might have the capacity to increase the resistance by social workers who are operating within a relationship of power. In this context, the moral perspective developed by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1985) appears to be worth examining. This section therefore aims to explore the relationships of power in the context of a virtue ethics approach applied to the practice of social care.

### Revisiting Alasdair MacIntyre's Position on Virtue Ethics

The theory contained in *After Virtue* "is meant to set out a program for future work" (Murphy 2003:39). Indeed, *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1985) was the first in a series by MacIntyre relating to ethical perspectives and moral agreements: it was followed by *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1991) and *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999). MacIntyre aimed to cast light on ethical behaviour in contemporary society and prompted the

development of his theory around the importance of 'virtue' in moral philosophy.

MacIntyre's thesis was summarised in the literature review; it supports a return to 'virtue ethics', which was primarily developed by Plato and furthered by Aristotle. In order to arrive at this conclusion, MacIntyre takes the reader on a journey that explores his interpretation of current morality, which he sees as the result of a fragmented understanding of ethics taken out of its cultural and historical contexts. This has mainly occurred because of the dominance of a society that is interpretivist, in ethical terms, which means that ethical or moral and conduct is understood to be an expression of personal preference.

MacIntyre argues that virtue ethics (with the question 'what sort of *person* ought I to be?') was the dominant approach in western moral philosophy until at least the Enlightenment period. However, from the eighteenth century onwards, moral philosophy changed radically, and philosophers such as Kant (Kantian ethics), Mill and Bentham (utilitarian ethics) and Ayer and Moore (emotivism and intuitionism) started to analyse ethics in terms of the question 'what *behaviour* should one adopt in order to live an ethical life?' and consequently began to dictate ethical conduct as being related to a set of principles to follow. That, as Vardy and Grosch (1999) argue, has achieved little:

> Reason, passion, choice, utility and intuition had all failed ... what was left was meaningless in the strict, philosophical sense of the word. We can establish facts through science and true or false statements through logic, but the world of value, the realm of morality is beyond fact, truth or falsehood. Instead morality is simply the expression of personal preference in a culture which has abandoned the virtue and rejected this sense of community. (Vardy and Grosch 1999:103)

In this vein, MacIntyre (1985) sees modern moral philosophies as being developed around the question of 'action': 'What action should I take in order to live an ethical life?' Indeed, returning to the literature review, it was clear that Kantian and utilitarian approaches to ethics simply explore different ways of determining the right behaviour to adopt. For example, the Kantian approach (Kant 1785) states that a course of action should be based upon the response to the three categorical imperatives ('act if the maxim of your action was to become through your will a universal law of nature'), while the utilitarian position is known as the theory of usefulness (cited in Vardy and Grosch 1999:63). This focus on action, however, constitutes only one part of MacIntyre's critique, since he also queries the value of the 'question of action' as the best way to understand ethical behaviour:

> [...] The central problems of moral philosophy come to cluster around the question' How do we know which rules to follow?' (MacIntyre 1985:236)

MacIntyre expresses another concern. His critique of moral philosophies highlights not only the fact that people understand ethics as a matter of action, but also that they define ethics, moral conduct and norms of behaviour as a question of personal taste and preference (emotivist and interpretivist). Indeed, MacIntyre bemoans the spread of emotivism and other interpretivist moral philosophies in society, as, in his opinion, they render the "state of moral agreement in a grave disorder" (MacIntyre 1985:256).

MacIntyre instead believes that ethics should be concerned with character, answering the question 'what sort of person ought I to be?' rather than 'what action should I follow?' Through an exploration of modern moral philosophy

(including the Kantian and utilitarian approaches), and in particular through his critique of emotivism, MacIntyre develops his argument for a return to 'virtue ethics'.

However, MacIntyre cautions that 'virtue ethics' are not always compatible with effectiveness and therefore do not always go hand in hand with the aims of organisations, which usually prioritise effectiveness:

> The organisation is characteristically engaged in a competitive struggle for scarce resources to put to the service of its predetermined ends. It is therefore a central responsibility of managers to direct and redirect the organisation's available resources, both human and non-human, as effectively as possible toward those ends. Every bureaucratic organisation embodies some explicit or implicit definition of costs and benefits from which the criteria of effectiveness are derived. Bureaucratic rationality is the rationality of matching means to ends economically and efficiently. (MacIntyre 1985:25)

Nevertheless, and despite the fact that virtue ethics are not always compatible with effectiveness, MacIntyre argues that the development of virtues could enable people to act more ethically and, as applied to the context of this research, enable practitioners to do more than follow only the guidelines for practice in the organisational context of work in various settings.

Starting from MacIntyre's position, I will argue that a return to virtue ethics can contribute to rendering social care practitioners better at taking ethical decisions, because virtue ethics is concerned with quality of character rather than guidelines to be followed. Social care practitioners from the statutory sector would then be faced with ethical dilemmas rather than personal dilemmas or ethical problems, as identified by Banks and Williams (2005).

Social action workers, on the other hand, would become more confident at making ethical decisions even where there is an absence of guidelines, as virtue ethics does not rest on following rules. Having developed the virtues, a practitioner would have the strength of character to implement the course of action that they deem appropriate and would thus increase the level of resistance to power relationships when appropriate, regardless of the context in which the action takes place:

> We cannot characterise behaviour independently of intentions, and we cannot characterise intentions independently of the settings which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others. (MacIntyre 1985:206)

Attempting to practice social work and make ethical decisions by mainly applying rules and regulations imposed through different work contexts is not, according to MacIntyre, the way forward for ethical practice. It will be argued that a virtue ethics approach can aid in counteracting this pressure, or its lack, thus helping in reaching ethical conclusions. I will now go on to explore further the appropriateness of virtue ethics in social work practice, before proposing a way forward for insuring ethical deliberation without being totally constrained, or disabled by, the power relationships felt through the organisational context of work.

## Ethics within a 'Practice'

The section on virtue ethics in the literature review introduced the idea that social work fits within the definition of 'practice' as understood by MacIntyre (1985). Indeed, MacIntyre (1985) explains that practices are very important in

defining a morally good life for an individual. It is useful, at this point, to remember what a practice constitutes in MacIntyre's terms:

> A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and practically define the practice. Practices of course, as I have just noticed, have a history: games, sciences and arts all have histories. Thus the standards are not themselves immune from criticism, but nonetheless we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far. (MacIntyre 1985:190)

Social work, as illustrated in the literature review, constitutes a 'practice' in MacIntyre's sense. Hence, social work involves standards as well as a set of values. However, MacIntyre also stresses that practice takes place within contexts, and as this study has demonstrated, settings and organisational contexts of work impact upon social workers and social care practitioners' understandings of ethics and ethical dilemmas. Consequently, several ethical conflicts emerge from the interplay between the 'practice' value base and the work settings in which social work takes place. However, as explained in the first section of this discussion, power plays an important role in maintaining organisational contexts of work. What links the concepts of power and discipline developed by Foucault (1977) is that power relationships jeopardise the development of the 'practice' of social work. Indeed, MacIntyre (1999) argues that, when a person enters into a practice (such as the practice of social work), they embed within them the values of the profession and the standards of practice, rather than just following rules and regulations prescribed by the setting:

> Neither kind of rule, neither inviolable negative rules nor positive prescriptions, can by itself be a sufficient guide to action. Knowing how to act virtuously always involves more than rule-following. (MacIntyre 1999:93)

In other words, although the organisational context of work (operating within different practice settings) defines what is expected from social workers through rules and regulations, it is important for practitioners to retain their practice values at the forefront of their decision-making and challenge the organisational context of work. MacIntyre (1985) believes in a return to virtue as the key to doing so, even when the practice takes place within an organisational context of work and a particular setting:

> Rule-following will often be involved in knowing how to respond rightly, but no rule or set of rules by itself ever determines how to respond rightly. (MacIntyre 1999:93)

The organisational context of work greatly impacts on the way ethical practice is constructed, interpreted and maintained within social care, through power relationships between agencies, social care practitioners and service users. Indeed, the organisational context of work, through the use of discourse, knowledge and discipline, maintains the power relationships necessary to dictate rules of conduct and behaviour. This leads social care workers to practice in the ways revealed in the data collection and analysis for this project:

> Foucault was only the latest in a long line of thinkers – Augustine, Hobbes, and Marx are his most notable predecessors – to remind us that institutionalised networks of giving and receiving are also always structures of unequal distributions of power, structures well-designed both to mask and protect those same distributions. So there are always possibilities and often actualities of victimization and exploitation bound up with participation in such networks. If we are not adequately aware of this, our practical judgment and reasoning will go badly astray. The virtues which we need in order to achieve both our own goods and the goods of others through participation in such networks

only function as genuine virtues when their exercise is informed by an awareness of how power is distributed and of the corruption to which its use is liable. Here as elsewhere in our lives we have to learn how to live both with and against the realities of power. (MacIntyre 1999:102)

Thus, MacIntyre tells us that developing and nurturing virtues can aid people to live a good life within structures of domination and power relationships. Developing and nurturing virtues, for MacIntyre, also constitutes a means to resist these power relationships and, in the case of this research, can be interpreted as a way of maintaining ethical practice, regardless of the specific work setting.

The last section of this discussion intends to identify possible strategies through which social care practitioners might develop social work virtues that would enable them to integrate their professional values (which I will call 'practice' values) simultaneously with working for an agency that imposes a high level of control over their work. This last section will be focused mainly on undergraduate and postgraduate social work education and also on social workers already working within social care agencies.

The justification for this focus on social work education and training relates to the emergence of the General Social Care Council's emphasis on the importance of qualifications. The high level of education now required to become a qualified social worker (a protected title since April 2004) is a key factor in attracting those who wish to work in the social care field. Lynn Berry, Chief Executive of the General Social Care Council, explained:

There has never been a better time to get into social work. There are many exciting and varied opportunities across the voluntary, statutory and private sectors, a new degree giving much practical work experience, a £3,000 bursary and golden hellos being offered by some

employers. And the work of social workers is getting far greater public recognition and status. (Berry 2005)

A social work qualification, as opposed to a general social welfare education, can be perceived as very attractive to people wishing to work in social care, because many social work jobs nowadays require the practitioner to be qualified, recognised by and registered with the General Social Care Council. Thus, the findings of this project will be considered in the context of social work education (as opposed to other forms of social care training that do not entitle the person to use the recognised title of 'social worker' on completion of their programme of study).

## Impact of the Findings on Social care Practice and Training

Thus far, the literature review and the discussion have examined the ways ethical dilemmas occur in practice and the elements that impact on the decision-making processes of social care practitioners. Much of the literature consulted in relation to ethics in social care practice pays attention to categorising the likelihood of different ethical dilemmas, with only little attention given to the role of organisational context in the creation and resolution of ethical dilemmas. Indeed, research in the field of ethics and social care has focused on the categorisation of ethical dilemmas according to profession or field of practice, but has not provided a holistic understanding of the formation and resolution of ethical dilemmas that encompass the whole field of practice and its unique 'practice' values. For example, Banks (1995), Rhodes (1986) and Clark (2005) have examined the different elements that appear to influence the emergence of ethical dilemmas in the field of social work. Many other authors have provided a typology of values and dilemmas in social care practice as well as in other fields of health care, such as occupational therapy and counselling. However,

despite this attention to the professional values of different fields of intervention and the relationships they have with the emergence of ethical dilemmas, none of the research, apart from that of McBeath and Webb (2002), has thoroughly focused on how and why the organisational context of work impacts on social care practice.

Thus, the literature mainly focuses on the variety of ethical standards within social care and ethical practices in different professions, and when it pays attention to the context in which the practice takes place, no practical solutions are proposed. However, in the light of this research, the use of MacIntyre's work, the Foucaultian understanding of power underpinned by a symbolic interaction perspective, assists in developing a model that has the potential to enable social workers and other social care practitioners to intervene ethically in line with their 'practice' values and regardless of the fields they work in.

MacIntyre (1999) suggests that people – in this case, social work practitioners – need to develop practical reasoning in order to unlock and cultivate virtues that are appropriate to their practice. This practical reasoning activity, which involves both reflection and self-knowledge, is an enquiry that

> provides us with grounds for the criticism, revision, or even rejection of many of our judgements, our standards of judgement, our relationships and our institutions. (MacIntyre 1999:157)

MacIntyre (1999) emphasises the need for developing and cultivating virtues through *practical reasoning*, and for ceasing to comply only with rules and regulations, particularly when the organisational context of work differs from the practice value, as in the case of social work practice settings.

If we revisit what essentially constitutes a virtue, it becomes clear that practical reasoning could help social workers to feel clearer about their 'practice' values and the nature of social work practice, rather than being solely synchronised by utilitarian, Kantian and intuitionist approaches to ethics or being deeply affected by the organisational context of work in the different settings in which social work takes place.

As MacIntyre points out, a virtue can be developed through strength of character. He explains that virtue is "an acquired human quality" (1985:191), rather than a feeling about rightness or wrongness. These personal qualities or 'virtues' have to be practised in order to become part of one's life as opposed to a one-off 'act of heroism' (Lynch and Lynch 2006). Understanding the primary concept of virtues, as well as developing them through 'practical reasoning', could help practitioners to feel more confident in their decision-making processes and, consequently, to challenge the power relationships that exist between themselves and the organisational context of work. Some virtues that could relate to social work practice have been identified by Lynch and Lynch (2006) and Clark (2006) as temperance, magnanimity, gentleness, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness, modesty and justice.

If we return to the concept of power developed by Foucault, it has become clear that, when resolving ethical dilemmas, social workers act in response to the power relationship that exists between themselves and the organisational context of their work with the service user. Foucault (1977) is very clear that power is relational; therefore, in order to challenge the effects of power upon the decision-making process, social workers need to challenge their relationship

with the organisational context of work. However, taking into account the work setting where social work takes place and the strong impact of the organisational context on practitioners, it is very difficult for them to challenge this power relationship. Ferguson and Lavalette (2004:304) point out:

> Social workers find they have less freedom and control over their contact and work with clients; they are subject to speed-up, bureaucratic control and regulation; their work activities increasingly confront them and their clients as a set of 'alien' practices; and all this limits the scope for social workers to stand shoulder to shoulder with their clients in the face of their oppression – the system increasingly places barriers between the social worker and the client.

It is therefore necessary to create a way for social workers to develop their resistance to power coming from the organisational context of work, in order to practice ethically, regardless of the external pressures put upon them. However, the development of a resistance mechanism has been identified as being a gap in Foucault's work on power. Indeed,

> there is a banal sense in which it could be argued that Foucault's claimed identification is the omnipresence of power also indicates a matching potentiality of resistance, but from within his own and his disciples' discourse there is no independent basis from which to develop principles of opposition. (Walzer 1986, cited in Gould 1990)

Therefore, while Foucault does not develop a practical way to counteract the effect of power felt through relationships, he nevertheless examines the importance of developing a new form of subjectivity. Indeed, he suggests that

> the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of

individualisation which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (Foucault 1982:216)

Foucault's comments, translated to social work, imply that social workers need to adopt a different approach to solving ethical dilemmas, to the extent that, as explained earlier, most dilemmas occur within, and are resolved through, different power relationships. In reality, and based on a Foucaultian understanding of power, social workers should not to try to work against the system, but instead (and in the light of social work 'practice' values) they should challenge the ideologies that are promoted through the system of social care, refusing to take them for granted as the best options for everyone. This is where MacIntyre's theory on virtue ethics comes to the fore. Undeniably, MacIntyre suggests that a return to virtue ethics will enable society to live in a morally right way. The findings of this research indicated that, when social care practitioners tried to resolve ethical dilemmas, the organisational context of work often seemed to take precedence over their 'practice' values. When we use MacIntyre's understanding of virtue as the necessary perspective for acting ethically in society, 'practical reasoning' becomes the means by which virtue can be developed and cultivated to the point that virtues become habits and overall 'strength of character'. These virtues applied to social work could take the form of strengths of character such as courage, wittiness, critical thinking and self-consciousness (McBeath and Webb 2002) and can assist social workers to challenge inappropriate use and abuse of power and therefore act ethically regardless of the context in which they practice. The following section will propose ways in which the concept of practical reasoning as developed by MacIntyre can be integrated into social work education in a practical manner.

*Development of Social work Virtues through Practical Reasoning*

The organisational context of work has been clearly linked with the concept of power as understood by Michel Foucault. Social workers will always have to work within an organisational context, because as things stand, social welfare is mainly provided and maintained by the state (Dominelli 1997). Foucault is clear that individuals need to be more challenging on what is ordinarily taken for granted, but he does not offer a practical way of doing this. MacIntyre (1999), on the other hand, suggests that the concept of practical reasoning that aims to develop the virtues should be central to moral inquiry and, therefore, applied to social work with the purpose of helping social workers to develop virtues.

Practical reasoning, in MacIntyre's sense, involves "reasoning together with others, generally within some determinate set of social relationships" (MacIntyre 1999:107). The relationships to which MacIntyre (1999) refers to are formed as a result of associations between individuals sharing the same practice: in the case of this research, social workers through their professional identity and social work activities (see discussion on 'social work as a practice', above). It is through habituation in practical reasoning that the virtues, or positive character traits such as courage, justice and temperance, develop and consequently enable people to act morally. Indeed, as Morse (1999) asserts, a virtuous character performs virtuous acts in any given moral situation (Morse 1999).

Practical reasoning, however, does not only mean "travelling along guidelines and conventions" (Payne 2002:126). Payne suggests that

any situation may need us to develop and change our guidelines, responding to new aspects of the work and social circumstances that we meet. We must look underneath the surface relationship and events which are presented to us. At any time we may need to think again and think differently. Because this kind of flexibility is the essence of dealing with any human being and being effective in working on complex human problems, critical awareness and refection is an important practical implementation of the social work value of respecting human individuality and rights. (Payne 2002:126)

The concept of reflective practice could be a helpful tool for social workers seeking to develop virtues through practical reasoning and to become more ethical social workers. Reflective practice has been common to social work for more than two decades and is already an important element of the social work education curriculum (Brown and Rutter 2006). Reflective practice involves making links between the practice and the theory, but necessitates more than carefully thinking things through and taking all aspects into account (Payne 2005). Trevethick (2005:252) explains reflective practice as a process that "involves developing the capacity for flexible and creative thinking". However, as it stands, reflective practice alone does not seem to be sufficiently well-developed to be helpful to social workers trying to resolve routine ethical dilemmas (Houston 2003). As Gould and Taylor (1986, cited in Gould and Baldwin 2004) argue, reflective practice is becoming something of a 'slogan'. Indeed, this research project has shown that practitioners still allow the organisational context of work to take precedence over their 'practice' values, especially where their work setting is highly structured (as in the field of statutory social work).

Reflecting on the research finding, and assuming that social workers attempt to be 'reflective practitioners' while intervening with service users, and in

particular when faced with an ethical issue or a dilemma, it would be appropriate to suggest that reflective practice does not suffice when the ethical issue takes place within the power relationships of day-to-day practice. This is echoed by Yin (2006), who claims that inappropriate conditions for reflective practice can trigger the destruction of the social worker's self-enhancement. Indeed, Yin (2006:783) asserts that

> inappropriate conditions include an oppressive social environment, demanding working environment, social workers' unresolved past trauma as well as social workers' poor physical and mental health. An oppressive psycho-social environment implies an imbalance of power in a professional's working environment that is oppressive to the individual worker. (Miehls and Moffatt 2000)

Therefore, power relationships also affect the capacity for reflective practice. The first conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that it is not sufficient to be a reflective practitioner in the way suggested by the current definition: something needs to be added to current social work training in relation to the concept of reflective practice. MacIntyre (1999) is helpful to consider, because in conceptualising practical reasoning, he links the concept of individual reflective practice to a more *collective process of practical reasoning*:

> Rational enquiry about *my* practical beliefs, relationships, and commitments is therefore not something that I undertake by attempting to separate *myself* from the whole set of my beliefs, relationships and commitments and to view them from some external standpoint. It is something that *we* undertake from within *our* shared mode of practice by asking, when we have good reason to do so, what the strongest and soundest objections are to this or that particular belief or concept that *we* have up to this point taken for granted. Such rational enquiry extends and amplifies our everyday practical reasoning. (MacIntyre 1999:157)

MacIntyre is introducing the concept of *practical reasoning* as a *collective activity* (1999) as the necessary means to develop and unlock the virtues required for good conduct in society. In relation to this research, the implications are clear for the value of 'collective practical reasoning' in social work. What differentiates MacIntyre's understanding of practical reasoning from the concept of reflective practice (as presently understood in the social work and social care sector – a sort of "lesson learnt" (Chiu 2006:184)) is his belief that, for ethical action to take place, the process must happen *collectively*. In the context of the present research on social work, this means that decisions taken by practitioners in relation to ethical dilemmas should be actively informed by collectively agreed 'practice' values and developed through collective practical reasoning.

It is also worth noting that the collective nature of the activity proposed by MacIntyre (1999) relates well to the principles of the social action model (Mullender and Ward 1991; CSA 2004), which, through groupwork activities, participants improve on their powerless state. Applied to this research, the collective nature of the practical reasoning is therefore an additional means to resisting power relationships encountered in practice. Indeed, the capacity for mobilisation is perceived as a weakness of the social work staff as Tréanton (in Foucault 1972:91) explains:

> I believe that the great diversity that exists among social workers prevents consciousness raising on their part, and this contributes to the crisis. They have great difficulty [trying] to become unionized. They have great difficulty in developing collective agreements.

The introduction to collective practical-reasoning activities in social work education and practice would therefore not only enable social workers to

become 'virtuous', but also, by its collective nature, reinforce the resistance to power felt though their organisational context of work:

> Practical reasoning is by its nature, on the generally Aristotelian view that I have been taking, reasoning together with others, generally within some determinate set of social relationships. [...] The making and sustaining of those relationships is inseparable from the development of those dispositions and activities through which each is directed towards becoming an independent practical reasoner. So the good of each cannot be pursued without also pursuing the good of all those who participate in those relationships. (MacIntyre 1999:107)

In the light of MacIntyre's perspective, it can be argued that reflective practice should *not* be carried out independently by each social worker. If this were to be the case, the emotivist perspective would be given precedence over the virtues that MacIntyre argues are necessary for a just and moral society.

In practical terms, I would argue that this research has shown the potential benefit for the social work education curriculum and the social work practice in general if the following element was to be integrated: developing *collective practical reasoning* among students and social work practitioners with an emphasis on the understanding of power on the one hand, and of critical reasoning, practice values, and ethics on the other.

First, course curricula must also make room for the examination of frameworks of power that operate in social care agencies and in society in general. Bar-On (2002:998) agrees in that, "if social workers are to help their clients, then they must master the discourse of power and use it effectively". I therefore argue that it is fundamental to provide an opportunity for social work students and social workers to develop an awareness of the effects of power relationships

between organisations and their settings, and the place of social work and social care within these relationships. This in effect calls for an emphasis on the examination of 'power' and its impact on social work practice rather than on an examination, for example, of social work methods and applications outside of a practice context. This examination of power can be achieved through teacher-led lectures, but also through different activities involving 'collective practical reasoning' as social workers and student practitioners acquire an understanding of the effects of organisational power upon their future practice. Ethical practice is not only about 'practice' values and the training curriculum per se, but as is evident in the work of Foucault and MacIntyre, it is also about the operations of the organisational context of work, the impact this has on ethical practice, and the practice of 'collective practical reasoning' as a way of developing and nurturing the virtues that helps counteract the effects of relational power emerging in various work contexts.

Second, and only in relation to social work education, I would suggest that the teaching of ethics starts from a practice *value base* as well as from a virtue ethics perspective (which is necessary for maintaining the practice – see MacIntyre 1999), instead of a code of conduct to obey (rule-following ethics). Foucault's insights on resisting power and developing ethics of self also reflect an objection to rule-following and codification of behaviour. Indeed, as Levy (2004:22) points out,

> Foucault tells us, that where the codes are numerous and detailed, 'practices of the self [...] almost fade away. But finding an adequate place for liberty in ethics requires that the practices of the self remain vital. An over-emphasis on codification decreases the margin of liberty.

This critique of the use of codes of ethics and codes of conduct for teaching ethics is also supported by such commentators in social work as Morelock (1997), Book (1982), Reamer and Abramson (1982), Read and Billups (1986) and, in particular, Yelaja (1982) (in Morelock 1997), who strongly recommends that moral philosophy is included in teaching as opposed to plain applications of codes of practice. A code of practice can provide students with an overall value base for social work, but it also needs be critically examined and discussed from a practical-reasoning standpoint. This is also supported by Bisman (2004), who claims that critical social work should not rely on ethical rules for guidelines or on the social sciences for expertise, but on a better grasp of the complexities of moral concepts. This is also emphasised by Downie and Telfer, "who urge social workers to spend more time analysing the moral ambiguities of their authority, rights and function" (cited in Bisman 2004:118). Finally, McBeath and Webb (2002:1020) agree that the "very stuff of good social work" should be the practice of virtues developed through reflection, experience and circumspection and not just the work 'done'.

Third, in the light of the above discussion and of my experience of higher-education teaching in the field of social work, I believe that the present curriculum does not address the issue of collective practical reasoning effectively. At most, the concept of reflective practice over-emphasises the individual rather than a collective-thinking process. McBeath and Webb (2002) suggest that virtues can be developed through education by critical evaluation. This suggestion, however, remains on the personal level, whereas a more collective approach to critical evaluation is needed. However, they also suggest exploring dialogically different qualities needed in different situations and using counterarguments, examining what qualities remain; exploring these

would suggest a different approach to responding to ethical situations (McBeath and Webb 2002).

This thesis therefore argues that developing a practical way for promoting collective practical reasoning, which, according to MacIntyre (1999), helps to *cultivate the virtues*, could, from a Foucaultian understanding of power, contribute to increasing *resistance* to power and consequently positively affect ethical practice in social work.

However, a note of caution must be made in relation to the effect of increasing resistance to power relationships. As Layder (1994:102) explains,

> Foucault understands power not as a commodity which may be acquired or seized, nor is it the property of an individual or class. Rather it has the character of network and its threads extend everywhere (Sarup 1988). Resistance, too, exists everywhere and simply reinforces the need for discipline and subjugation in the first place.

Therefore, following Foucault's early conceptualisation of power,[10] there is a danger that increasing the social worker's resistance to power relationships can directly result in the agency or other structural sources of power such as the GSCC increasing their discipline mechanisms as well. Indeed, as many commentators have noted through examining power from an early Foucaultian perspective, the increase of resistance to power creates more mechanisms of discipline (Smart 1985; Layder 1994).

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[10]   See Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish.* London: Penguin.

However, during his later work, <u>Foucault</u> (1988; 1993; 2005) proposed an alternative solution for increasing the potential for resistance. As Dreyfus (2004a:1) comments,

> for early Foucault, the subject is reduced to a function of discourse; for middle Foucault, writing can open up new worlds, and in later Foucault, freedom is understood as the power to question what is currently taken for granted, plus the capacity to change oneself and, perhaps, one's milieu.

In his late work, Foucault refers to this strategy for resistance as "technologies of the self" and *parrhêsia* (courage of truth), "where individuals create their own identities through ethics and forms of self-constitution" (Best and Kellner 1991:61). Through such technologies or processes, individuals can question their identity as a subject and thus increase resistance to networks of power. Indeed, Foucault (1988a:18) explains that

> Technologies of the self are the various 'operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being' that people make either by themselves or with the help of others in order to transform themselves to reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

My argument is that "technology of the self" (Foucault 1988a), made possible by a process of transformation, is achievable through what MacIntyre refers to as practical reasoning and, in the context of this thesis, collective practical reasoning as an activity that leads to the development of a virtuous social care workforce. "Technology of the self" also echoes the nature of symbolic interaction whereby individuals, through collective practical reasoning, interact with others and thus construct the meaning they give to situations as well as, if appropriate, developing a resistance to power relationships.

Indeed, just as Foucault began to recognise that the subject can be "self-determining, capable of challenging and resisting the structures of domination in modern society" (McNay 1992:4, cited in Besley 2005:79), so some commentators have even developed Foucault's work to the point where they see a close link between increasing resistance through the technologies of the self and the integration of 'virtue ethics' to his work. As Levy (2004:30) explains,

> Foucault's virtue ethics thus focuses, not on the subject, but on the character of the individual. While a subject is something given in advance, character is the set of dispositions and motivations to act into which we are acculturated and which we may then choose to cultivate or reject. According to this picture, if the self has depths, it is only because it has created them. Here too, though, Foucault is not a lone voice, but working in an area that has also been cultivated by at least some virtue ethicists.

Therefore, for Foucault, technology of the self and *parrhêsia* assist in rejecting subjugating structure and relationships of power and in cultivating personal dispositions or virtues that increase resistance to power relationships in society. Levy goes on:

> If I am right, if Foucault's last work can indeed usefully be read as participating in the project of elaborating a new virtue ethics for late modernity, then this work could undoubtedly have been rescued from a number of obscurities and hesitations had Foucault engaged with the parallel projects of the Anglo-American virtue ethicist. At the same time, those virtue ethicists who seek to elaborate a tradition-based theory, and reject the notion of human nature, would find in Foucault both a powerful justification for their position and an example as to how they might proceed. Perhaps, then, the fact that we can now see what value each could have been to the other should stand as a warning to those of us in both philosophical traditions, that in ignoring the work of the other we risk inhibiting the development of our own. (Levy 2004:31)

This thesis therefore argues that collective practical reasoning is a way of cultivating personal dispositions or virtues (MacIntyre 1999) and that social workers, by nurturing a set of social work virtues, can find a strong ground for beginning to increase their opportunity for resisting power. Besley (2005:79) explains:

> In his later writings [Foucault] broke with this relationship to emphasise games of truth not as a coercive practice, but rather as an ascetic[11] practice of self-formation. Work completed by the self upon itself is an ascetic practice that is to be understood not in terms of more traditional left-wing models of liberation, but rather as practices of freedom. This is an essential distinction for Foucault because the notion of liberation suggests that there is a hidden self or inner nature or essence that has been 'concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression'. (Foucault 1997a:282)

Therefore, Foucault does not believe that an individual can be 'liberated' from the networks of power;[12] rather, Foucault emphasised the notion of developing freedom, a process of self-development where individual and society can define "admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society" (Foucault 1997a:283, cited in Besley 2005:79). As a result, social workers will increasingly work within their practice values that call for 'human dignity and worth', 'integrity', social justice' and 'service to humanity' (BASW 2002) and begin to act less in regard to bureaucratic norms and their organisation's rules and more in the service users' needs and interests (Rhodes 1986).

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[11] 'Ascetic' in this context means an "exercise of self upon the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being" (Foucault 1997a:282, cited in Besley 2005:79).
[12] Foucault does not believe that the subject is born free.

The following section will therefore examine a possible way to develop virtues through the exercise of collective practical reasoning. 'Socratic Dialogue' will be explored as a tool to achieve this and for proposing ways in which such a strategy can be integrated into social work training and practice.

## Socratic Dialogue as a Tool for Collective Practical Reasoning and Development of the "Technology of the Self"

Socratic Dialogue, which is known as being a good tool for developing practical and critical reasoning (Philippart 2003), and which originates from the 'Analogy of the Cave' (Plato, *Republic*, Bk. VII, pp. 514–520) (cited in Kesselss 2005b), was only furthered by Nelson and Heckman in Germany during and shortly after the Second World War (Saran and Neisser 2004).

Saran and Neisser (2004) describe the Socratic Dialogue approach as being practised in small groups (8 to 14 participants) with the help of a facilitator and as encouraging participants to reflect and think independently and critically so that self-confidence in one's own thinking is enhanced and the search for truth (*Parrhêsia* in Foucault's terms) in answer to a particular question is undertaken as a group. Philippart (2003) argues that the many conflicts of interests, ethical standards and visions for the future found in multi-cultural and pluralistic society pose a problem in decision-making in regard to ethics. He claims that

> Socratic dialogue helps constitute a growing awareness of the actual assumptions, presuppositions, norms and values that play a role in the personal and collective thinking and feeling on every kind of matters. (Philippart 2003:70)

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This understanding and practice of the Socratic Dialogue approach would therefore enable students to practice the concept of collective practical reasoning proposed by MacIntyre (1999).

Many authors also agree that the Socratic Dialogue approach can be a very effective tool for developing virtues (Overholser 1999; Gronke 2005; Kesselss 2005a) in so far as participants, through discussing a set question, develop 'virtuous' habits such as critical thinking and self-consciousness (McBeath and Webb 2002). The Socratic Dialogue approach helps to enhance effective thinking about organisational life (Burnyeat 1990, cited in Morrel 2004), enabling problem-finding (Arlin 1990, cited in Morrel 2004) and protecting against complacency or misplaced certainty (Meacham 1990, cited in Morrel 2004). The Socratic Dialogue approach benefits from the involvement of different stakeholders, as it provides an opportunity to nurture a more diverse discussion on the topic (Boers 2005; Kesselss 2005a). In addition, as Morse (1999:52) notes,

> The impact of one's involvement with different members of the community becomes pivotal in virtue theory because both habit formation and the setting of one's value takes place at the level of our interaction with other members of the community and their reactions to our actions.

This could be achieved by involving students, service users and carers as well as academics in classroom discussions where a diversity of ideas, experiences and perspectives would be explored and maximised.

The Socratic Dialogue endeavour is for the group to reach consensus, not as an aim in itself, but as a means to deepen the investigation. Philippart (2003) refers

to consensus in values, principles and ideas. Socratic Dialogue only requires adherence to basic guidance, and so it provides a framework to apply it to a classroom situation. The procedures for Socratic Dialogue are set out in Figure 9, below.

Figure 9 – Socratic Dialogue procedures

The Socratic Dialogue normally uses the following procedures:

* A well formulated, complex question, or a statement, is set by the lecturer before the group activity begins (for example: What is Justice?).
* The first step is to collect examples experienced by participants in which the given topic plays a key role. (I was working with Y and it was so unjust!; I felt I was treated justly when I did X)
* One example is chosen by the group, which will usually be the basis of the analysis and argumentation throughout the dialogue.
* Crucial statements made by the participants are written down on a flip chart or board, so that all can have an overview of the discourse.
* Using counterexamples – inconsistencies with other beliefs
* Striving to reach consensus

(Adapted from Saran and Neisser 2004; Khron 2005; Morrell 2004)

The last basic rule (striving for consensus) is also examined by Houston (2003) in his discussion on how to develop the social work virtues, in so far as he also suggests reaching consensus by using a Habermasian[13] model for decision-making. As Socratic Dialogue places the importance of consensus as being central to the process, it can therefore provide a framework for developing some of the social work virtues through collective practical reasoning.

However, McBeath and Webb (2002) point out, in relation to virtue ethics, that Socrates differentiates between two types of virtues: the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues. Socratic Dialogue is a way of developing the 'moral' virtues

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[13] The Habermasian model of decision-making is based on reaching consensus, as with the Socratic Dialogue approach.

such as liberality and temperance, as it provides participants with opportunities to examine their experience through collective practical reasoning. On the other hand, MacIntyre (1988) suggests that intellectual virtues can only be nurtured through education. In order to develop intellectual virtues for social work, I suggest that is necessary that students are also exposed to a variety of theories of philosophy, sociology (including power) and ethics. Osmo and Landau (2006) also assert that social work students should be taught critical thinking together with ethical theories in order to develop better arguments for their decision-making processes.

The use of Socratic Dialogue as a means for collective practical reasoning would, in addition to, for example, lectures on critical thinking, value bases, moral philosophy and relationships of power in society, create opportunities for opening discussion around political and ethical questions and protect against what Rhodes (1986) refers to as "moral schizophrenia". It is therefore proposed to include Socratic Dialogue to teacher-led lectures in order to develop both moral and intellectual virtues. Below, in Figure 10, is an example of the format that could be used for each session of a social work module on the topic of social work ethics and values:

Figure 10 – Socratic Dialogue in social work teaching

| 9.00 | Introduction: plan and topic of the session, learning outcomes (15 minutes) |
| 9.15 | Socratic Dialogue : the question will be aiming at deliberating in relation to the main topic of the session (1 hour) "what does self-determination of service users really mean in Social Work practice?" |
| 10.15 | Break |
| 10.30 | Lead lecture: Kant, Kantian Ethics and Kantian legacy in social work practice, Kantian elements of the GSCC, BASW and IFSW codes of ethics |
| 11.40 | Reflection break: developing practical applications – examination of the 'consensus' reached during the Socratic dialogue and the lead lecture (group discussion about application of Kantian ethics in Social Work, examining strengths, weaknesses and way forward) |
| 12.00 | end |

The content of each individual session would vary from one week to another and could cover topics in the realm of philosophy and sociology relevant to social work. Examples could include 'utilitarian ethics', 'social justice', 'virtues ethics', 'ethics of care', 'power', 'empowerment' and 'professionalism'.[14] However, as illustrated in Figure 10, Socratic Dialogue precedes the lecture so that participants can collectively and critically reason on the topic as opposed to discussing a theory learned during a teacher-led lecture.

However, it is also important to make room for students to relate theory to practice, and thus, a third part of the session is used as a workshop to develop praxes on the topic. In order to make the use of Socratic Dialogue and collective practical reasoning even more relevant to practice, it would be useful for students to have regular contact with social work agencies through a practice placement. Therefore, by either integrating a 'concurrent placement' into the model developed above, or to extend the Socratic Dialogue session to the placement's 'recall days', would enable the student to "think and do praxis" (Freire 1972), a concept that Coulshed and Orme (2006:17) explain as one that "encourages people to perceive, interpret, criticise and transform the world around them". Indeed, students would not only have the opportunity to practise collective practical reasoning and to gain understanding of theories in classroom settings, but would also have the weekly opportunity to apply their learning and understanding to practice, and vice versa.

Socratic Dialogue can also cover a range of topics, as Morrel (2004:388) explains:

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[14]     This list is not exhaustive.

[Socratic Dialogue] can be revealing about structures as well as rhetoric. For example, in many roles, status and authority are traditionally understood as dependent on a notion of expertise (Baldwin 1995:380). Inquiry that identifies frequently unquestioned assumptions (such as the belief that one can say what expertise is) could highlight how some truth claims rest on value judgements, or social structures (Illich et al. 1997). In extremis this is seen in the idea that knowledge only makes sense in a given discursive practice. (Foucault 1979, 2002)

Many authors claim that Socratic Dialogue is possible as long as the given guidance is carefully integrated into the work of the participant (Leal 2005; Khron 2005; Gronke 2005), as presented in Figure 10, above. The potential of Socratic Dialogue as a pedagogy in higher education is therefore enormous, as it does not require much in terms of resource mobilisation, since the process is relatively simple.

I would suggest that the results of this research could be used to inform curricula development and to explore new ways to educate social workers in ethical practices. An enhanced curriculum by integrating collective practical reasoning (in this example, through using Socratic Dialogue) would not only pay attention to the uniqueness of the 'practice' values in the field, but would also create opportunities to analyse the organisational contexts of work and the impact of power relationships in the social care system on ethical conduct.

**Towards a more 'Critical Social Work Community'**

This thesis has so far argued that it is essential to educate social work students about the importance of collective practical reasoning that leads to the development of virtues. This opportunity can be actualised, as explored in the last section, by a combination of Socratic Dialogue sessions, teacher-led lectures

and concurrent practice-placement opportunities. This will enable students to discover for themselves that it is not sufficient to learn 'practice' values and ethics without paying particular attention to the contexts and relationships of power in which social work operates. In developing their capacity to become collective practical reasoners, students would become capable of nurturing (and therefore applying) their 'practice' values, making sure that their values remain at the forefront of their daily social work activities, regardless of the contexts of intervention.

Through this process of the development of virtues through collective practical reasoning activities, the newly qualified social care workforce may then be able to understand the impact of work settings and organisational contexts on their ethical decision-making and should therefore be equipped for more effective ethical decision-making. The development and cultivation of a strong commitment to 'practice' values, together with an understanding of the power relationships entangled within the work setting, should help to achieve better ethical conduct within the profession. Unquestionably, newly qualified social workers will have to adapt to the demands of the organisation, but they should be prepared to challenge organisations when necessary, and appropriate social work virtues can help them to achieve this. However, there is a danger, if the collective practical reasoning process is not maintained, that social workers, some time after qualification, may lose their opportunity to nurture the virtues developed through education and thus themselves become entangled in the web of power relationships.

As Ballock et al. point out in explaining the results of a survey conducted in the mid-1990s, "44 per cent of those interviewed agreed that 'I felt that my values

are different from the Department's values'" (cited in Ferguson and Lavalette 2004:303). This statistic shows that a high percentage of qualified social workers work within an environment that does not always allow room for social work values, and therefore, it is important to examine ways in which newly qualified and well-established social workers are provided with the opportunity to develop and cultivate social work virtues and thus maintain ethical practice to a high standard.

To do so, my argument will be twofold. On the one hand, group activities based on the Socratic Dialogue technique (or another form of collective practical reasoning) should be adopted by social care agencies. On the other hand, the 'Practice Teaching Award' and other post-qualifying social work programmes should incorporate Socratic Dialogue as a pedagogical approach to teaching wherever possible.

My first argument is that the integration of Socratic Dialogue techniques in the decision-making process would benefit both social work staff and managers. I argue that extending the use of Socratic Dialogue to social care agencies, by implementing it through already available social work activities could be a way to develop and nurture collective practical reasoning among social workers and thus to foster the virtues developed through education or being developed through social work practice. This integration of Socratic Dialogue techniques can be done through existing group activities such as group and individual supervision, case conferences and even lunchtime Socratic Dialogue sessions (Socratic cafés). This inclusion of Socratic Dialogue within weekly social work activities would protect against complacency and allow social care agencies to be responsive to the ever-growing need for critical reflection in social work

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practice. Complementarily, the introduction of Socratic Dialogue techniques could enable social care agencies to adapt to progressive social care practice and, to a certain extent, to become 'learning organisations'. The concept of a 'learning organisation' can be interpreted with the late Foucaultian understanding of power, where the subject has the capacity to change oneself and, possibly, one's milieu (Dreyfus 2004a).

Indeed, following Revans's Law, Gould (2000:586) explains that, "for an organisation to survive, its rate of learning must be equal to or greater than the rate of change in its external environment". TOPPS England, through the publication of the National Occupational Standards for Social Work, is clear that a qualified social care workforce, especially at the post-qualifying level, needs to meet a competent level of 'critical thinking' in their practice:

> Think critically about their own practice in the context of the GSCC Codes of Practice, national and international codes of professional ethics and the principles of diversity and equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations, including those associated with inter-agency and inter-professional work. (National Occupational Standards for Social Work, cited in Brown and Rutter 2006:1)

Therefore, for social care agencies 'to survive' and to comply with the expectations from social care regulatory bodies, different mechanisms will need to be introduced in order to allow greater opportunities for critical thinking. However, this may also be indirectly resisted by the social care agencies, which may see collective practical reasoning through Socratic Dialogue as threatening. Indeed, one of the aims of collective practical reasoning and the subsequent development of virtues is to safeguard people against misplaced certainties,

and therefore, through practical reasoning, it is possible that social care staff would find grounds for challenging the organisational context of work.

The grounds for resistance to the social care agencies would be legitimate, as they have the responsibility to ensure that their staff comply with the GSCC code of practice,[15] which states that social care staff must be "meeting relevant standards of practice and working in a lawful, safe and effective way".[16] Nevertheless, this could therefore make collective practical reasoning difficult for agencies because, as pointed out earlier by MacIntyre (1985:25), 'virtue ethics' is not always compatible with effectiveness and therefore does not always go hand in hand with the aims of organisations.

Indeed, even though the National Occupational Standards for Social Work stress the importance of critical reasoning, TOPSS England, the organisation that developed them, and a registered charity and company (TOPSS 2004 in Horner 2006), does not possess regulatory power in relation to its implementation. It can be argued, however, that, even though collective practical reasoning may bring some resistance from the social care agencies, it can help re-focus social work interventions on service users' needs as opposed to bureaucratic demand. By dialoguing, social workers would have the opportunity to nurture social work virtues[17] as well as question the context for practice and indirectly, gain strengths and ability in beginning to resist power relationships by developing themselves as practical reasoners.

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[15] GSCC code of practice for employers, Article 5.1 states that social care employers have the responsibility to inform their staff about the GSCC code of practice for employees as well as complying with it.
[16] GSCC code of practice for employees, Article 6.1.
[17] For example, critical thinking, courage and empathy.

In addition to using Socratic Dialogue as a tool for group supervision and other group activities within social care agencies, this approach could also benefit activities such as Child Protection Case Conferences, where a variety of professionals, managers and service users could examine the best ways to take a course of action. Indeed, as Rhodes (1986:149) points out,

> Case conferences are supposed to be forums for expressing and resolving some of these differences, but often they service instead as a show piece for visiting consultants or as a public exhibition of a worker's best case.

Activities based on Socratic Dialogue, if undertaken according to the basic guidance, could indeed nurture an opportunity for 'expressing and resolving differences', as the approach emphasises the importance of questioning meanings, and thus, through this activity, all actors are provided with an opportunity to explore and understand one another's values and points of view during the process of reaching consensus.

Therefore, collective practical reasoning through the use of Socratic Dialogue for examining daily ethical issues faced by social workers is a way of maintaining some of the social work virtues needed for ethical social work practice in general as well as for resisting some of the power relationships within which social work activity takes place. These important changes are made possible by nurturing dispositions such as critical analysis, courage and introspection. However, social care agencies' staff also need to sustain the intellectual virtues to which Socrates refers. This could be done by also adapting Socratic Dialogue and teacher-led lectures to post-qualifying social work programmes and other Continuous Professional Development activities.

It is therefore now that I turn to my second suggestion to improve ethical practice in social care agencies.

My second argument that I put forward is that some of the teaching on the Practice Teaching Award should be delivered under the same framework of Socratic Dialogue as outlined above for university social work programmes. This would bring two important contributions to the inclusion of collective practical reasoning in social work practice. First, practitioners having undertaken Socratic Dialogue training would be a portal for other social workers wishing to further the collective practical reasoning skills and who are already qualified. Moreover, having been exposed themselves to Socratic Dialogue experience, practice-learning supervisors would be able to utilise the approach with students on placements and thus, model them to be collective practical reasoners from the outset of their professional careers. Simpkin (1979, cited in Bar-On 2002:1011) supports this in arguing that

> A preliminary step toward increasing social workers' professional autonomy is for social work education programmes to re-examine their fieldwork practice, which apparently is a major contributor to social workers' acceptance of bureaucratic control. This is largely because it is at this stage of their training, as distinguished from the classroom, that students first learn that expressing dissatisfaction with positional authority is interpreted as a mark of 'immaturity' and hence as a lack of 'professionalism'.

From Simpkin's comments, it appears that there is a danger that students who undertake practice-learning experiences may, from the outset, develop a feeling of powerlessness. By educating practice assessors and practice teachers of the benefits of using Socratic Dialogue with students on placements, this would not only enable them to cultivate and develop social work virtues, but would also enable students to extend the process of collective practical reasoning to their

practice. This process, as Dreyfus (2004b:1) argues, "helps us free ourselves from understanding ourselves as subject" and, thus, helps to develop their resistance to possible power relationships that could compromise their ethical decision-making in the present work context or in the future.

It becomes clear that there is a value in using Socratic Dialogue for collective practical reasoning in education as well as within social care agencies. The use of Socratic Dialogue can ensure the development and nurturing of social work virtues at the same time as helping to develop mechanisms for resistance to power in social work practice. As Rhodes (1986:154) puts it,

> To encourage moral responsibility in bureaucracies, we need a new approach – an approach which would in effect begin to debureaucratise bureaucracies. Workers must begin to break down the radical separation between their personal integrity and their professional lives, by accepting responsibility for the ethical and political dimensions of their work.

The above exploration of the ways in which Socratic Dialogue for collective practical reasoning can be utilised in social work education and within social care agencies has provided insights on the potential for ensuring ethical and moral forms of practice. Collective practical reasoning can enable students and social workers alike to develop themselves as virtuous practitioners and, thus, to create for themselves mechanisms that enable them to resist various relationships of power that, too often, as demonstrated within this research, put social workers in compromising ethical situations. One way forward is to foster the importance of a virtue-based social work practice, underpinned by a major emphasis on collective practical reasoning within daily social work activities and education. This will result in social workers being more ethical and

conscious of the ethical dimension that social work entails on the journey to becoming competent social workers, from early social work education and training to qualifying fully as social workers.

# Chapter Nine

## Conclusion

**"There is a hole in the moral ozone"**

(Christina Hoff Sommers 1992)

This research was conducted using a constant comparative approach based on Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss 1967), and began by exploring social work roles, values and ethics across different settings of social care practice in England. As the research process evolved, the findings revealed first, that ethical dilemmas occur at different levels in social care practice, and second, that the effect of power perceived through the organisational context of work is often responsible for the emergence of ethical dilemmas, as well as the way in which they are resolved. To conclude the research has demonstrated how the concept of collective practical reasoning and the development of virtues (MacIntyre 1999) could help in counteracting the effect of power by developing frameworks for increasing resistance by social workers towards the organisational context of work (Foucault, 1988). The Socratic Dialogue process was used to illustrate a possible practical application of collective practical reasoning in social work education and beyond, that is to say among the already qualified workforce.

The research initially explored differences and similarities in relation to the boundaries between the practitioner and service users in statutory social work and social action work (the voluntary sector was included later in the research process). It ended by suggesting ways of improving understanding in relation to ethics in social work and social care practice, as well as by introducing a

strategy to overcome the pressure that results from the impact of the organisational context of work in resolving ethical dilemmas. By interviewing social care practitioners and social workers, analysing this data, and relating it to modern moral and sociological theories, it has been possible to suggest a more holistic approach to understanding the emergence of ethical issues in practice, and at the same time improving the comprehension of social work ethics. The previous chapter argued that through a different form of training and continuous professional development based on virtue ethics, collective practical reasoning and Socratic Dialogue, social care practitioners and social workers can find a ground for improving their ethical practice and understanding. This understanding should be based on commonly agreed practice values and not so much on codes of conduct, regulations, procedures, budgets or statutory duties; these factors were grouped as the concept of the 'organisational context of work' for the purpose of this study.

Because of the nature of the Grounded Theory process, examining the first research statement did not constitute the end of the research process, and further research questions and statements have been explored during the course of the project. Indeed, the first statement aimed at examining whether or not the general roles and values surrounding ethics in statutory social work were different from those in social action work; this was revised in the light of the preliminary findings. The central statement therefore intended, through the Grounded Theory process, to examine the occurrence of ethical dilemmas in different fields of social care practice, and to identify the elements that underpin the decision-making processes of social care practitioners.

The discussion has shown that the concept of power, identifiable through the relationships between the organisational context of work, the social care practitioner and the service user, affects the cause of ethical dilemmas as well as their resolution. Indeed, a Foucaultian analysis of the experiences of social care practitioners has shown that depending on the degree of pressure it exerts upon the worker, the organisational context of work creates work environments vulnerable to the emergence of these dilemmas, and also influences the way they are resolved. This has been discussed in the section on ethical problems' and 'ethical dilemmas'.

The research has investigated the existence of similar ethical issues across different fields of practice, as well as similar elements underpinning the decision-making processes of social care practitioners in these fields. The research led to a particular focus on one element that is present regardless of the field of practice: the relationships of power present within the organisational context of work in which the dilemma takes place.

The concepts of collective practical reasoning and virtue ethics, as understood by MacIntyre (1999), are helpful in terms of resolving ethical problems directly related to pressures from the organisational context of work. Indeed, MacIntyre offers a revised perspective on virtue ethics, which enables us to understand ethics as observable in personal traits of character, instead of through sets of actions laid down by rules of behaviour, as suggested by the Emotivist, Kantian and Utilitarian approaches which are commonly used in contemporary social care.

In the light of this research, the implications for social work and social care practice become clear. On the one hand, it is important to develop the notion of collective practical reasoning among students so that they can carry the values of social work practice into their work settings and act virtuously. This can be made possible by the inclusion of activities known as being helpful for developing the virtues such as Socratic Dialogue techniques to led lectures within social work education. It was also suggested to extend the use of Socratic Dialogue to different activities already taking place in social care agencies, as well as within different post-qualifying social work programmes in order to nurture social work virtues while in employment.

## Limitations of the research

One of the limitations of the research was that the process did not allow room for exploring what might constitute the relevant virtues necessary to the practice of social work and social care. Indeed, at the present time, values for social work and social care practice in England are not at all clear and therefore cannot be easily translated into practice. For example, the General Social Care Council has published two codes of ethics (one for employers and one for employees), but a clear set of values for social work practice cannot be found anywhere in their published literature. Instead, the General Social Care Council has published a set of 'headings' for practice, which constitute broad statements of practice rather than values (GSCC 2002). Instead of values, regulatory bodies set rules and regulations to follow. Therefore, in order for practitioners to cultivate the virtues necessary for social work practice, it is essential that social workers and social care practitioners collectively define and agree upon a clear

set of values relevant to their profession, taking into consideration the traditions and contexts in which the practice has evolved. Because MacIntyre's theoretical perspective was only applied at the end of the Grounded Theory process, it has not been possible to explore what might constitute these social care and social work virtues.

Another limitation was that even if MacIntyre's ethical perspective had appeared earlier in the research process, it would have been difficult, in the context of this research, to define virtues relevant to social work and social care practice, because of the resources this would have involved, and also because of the methodology used. Indeed, according to MacIntyre (1985), virtues can only be cultivated and developed within a practice[18] and by practitioners. An attempt to identify the virtues relevant to social work practice would require a large-scale research project as well as a significant mobilisation of resources, well beyond the scope of this project, in order to work with students and practitioners to define the virtues they need in their work. Moreover, it would not be appropriate for one researcher alone to conduct research that attempted to pinpoint the virtues necessary for social work and social care practice; this would necessitate the participation of several social workers from different settings, together with other social work researchers and social work students, and possibly with other stakeholders such as service users and carers.

In addition, another methodology would be more appropriate for conducting a research project that aimed to identify social work virtues. The task of developing and agreeing upon the 'virtues' of social work would require social workers and social care practitioners to be collectively and actively involved in

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[18]     Practice in Macintyre sense i.e. a discipline that involves standards of excellence (1985:190) as opposed to 'practicing social work activities'.

the research process. In order to enable them in such a process, an action research framework would be more appropriate. For example, different steering groups could be formed, facilitated by a social worker-researcher, in order to discuss the importance of virtues for social work practice as well as the range of virtues needed in the profession.

However, a new research project has already emerged as a direct outcome of this PhD thesis. The research project, which is jointly directed by myself and a colleague at Coventry University, is concerned with exploring the question of how social work students can be engaged pedagogically in such a way that they develop a greater capacity to practice in a more consciously ethical manner through collective practical reasoning. The project aims at setting out an underlying theoretical argument which seeks to develop a link between two areas of research within social work which have not yet been considered together: these are empowerment and virtue ethics. The purpose of placing these two together is that we wish to argue that the concept of empowerment is concerned with something more than the promotion of socially just and anti-oppressive outcomes. Our argument is instead that empowerment needs to be framed as a practice in which a range of virtues are embedded. The second aim of the project is to evaluate Socratic Dialogue as a pedagogical strategy for encouraging those virtues which we argue are the basis of this more conscious form of ethical practice based on collective practical reasoning (see appendix 7 for full research proposal).

To conclude, I would like to return to the beginnings of the project in 1998, when I started to practice social action work within an organisation where the organisational context of work was not favourable to this approach. As a matter

of fact, I did not, at this time, identify that the situation I faced as a 'personal dilemma', as my course of action was already pre-determined by the agency's organisational context of work. Having learned about Foucault's notion of power and its relationship to social work practice, as well as having understood the contribution of MacIntyre to theories of ethics and ethical practice, my reaction to both the dilemmas exposed in the introduction would have been different.

Having had the opportunity to develop and nurture some of the essential virtues for social work though practical reasoning, I might have continued to take the food home, believing that it was indeed the right course of action; certainly, a virtues such as 'courage' has relevance to my own professional experience – the courage to follow through with a challenge to the way that one of my 'practice' values urged me to act, in terms of 'respect and dignity of service users' and of 'belief and defence of concept of social justice' – not simply following rules. However, doing so would have put me in a difficult position as I would have probably faced disciplinary measures by the authority which was funding the project I was coordinating. Indeed, after taking the food only once, I was called into a senior manager's office to be told that, even though after explaining to them the rational behind my action, this behaviour should not be repeated.

Ultimately, the senior management would have probably disciplined me after a couple of times if I had carried on taking the food home. However, continuing to take the food home, knowing that I could face disciplinary action would be considered, from a virtue ethics point of view, as an excess of courage (recklessness), and perhaps even a lack of temperance from my part. Virtue

ethics, in this case would necessitate that I am a practical reasoner, which would enable me to examine different ways of upholding service users' interests while aiming at empowering them. As a result, I would perhaps have talked them through my own dilemma about taking the food home (honesty). On the other hand, having had an opportunity to discuss my dilemma with fellow social workers would have also helped me to think through the best course of action in this situation. Indeed, if I had strong links with other 'practical reasoners', that is to say, social workers participating in activities around collective practical reasoning and belonging to the same or a similar organisations, who supported me openly in my action, then perhaps the fact that I challenged the organisation would have pushed the boundaries a little further instead of simply being disciplined.

This, in my opinion, highlights the importance of developing virtues though practical reasoning at a *collective* level, not only to make sure that the virtues are developed by and for practitioners and service users, but also to ensure that when a practitioner believes that the organisational context of work needs to be challenged, social mobilisation is also possible. Thus, virtue ethics enable practitioners to develop practical reasoning, which is essential in order to become virtuous while the collective nature of the activity renders the resistance to power more significant because of a possibility for social action and collective mobilisation.

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# Appendices

# Appendix One:
## List of the Social Action Principles

## What Is Social Action

Social action is made up of two essential and inseparable elements - the principles and the process. These do not stand alone, but are completely dependent upon each other. Combined, they form an effective approach for working with people and a powerful force for change.

### The Social Action Principles

- **Social action workers are committed to social justice. We strive to challenge inequality and oppression in relation to race, gender, sexuality, age, religion, class, disability or any other form of social differentiation.**
  Social action is about fighting for fairness, equality and justice and this needs to be stated clearly. We recognise that injustice, discrimination and oppression exist and take a stance against it, in all our work.

- **We believe all people have skills, experience and understanding that they can draw on to tackle the problems they face. Social action workers understand that people are experts in their own lives and we use this as a starting point for our work.**
  Our job is to help uncover what is already there, to encourage people to use the insights and knowledge they possess to bring about changes in their own lives.

- **All people have rights, including the right to be heard, the right to define the issues facing them and the right to take action on their own behalf. People also have the right to define themselves and not have negative labels imposed upon them.**
  Ordinary people's right to be involved in the changes that affect them, to have a voice and a stake in the society they live in, is fundamental to social action work. The right to 'name their world', to define themselves and the world around them is something we insist on. Too often people have to contend with labels imposed upon themselves, or the places they live, for the ease of policy-makers and professionals.

- **Injustice and oppression are complex issues rooted in social policy, the environment and the economy. Social action workers understand people may experience problems as individuals but these difficulties can be translated into common concerns.**
  We recognise that there are many different problems in individuals' lives. They may feel overwhelmed and daunted by these, they may even feel blamed for them. Social action gives people the opportunity to break free from this negative view, understand their individual problems in a wider, political context and to do something about organising to overcome them.

- **We understand that people working collectively can be powerful. People who lack the power and influence to challenge injustice and oppression as individuals can gain it through working with other people in a similar position.**
  Oppression is maintained through isolation and division, though it is experienced by the majority. Our job is to bring people together so that they can share their experiences and pool their resources and skills to fight injustice. Finding common cause may give individuals the will and power to tackle more complex issues than they might have dared on their own.

- **Social action workers are not leaders, but facilitators. Our job is to enable people to make decisions for themselves and take ownership of whatever outcome ensues. Everybody's contribution to this process is equally valued and it is vital that our job is not accorded privilege.**
  Social action workers value all skills and knowledge equally, making no distinction between experience and formal qualifications. Our job is to work alongside the group, resisting the temptation either to become a group member or a group leader.

**The Social Action Process**

As already mentioned, the principles and the process of social action are inseparable.

**The role of the social action worker is to facilitate the group through a five-stage process. The intention is to change the traditional relationship between service users and the professionals employed to work with them. A social action worker is a facilitator, not a provider. In this process service users are not just consumers, they are active agents for change.**

Working alongside community members in this way requires the ability to plan and prepare well, to be creative, to listen actively, to be patient, to be disciplined and to be interested in people's lives. It is also essential to maintain a consistent and realistic level of optimism and enthusiasm that will fire the group.

The five stages are as follows:

**What**

This is all about discovery, finding out what is happening in people's lives. What are their issues, problems and concerns? What makes them angry, frightened, happy, and frustrated? What occupies their thoughts? The social action worker designs ways in which the community members can express all this, creating as comprehensive a picture as possible of what is going on in their lives at present, without interpretation and without at this stage having to worry about what to do with the material. This is often the longest stage of the social action process. Video, role-play, photography, drawing and discussion will all be used during this exploration of life in the community.

**Why**

Once the issues have been agreed it is important to identify the reasons why they exist so that any solutions devised will attack root causes and not just symptoms. Asking 'why?' helps people examine their private troubles in the wider context. It provides them with a deeper understanding of their causes. This is necessary if community members and service users are to go on to create and own positive social change. This stage of the process allows the community members to engage in analysis and to present their understanding of the problems facing them. It also helps to discover the most effective point of intervention; the place at which it is possible to make changes that will affect the final outcomes. This analysis is accepted by the social action worker, without interpretation once again, reinforcing one of our basic beliefs: people are experts in their own lives.

**How**

So what do we do with this understanding? How can the community members change things in a meaningful way themselves?

Here the role of the social action worker changes. The responsibility now is to create safe spaces where the group can test out their ideas for change before putting them into practice. It is vital that the community members are not set up to fail and that their ideas undergo a rigorous examination before taking them to the world outside the group. The decision on which ideas will be taken forward lies in the hands of the group, but the social action worker must question their viability without crushing enthusiasm.

**Action**

The group then put their idea(s) for change into effect. They should by now have a realistic sense of the possible outcomes, whether it will solve their problem or simply be the first stage in a longer struggle. Even if the action disappoints, as sometimes happens, the legacy of the work is that the group members now have an understanding and practical experience of the tools needed for dealing with problems that they will face in the future.

**Reflection**

The fifth stage is for the social action worker to bring the group together and ask: 'what happened? Now that we have carried out our action, are the issues, problems and concerns the same?' This critical reflection enables the community members to learn from their experience and to plan future actions for change. The What, Why, How process begins again.

The above information was taken from the Centre for Social Action's Webpage:

http://www.dmu.ac.uk/faculties/hls/research/centreforsocialaction/whatssocialac tion.jsp

Accessed on 09<sup>th</sup> February 2007

# Appendix 2- Focus groups interview schedule[19]

Version 3

Focus group for mental health support workers, ██████████████,
Nottingham 14.1.00

- Welcome
- Introduce self, Annie and project

De Montfort University has been commissioned by the Department of
Health to carry out a review of what are broadly termed health support
workers. This is a short-term label for a very diverse workforce, to be
found in NHS, local authority and independent sector settings. The
Department of Health's core definition of a health support worker provided
by the Department of Health is someone who is not professionally qualified
or registered but who has hands-on responsibility for patients or clients.

The purpose of the review is, first of all, to map this group of workers: to
get some idea of how many there are, what settings they work in and what
are their roles and responsibilities. Secondly, we have been asked to
consider whether the regulation of this group of employees needs to be
strengthened in order to protect the public.

- This session will take 1 1/2 hours. Working in small groups and as a
  large group. Flip chart will be used to record. Confidentiality.

- Any questions

- Ask everyone to introduce themselves, say a little bit about their
  background and the training they are undergoing.

- **Exercise. Boundaries**

We're particularly interested in exploring the boundaries around your work.
The first boundary we would like you to look at is that between health and
social care. Do you distinguish between the two areas in the work you do?
Are there some tasks which you would firmly identify as health-related and
others which are to do with social care. Or are they in practice integrated in
the tasks you do.

---

[19] This interview schedule was used for the data collection with the 3 focus groups

The second type of boundary is between your role and that of professionally qualified staff. Is there a clear division of responsibility or is the reality a considerable degree of overlap. I'd like you to spend a few minutes discussing this *(in small groups if appropriate)* and then feed back to the group as a whole.

- **Exercise. Risks**

Are there any risks associated with employing unqualified support workers in the mental health field   a) to workers themselves and b) to patients/users. Are patients/users any more at risk when support workers do the shared tasks than when the professionally qualified staff do them?   Continue working in groups and then once again we'll record your thoughts on this.

- **Exercise.   Protecting the public**

Existing safeguards

At present, the responsibility for safeguarding the public when health support workers are employed rests mainly with the employer, whether this is an NHS trust or a private nursing home proprietor.   In order to make sure that suitable and competent people are employed, the employer can put in place the following safeguards:

- pre-service checks  (may include access to lists of unsuitable people)
- checking against voluntary registers for some groups of workers
- codes of conduct
- training and continuing development opportunities
- professional  management and supervision
- complaints procedures
- EXTERNAL INSPECTIONS

The safeguards may be reinforced by regular inspections by statutory bodies.

Keeping together as a larger group this time, I'd like to work through the list with you and hear your comments about how effective each measure is in ensuring that only suitable people are employed and that they are competent when in post.

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Taken together, do these measures constitute a strong and effective system for regulating support workers. Which is the most important? Are there any weak points?

## A national system

We have talked about the things that employers can do. Finally, I would like you to work together for a few minutes to consider whether there is also a case for some kind of national mechanism to regulate staff such as yourselves. You will no doubt be familiar with the General Medical Council and the UKCC, but there are several others for specific professional groups. Such bodies usually hold a register of members, they promote codes of conduct, they influence professional training, they investigate complaints against individuals and they can in some circumstances strike off individuals from the register. At present, compulsory regulation through a national body exists only for professionally qualified staff. Support workers are not included. Do you think there is a case for extending this kind of regulation to health support workers? Would it be in the patient's interest and your interest? Would there be any disadvantages?

# Appendix 3- Questionnaire

Leicester 21st June 2000

**DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY**
LEICESTER

Faculty of Health and
Community Studies
Department of Social and
Community Studies

Professor David Ward LLB MA
Head of Department

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. The information gathered will be used for a research undertaken for a PhD in Social Work at De Montfort University.

The aim of the research is to investigate the experience of practitioners in statutory social services and voluntary organisation in comparison to practitioners and researchers from social action in respect of their conduct and ethics and to determine the differences or similarities between them all. It is hoped to be able to propose guidelines for a code of conduct for practitioners who are undertaking social action work and, more widely, from discussion in the new proposal of Social Care Council, about code of conduct for social workers / social care practitioners.

I think it is important to emphasise that all information gathered will be kept anonymous and solely for the purpose of this research.

I do realise that you are very busy with your own work and that this will not be at the top of your list of priorities. However, I am very grateful that you have agreed to give some time to complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire is composed of 21 questions for you to answer in writing, or to tick, depending on the question, and also another 4 questions about yourself on a separate sheet. The latter will be used for statistical purposes only and again, will be kept anonymous.

I would be grateful to get the questionnaire back by the latest on the 1st August 2000. If there are any questions you feel are unclear, do not hesitate to contact me.

Once again, thank you so much for taking your time to fill in this questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Annie Sansfacon
Social and community Studies
De Montfort University
(0116) 270 0073
07977 042949
annie_sanfacon@yahoo.com

Question 1: Work setting and qualifications

What is your field of practice?
O Statutory
    O Residential Care
    O Hospital
    O Probation Services
    O Education
    O Social Services area office
    O Other, please specify: _____

O Independent sector
    O Voluntary, please specify: _____
    O Private, please specify: _____

What is your type of practice (e.g. individual caseload, groupwork, etc) and your client group?
_____

What is the name of the agency / organisation for which you work?
_____

What is your full job title?
_____

What are your qualification(s) as a social worker / social    practitioner?
(you can tick more than one answer)
    O    No particular qualification in social work /    care practice
    O    GCSE, please specify the subjects:
    _____    _____
    O    A level, please specify the subjects:
    _____
    _____

    O    Training provided by the agency, please specify the subject(s):
    _____
    _____

    O    National Vocational Qualification (NVQ - GNVQ)
    O Level 1, please specify _____
    O Level 2, please specify: _____
    O Level 3, please specify: _____
    O    Social work Diploma (CQSW. DipSW
    O    Youth and Community Diploma
    O    Bachelor's Degree, please specify the subject:_____
    O    Post graduate qualifications, please specify:
    _____
    O    Other, please specify: _____

1

**Question 2.**

What is your job description as social care practitioner in this agency or if you have not job description, what does your agency expect you to do?

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_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Question 3.**

Is your day to day work different to what you have describe above?

- O   Yes
- O   No

If yes, can you describe what are your day to day roles and tasks and why they are not the same as in question 2?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Question 4.**

Do you belong to any professional organisation (e.g. BASW, UKCC, etc) in relation to your practice?

- O   No. Please pass to question 6.
- O   Yes. Please state the organisation(s) you belong to:

_____
_____

2

**Question 5.**
Within the professional organisation (e.g. BASW, UKCC, etc.) you belong to, do you have any written code of conduct/ code of practice or code of ethics you have to respect?

    O   Yes
    O   No

    If yes, how often do you refer to it?

        O   Never
        O   Occasionally
        O   Often
        O   Always

If you use it, explain in which context and give an example.

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**Question 6.**
Does the agency for which you work provide any guidelines in relation to your practice?

- O  No. Please pass to question 7.
- O  Yes. If yes, what kind? (you can tick more than one)

  - O  Staff handbook
  - O  Code of conduct / code of Ethics
  - O  Other, please specify: _____
  _____

Does it influence your work?
Please, mark each one:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Never | Rarely | Often | Always |

Please explain what you can find inside this / these guides(e) (e.g. what topics are covered, how prescriptive it is, etc):

_____
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4

Explain in which situation(s) you might use these guidelines:

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_____
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_____
_____
_____

If your agency does not provide any form of written guidelines, which other guideline do you use within your work?

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_____
_____
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_____
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_____

5

**Question 7.**
Are you obliged to follow or be influenced by any statutory / legal duties, e.g.
Children Act, whithin your work?

     O    No
     O    Yes

If yes, please fill the following chart: (use one row per statutory / legal
duty)

| Specify the statutory / legal duty | Does it influence your day to day work or not? | Explain your answer |
|---|---|---|
| | O Yes<br>O No | |
| | O Yes<br>O No | |
| | O Yes<br>O No | |
| | O Yes<br>O No | |

Please photocopy or add white pages if necessary

6

**Question 8.**
For you, what is an ethical dilemma?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____
_____

**Question 9.**
Have you or do you experience any sort of ethical dilemma within your work?

    O    Yes
    O    No

If yes, can you give example(s) of when you have experienced an ethical dilemma?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7

**Question 10.**

In facing ethical dilemma, many issues are important to consider when solving it, such as personal values, personal and professional judgement, user's needs, agency policy, code of conduct or code of ethics from the agency or professional organisation, and so on. When you experience an ethical dilemma or if you were to experience one, what would you consider as important in your decision making and why?

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8

Question 11.
For you, what is empowering practice?

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_____

Question 12
Does your organisation / agency promote empowerment of the client / user?

O    Yes
O    No

If yes, can you explain HOW?
If no, can you explain WHY?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9

Question 13.

Do you consider yourself to be a practitioner who uses an empowering approach in your work?

    O    No
    O    Yes

If no, please explain WHY:
If yes, please explain WHY and HOW you use it:

_____

_____

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10

## Question 14.

How likely is it that you would act in the way described in the following statements according to your own values?

| | Very likely | Fairly likely | Not very likely | Very unlikely | not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would never accept negative labels towards client / users | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I plan the intervention for the user; I have the appropriate knowledge. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I value the strengths in people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I consider the user as someone who has right to choose what kind of intervention he/she wants. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I believe the agency's rules ought to be considered before the client's needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I think the user should always be free to express their opinion. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I believe the problems faced by the client they bring on themselves | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I always plan the goals and objectives of an intervention process. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I think the user should always keep control over the agenda for action. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I believe that the problems faced by the user are complex and it is by external change that the situation can improve. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I always try to challenge any form of oppression | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I consider myself as the expert when it is time for planning the intervention. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I do not lead the group or individual intervention but facilitate decision making. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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## Question 15
Do you ever experience any form of ethical dilemma in regard to the practice of empowerment with your client / users within your agency?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I do not use empowerment as approach of intervention

If YES, which kind of ethical dilemma do you face in relation to an empowering practice? (you can tick more than one)

- ○ Boundaries in relation with users
- ○ Conflict with objectives and values carried by the agency
- ○ Respect of confidentiality
- ○ Difficulty with communication
- ○ Assessment of risk
- ○ Knowledge about services
- ○ Flexibility and fairness in the provision of services
- ○ Budget
- ○ Other, please specify:

_____
_____
_____
_____

## Question 16
Do you feel there is a need for introducing a code of Ethics for ALL social care practitioners regardless of their qualification and where they work?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please, justify your answer:

_____
_____
_____
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**Question 17**
If a code of Ethics was developed for all social workers/social care practitioners including qualified and unqualified staff, how likely would you be to use it?

O Very likely       O Fairly likely       O Not very likely       O Very unlikely

Can you explain why?

_____
_____
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**Question 18**
What do you think such a code should include?

_____
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_____
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13

Question 19.

For whose interest should the code be developed? (tick only one answer that reflects the main / dominant interest)

    ○    For the user's interests
    ○    For the professional / personal interests
    ○    For the agency's interests
    ○    For the user's and professional's interests
    ○    For the user's and agency's interests
    ○    For the professional's and agency's interests
    ○    For the user's, professional's and agency's interests

Please, explain the justification of your choice:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 20.
For the protection of whom do you think it is more important to develop a code of Ethics? (please chose only one answer)

○    For the
○    For the agency where you work
○    For you, as a social care practitioner

Why do you think it is the most important?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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**Question 21**

Would you agree to meet up with me for an interview where I would ask you to comment on some "case studies" of ethical dilemmas, and the way you would solve them?

       O     Yes        Please enter some details to set up an appointment:

                             Name: _____

                             Telephone number (daytime) _____

                             The best time for you to meet for and interview:

                             _____

       O     No

_____

Thank you for your time,
All answers are kept anonymous,

Annie Sansfacon
Social and community Studies
De Montfort University
07977 042949

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About you

1.    Your gender
           O    Male        O    Female

2.    Your age: _____

3.    Your ethnic group: (Choose one section from (a) to (e) then tick the
      appropriate box to indicate your cultural background)

           a. White
           O   British      O Irish     O any other background
                                             please specify: _____

           b. Mixed
           O       White and Black Caribbean
           O       White and Black African
           O       White and Asian
           O       Any other mixed background, please specify:
                   _____

           c. Asian or Asian British
           O       Indian
           O       Pakistani
           O       Bangladeshi
           O       Any other Asian background, please specify:
                   _____

           d. Black or Black British
           O       Caribbean
           O       African
           O       Any other Black background, please specify
                   _____

           e. Other ethnic group
                   please specify: _____

4.    Your religion:
           O       None
           O       Christian (including Church of England, Catholic,
                   Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
           O       Buddhist
           O       Hindu
           O       Muslim
           O       Sikh
           O       Jewish
           O       Any other religion, please specify: _____

Thank you. Please go on to the main questionnaire.

# Appendix 4
# Preliminary Interviews

| Reference. | |
| --- | --- |
| Name of interviewee. | Date of interview. |
| Place of Interview | Name of organisation |
| Beginning at | Finishing at |

Question 1
Where would you situate your organisation within the social services? (statutory, private, voluntary, etc.)

Question 2
What is the vision about social work in your organisation?

Question 3
What kind of services are provided by your organisation?

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---

[20] Note that the use of English as found in this tool of data collection is in it original state (1999) and has not been edited.

Question 4
How could you consider the influence of the legislation within your organisation ?

Question 5
When the organisation has been founded and by who ?

Question 6
Would you consider your organisation as one who practice anti-oppression and empowerment approach ? Why ?

2

## Interview

(Thanks the person for meeting me a second time, exploring confidentiality of the research etc.)

Since the last time (we met of you fill the questionnaire in), have you experience any sort of ethical dilemmas you would wish to share?

From the questionnaire, respondents have identified many elements as main cause for ethical dilemmas. Could comment on these, telling me if you experience them within your practice and which one of these (or any other) would be the main one for you.

```
┌─────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────┐
│ Lack of clarity │          │ Conflict between│
│ about role:     │          │ personal values │
│ Controller or   │          │ and regulation  │
│ enabler         │          │                 │
└─────────────────┘          └─────────────────┘

            ┌──────────────────────────┐
            │ Causes for ethical       │
            │ dilemmas in the social   │        ┌─────────────────┐
    ┌───────┤ care profession          │        │ Disclosure of   │
    │ Budget│                          │        │ information     │
    └───────┴──────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────┘

   ┌─────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────┐
   │ Pressure of the │          │ Conflict between│
   │ outcomes or     │          │ professional    │
   │ expectation from│          │ expertise and self-│
   │ the agency      │          │ determination of│
   │                 │          │ the user        │
   └─────────────────┘          └─────────────────┘
```
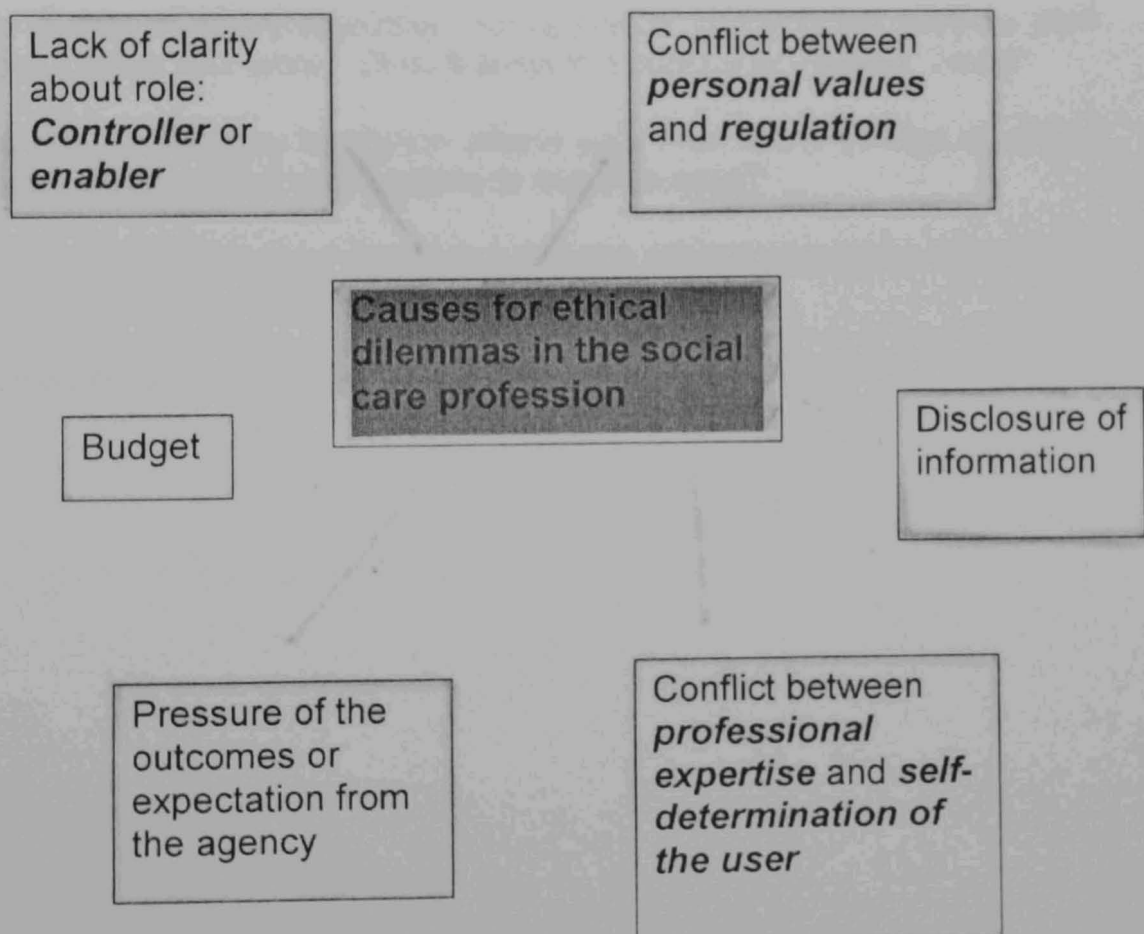
How does the organisational context of your work (e.g. legislation, structure of organisation and hierarchy, and so on) help or not in relation to your work in general?
Probe: for example, do you think the staff handbook is a constraint or of any help in relation to your work?

From the questionnaire, people who answered mention that often, regulation, legal duties or even agency policy and procedures affect their work in relation to ethical dilemmas. They identified that often, these regulations are one of the elements that cause ethical dilemmas. However, when they were asked if code of practice or code of ethics was developed, it would they would use it. Could you comment on it?

How does the organisational context of your work help or not in relation to ethical dilemmas?

How does the organisational context of your work help or not in relation to the empowerment of the user?

How do duties, statutory legislation, (or any sorts of regulation such as staff handbook.) affect your work? Does it affect in a positive or negative ways?

How do duty or statutory legislation affects your work in the context of ethical dilemmas? Does it affect on a positive or negative ways?

How often does legal duty or statutory legislation affect the empowerment of the user? Do you think it affect on a positive or negative way?

How do you think funding affect the cause of ethical dilemmas?

# Values of Social Work.

Social workers assist people to have control of and improve the quality of their lives, and are committed to reducing and preventing hardship and disadvantage for children, adults, families and groups. Social workers practise in social settings characterised by enormous diversity. This diversity is reflected through religion, ethnicity, culture, language, social status, family structure and life style. They work with individuals and families from backgrounds and cultures of which they may have little direct experience and intervene in the lives of people whose life chances may have been adversely affected by poverty, ill health, discrimination and/or disability. In intervening in peoples lives to achieve change, social workers must recognise the interrelationships of structural and individual factors in the social context in which services operate and the need to address their impact on the lives of children and adults.

It is essential because of the responsibilities that social workers and probation officers carry and the influence and impact that they can have on the lives of vulnerable people, that as well as being skilled and knowledgeable, they treat people with respect and are honest, trustworthy and reliable. They must be self aware and critically reflective and their practice must be founded on, informed by and capable of being judged against a clear value base.

# The Values Requirements.

In order to achieve the award of the DipSW, students must demonstrate in meeting the core competences that they:

- identify and question their own values and prejudices and their implications for practice.

- respect and value uniqueness and diversity and recognise and build on strengths.

- promote people's rights to choice, privacy, confidentiality and protection, while recognising and addressing the complexities of competing rights and demands.

- assist people to increase control of and improve the quality of their lives, while recognising that control of behaviour will be required at times in order to protect children and adults from harm.

- identify, analyse and take action to counter discrimination, racism, disadvantage, inequality and injustice, using strategies appropriate to role and context.

- practise in a manner that does not stigmatise or disadvantage either individuals, groups or communities.

Since values are integral to rather than separate from competent practice, evidence that value requirements have been met, must be drawn from and refer to specific practice undertaken in relation to the six core competences. It is clear, consistent and thoughtful integration of values in practice that students must demonstrate and programme providers seek evidence of in all assessable work.

# Appendix 7

## Summary of Proposal

This research project is concerned with exploring the question of how Social Work students can be engaged pedagogically in such a way that they develop a greater capacity to practice in a more consciously ethical manner.

The proposal is divided into two parts:
Part 1 begins by setting out an underlying theoretical argument which seeks to develop a link between two areas of research within Social Work which have not yet been considered together; these are Empowerment and "Virtue Ethics" (MacIntyre,1985). The purpose of placing these two together is that we wish to argue that the concept of Empowerment is concerned with something more than the promotion of socially just and anti-oppressive outcomes. Our argument is instead that Empowerment needs to be framed as a *practice* in which a range of personal qualities, or 'Virtues', are embedded.

Part 2 is concerned with developing a Pedagogical strategy which develops the above using "Socratic Dialogue". Socratic Dialogue has been selected as a pedagogical strategy precisely because it is epistemologically linked to the concerns articulated in Part 1; that is, it works experientially on the terrain of nurturing and encouraging those 'virtues' which we are argue are the basis of this more conscious form of ethical practice .

We have broken up the Proposal Summary into three parts concerned respectively with Empowerment, Virtue Ethics and Socratic Dialogue.

### Part 1
*Empowerment*
The International Federation of Social Workers has defined their vision for the Social Work profession as one which "promotes social change. problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being" (IFSW, 2001 in Horner 2003; 2). Despite the centrality of the concept of empowerment to contemporary Social Work, many have commented on the fact that the term is used to mean many different things to different people and groups. Ward and Mullender (1991), for example, have observed that the term has become something of a "bandwagon" within which so many diverse agendas have found a home that it is at severe risk of becoming meaningless. Zippay (1995) has exemplified this noting that an emphasis on themes such as self-help, community organisation and reducing dependency on the state can variously appeal to a wide range of positions right across the political spectrum - conservatives, liberals and radicals - though of course the strategies each would deploy to achieve these ends would be entirely different and most likely opposed to each other. For example the sale of council houses has been viewed by conservatives as an 'empowerment' strategy, yet be viewed in entirely opposite terms by those on the left (Zippay:265). Central to these different approaches is the question of whether ideas about empowerment incorporate questions of structural inequality or are purely concerned with an individualistic conception of the term. Discussing what she sees as the dominant use of the term empowerment within Social Work in the UK specifically, Langan (1998) has argued that the term implies "an individualistic conception of power, which, by reducing social relationships to the interpersonal, obscures the real power relations in society" (1998:114). Hence the problem is that though a broader conception of social power is implied, in practice this is defined individualistically. Pearse (2002) takes a more critical position still. He argues that the term represents a new form of "governmentality". Developing the work of Michel Foucault (1980), he argues that the term's emancipatory intent offers no necessary guarantee about outcomes, which may themselves be "marked by a more subtle refinement of domination, masked by the respectability of a liberatory discourse" (2002:113).

While we fully accept that the meaning of the term is contested, at the same time we would argue that if Social Work is to be capable of achieving progressive and meaningful change in the lives of people, then it is imperative defend the term "empowerment" within Social Work. We would seek to develop the definition offered by the IFSW, using the work of Paulo Freire, who defines empowerment as "*the deepening and widening of the horizon of democratic practice*".

(http://aurora.icaap.org/talks/freire.html: para 20). This definition insists on a social, rather than individual understanding of the term, and the practice based on such a definition needs to be conceived as a process, as opposed to a one-off action or event. It also implies a rejection of consumerist notions of the term concerned with 'giving people what they want'. Consistent with Freire's overall approach (1970), practice based on empowerment is conceived as a dialogue between practitioner and service user, but which is based on an analysis of power relations and a commitment to uncovering or 'naming' the operation of power, and resisting the abuse of power.

This understanding of empowerment points to its significance for both Social Worker and Service User. The work of Van Hooris and Hosfstetter (2006) furthers this point through the development of a methodology for correlating the sense of empowerment of the social worker themselves with the capacity to empower service users during the process of intervention. This work draws on additional research which proposes that a meaningful practice of empowerment emerges through a sense of creating new possibilities and experiences (Lord, 1991; Lebosse et al 2004), as well as learning opportunities which focus on structural, social and institutional levels of problem understanding (Bernstein et al, 1994; Wallerstein and Sanches-Merki 1994).

While there is considerable discussion on the issue of what constitutes Empowerment within contemporary Social Work teaching, recent research has suggested that the translation of this into practice in frontline Social Work is far more problematic. Pullen's research (2005) has noted that when faced with ethical dilemmas in practice, Social Workers have difficulties in dealing with these - however the nature of that difficulty lies not in students and practitioners willingness to engage with ethical issues, but rather the predominance of an organisational context which limits or restricts such discussions (Pullen 2005). In relation to the above, we see this, rather than the Foucauldian concern around 'governmentality' as the primary reason why emancipatory intents are not translated into outcomes. Central to these issues within Social Work pedagogy is the relationship between classroom teaching and Social Work Practice Learning (Placements). While students may be able to offer definitions of empowerment within the classroom which incorporate the dimension of structural inequality, these conceptualisations tend to be dissonant rather than congruent with their experience of Social Work placements. Bar-On (2002) has argued that the centrality of Placements within Social Work degree contributes substantially to this; he proposed that placements are the "major contributor to social workers' acceptance of bureaucratic control...because it is at this stage of their training, as distinguished from the classroom, that students first learn that expressing dissatisfaction with positional authority is interpreted as a mark of 'immaturity' and hence as a lack of 'professionalism' (2002:1011). This work could be seen to draw on classical sociological understandings of the nature of modern bureaucracies, such Max Weber's idea of the "iron cage" of bureaucracy (Weber, 1984). However we would also argue that these constraints are even more significant in a period where the intellectual content of social work teaching and practice is being challenged by an emphasis on 'competency' within practice (Cowden and Singh 2006), which has the potential to undermine further the ethical imperative upon which the definition of empowerment for which we argue has the potential to be practiced.

*Virtue Ethics*
McBeath and Webb (2002) and Pullen (2005) have argued that given the significance of socio-political constraints in contemporary Social Work practice, there is considerable value in using "Virtue Ethics" as a means of recasting the moral identity of social workers. McBeath and Webb (2002:1016) argue that the value of this for social work lies in the "emphasis upon judgment, experience, understanding, reflections and disposition." A 'virtue' is defined as "a pattern of behaviour and feeling: a tendency to act, desire and feel in particular ways in appropriate

situations - a virtue is not an unthinking habit, but rather involves an intelligent judgement about the appropriate response to the situation you are in."(Warburton 1999:55). A virtue is therefore a trait of character, developed through habit and instruction, and one that promotes 'human flourishing' (Graham 2004). McBeath and Webb (2002) identify elements such as developing analytical ability and skills as well as the cultivating a moral 'character' which in their opinion, enable a social worker to be 'virtuous'. While they suggest that the virtues can be developed through experience, reflection and circumspection, it is unclear from their work as to how this can be successfully achieved in practice. Other commentators have pointed out that another potential pitfalls involved in introducing virtue ethics for Social Work teaching being that there is an "insufficient attention given to the problem of how virtue is defined and established in the first instance" (Houston 2003:819).

MacIntyre (1999) has argued that the key to unlock and develop virtues lies in conceptualising critical reasoning as a *collective activity.* This is the model we are looking to follow in the module in which this teaching will take place - 'Principles of Social Work'. We intend to do this through the use of Socratic dialogue groups. These are significant as we believe they will enable students to acquire and practice critical reasoning on a collective level and in doing so develop social work virtues. The module will situate the concept of virtue ethics as a central component to the teaching curriculum. We also believe this will compensate for the limitations of traditional approach to teaching ethics which are based on social work *codes of practice and codes of ethics* (rule-following ethics) (Morelock 1997), which have been criticised by many authors as a starting point for teaching ethics (Rhodes, 1986; Reamer 1982; McBeath and Webb 2002).

## Part 2
### Socratic Dialogue
By basing the module "Principles of Social Work" on Socratic dialogue groups we seek to create a pedagogy which aims toward enabling students to recognise and engage with the complex ethical and political conflicts embedded in Social Work, as well as to acknowledge inconsistencies between Social Work's goals and practice (Rhodes 1986).

The significance of Socratic Dialogue as a pedagogical approach is that has the capacity to bridge the gap between individual critical evaluation, dialogical process and the development of virtues. Socratic Dialogue originates from the 'Analogy of the Cave' (Plato, Republic, VII, 514-520) (Kessels 1999) but was then taken further by Nelson and Heckman in Germany during and shortly after the Second World War. Socratic Dialogue is usually practiced in small groups (8 to 14 participants) with the help of a facilitator (Saran and Neisser 2004). It encourages participants to reflect and think independently and critically so that self-confidence in one's own thinking is enhanced and the search for truth in answer to a particular question is undertaken in common.

One of the most significant aspects of Socratic Dialogue is its emphasis on process. For example, the fact that the work takes place in groups mean that it embodies Macintyre's concept of collective practical reasoning (MacIntyre 1999). Many authors have pointed to the way in which this groupwork is itself an effective tool to develop virtues (Overholser 1999; Gronke 2005, Kessels, 2005), since this contributes to the development of critical thinking and self-consciousness (McBeath and Webb 2002). It has also been suggested that Socratic Dialogue enhances effective thinking about organisational life (Burnyeat 1990 in Morrel 2004), problem-solving (Arlin 1990 in Morrell 2004) and protecting against complacency or misplaced certainty (Meacham 1990 in Morrel 2004). The Socratic Dialogue approach requires that different stakeholders actively participate in order to promote a more diverse discussion on the topic (Boers 2005, Kessels 2005). This can be achieved by involving students, services users and carers, as well as academics in classroom discussion where a diversity of ideas, experience and perspectives has the potential to be explored and maximised.

Within "Principles of Social Work", the Socratic Dialogue approach adopted requires adherence to a set of basic groupwork ground rules. These are:
1) remaining with concrete experience

2) full understanding between the participants
3) adherence to subsidiary question until it is answered
4) striving for consensus
These are based on the work of Krohn, (1998 in Saran and Neisser 2004). The final rule has also been highlighted by Houston (2003) as being specifically appropriate for the development of the social work virtues.

Below is the format that we propose for each of the 13 sessions planned on the programme. For example, an early session will be aiming at covering "Kant and the Concept of Goodwill ":

9.30 Introduction of the topic (10 minutes)
9.40 Socratic discussion groups: the question will be aiming at deliberating in relation to the main topic of the session (1 hour) (what does self-determination really mean in Social Work practice?)
10.40 Break
10.50 Led lecture: Covering the theoretical underpinning of the question (lecture on Kant, Kantian Ethics and Kantian legacy in social work practice)
11.50 reflection break: developing practical applications – bridging the gap between the Socratic discussion and the theoretical underpinning (group discussion about application of Kantian ethics in Social Work, examining strengths, weaknesses and way forward)
12.15 end.

## Scientific background, design, method and conduct of the study

This is a small scale research project drawing on a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed methods approach is used to provide a more complex knowledge to inform theory and practice (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003) Both methods are included in the overall research study and the paradigm emphasis will be of equal status both methods being used to corroboration of findings. The quantitative aspect of the data collection will occur first, and will be repeated concurrently to the qualitative aspect of the research.

The research is planned according to three different stages of data collection. A first stage of data collection will involved quantitative data and the use of a questionnaire adapted from the 'Social Work Empowerment Scale' (Lebosse et al 2004); the second stage of the research process will involved the same questionnaire re-distributed to students at the end in order to assess changes in empowerment levels. A third stage of data collection will be undertaken at the same time but to gather qualitative data by use of semi-structured interview. A fourth stage of data collection will take place at the end of the 1$^{st}$ practice learning experience (placement) and will involved 2 focus groups. Details of the design and methods can be found below.

Quantitative Data: Questionnaire adapted from the 'Social Work Empowerment Scale' (Data collection stage one and two)
The quantitative aspect of the research will be achieved through the use of a questionnaire adapted from the 'Social Work Empowerment Scale (MIPPA)' (LeBossé et al. 2004). Questionnaires can be viewed as a stable, consistent and uniform system of measurement without variation (May 1997), an aspect that semi-structured interviews cannot offer due to the interactions taking place between the researcher and the participant. The questionnaires will also produce quick results which will highlight themes which the researchers will pursue in greater depth during the interviews which will follow at the end of the module. Finally, the questionnaires offer the kind of wide coverage that interviews would not have allowed due to financial and resource constraints (Sarantakos 1993). The questionnaire will examine understanding and perceptions of student's feeling of empowerment and will be completed twice, once at the beginning of the module 'Principles of Social Work', and again at the end of the module. The project aims at comparing empowerment levels among students and the impact which the module has had on their professional development and feeling of empowerment. Three factors will be examined as a means of measuring this:

a) 'propensity to act'
b) critical consciousness
c) feeling of personal efficacy.

The questionnaire, adapted from Lebosse's empowerment scale, will be piloted before being distributed to the students. The sampling will be 'convenience sampling' (Bryman 2001) and will involve anyone registered on the module who is interested in participating in the research. It is hope that most of the cohort will agree to participate in the study. However, their informed consent will be sought and their participation will be on a voluntary basis only. Participants will also be free to no longer participate in the study / complete the questionnaire at any time. As this research project is only at pilot stage, no minimum sample size is required. It is hoped that this data will serve as a 'springboard' for further research on the use of Socratic dialogue as a teaching tool and the increase of student's empowerment and the development of social work virtues. Data analysis will be thematic and comparative and done by using SPSS.

## Qualitative data: Semi-Structured Interviews (Data collection stage 3)

The qualitative aspect of the research project will be undertaken in conducting a series of semi-structured interviews at the end of the module delivery, with a small number of students. The interview will take place after the module assessment is completed and returned to students, at around mid-February 2007. This will insure that students do not feel threaten by their participations to the interview in relation to the assessment of their coursework within the module.

May (1997:112) suggests various reasons for the use of interviews, such as the fact that this tool "provides qualitative depth by allowing interviewees to talk about the subject in terms of their own frames of reference". It is aimed to capture the experience of project participants (Mahoney 1997) and gain in depth understanding of the process of participation in the Socratic Dialogue groups and their experience in developing social work virtues and their feeling of empowerment. An interview schedule will outline the themes which need to be covered but a more dialogical procedure will be used, insofar that the interview will be guided by both the participant and the researcher while ensuring that all the themes are covered (Corbetta 2003). The sampling will be non-probabilistic purposive (Sarantakos 1993) in so far as students will be recruited on a voluntary basis and invited to participate in an interview at the end of the module. It is hope to recruit 6 to 8 students willing to participate in the interview. The interviews will be taped recorded with consent from the participants. Data analysis will be done by an examination of theme and then themes will be compared altogether.

## Qualitative data: Focus Groups (Data collection stage four)

A fourth and final stage of data collection will take place in June and will aim at gathering data in relation to social work virtues and empowerment and how those have been embedded in practice. The focus group is a method of data collection that can be defined as: "group discussions that are organised to explore a specific set of issues and involve some kind of collective activity." (Becker & Bryman 2004:394). Two focus groups, involving about 6 participants each will take place and will examine how different social work virtues and feelings of empowerment have contributed to students becoming ethical, critical, and practical reasoners.

Focus group is known as an efficient methods to gather data, especially towards the end of research process as it enable researcher to examine trends and variances, reasons and causes, attitudes and opinions (Derher and Dreher 1991; Mariner 1986). By facilitating two focus groups, it is anticipated we will be able to collect data both about student's attitudes toward the resolutions of ethical dilemmas in practice, as well as how social work virtues and their personal feeling of empowerment affect their decision making processes. As for the semi-structured interviews, the sampling will be non-probabilistic purposive (Sarantakos 1993) in so far the students will be invited to take part in the focus groups on the same day than their last recall day after their practice learning experience. Again, their participation will be

fully voluntary. Data will be recorded using pen and flipchart and then analysed in terms of content.

### *Research Ethics*

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has published a Research Ethics Framework (REF) to be used by students and researchers, in order to comply with national recognised ethical guidelines for research, effective from the 1st January 2006 (ESRC 2005). The following criteria were taken from the REF ESRC.

## Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

The notion of informed consent will be paramount during the whole research process. For example, before filling in the questionnaire, participant will be asked to read, agree and signed a consent form and will be invited to ask questions about the research process. Emphasis will be put on voluntary participation. Consent will also be sought from students participating in the interviews and emphasis will be given to the confidentiality of the data. Finally, it will be made clear that all participants are free to opt out of the research process at any time and no form of incentive will be given to any of the research participants.

## Confidentiality and Anonymity of the Data

Steps will be taken in order to ensure the confidentiality of the data collected during the research process through anonymisation of the research results. For example, each participant completing a questionnaire will be given a unique code made from a random number (according to the number of students) and an alphabetic letter indicating the questionnaire number i.e. questionnaire A at the beginning of the module, and Questionnaire B at the end of the module). No names, organisations or personal details that could lead to the respondent being recognised will be added to on the data collection tools, and all raw data will be kept safely locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's office. The raw data (paper and tape-recorded) will be safely discarded at the end of the research process. The data will also be anonymised when the research results are published.

## Avoiding Harm to Research Participants

The research process does not discriminate against participants from any race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, or in relation to any other characteristics (ERSC 2005). Participants will be chosen due to their suitability for the sample, which included men and women from different geographical areas. Nor risk of harm to participant is foreseen. Indeed, as ERSC (2005) explains, risk to participants can occur when delicate topics are at the forefront of the research objectives. However the research does not cover any delicate topic and all respondents will be adult, and will be giving their informed consent in order to participate in the research, and therefore, participants will be fully aware of their choice to participate. Consequently, no harm could arise for participants.

## Possible Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest are envisaged during the research process because no funding is accessed and the researchers are undertaking this research project in their own time and aim at developing well grounded teaching activities relevant to social work practice.

**Time Scale**

| | |
|---|---|
| July 06 | Submission of Research proposal and Ethics Governance to Faculty<br>Review of the Literature<br>Development of the questionnaire adapted from the 'Empowerment Scale MIPPA' (Lebosse et al 2004) |
| August 06 | Pilot of the questionnaire and revisions in light of pilot |
| September 06 | final changes on the questionnaire and development of interview schedules |
| October 06 | Questionnaires - $1^{st}$ data collection ($1^{st}$ stage of data collection)<br>Teaching begins |
| November 06 | Pilot interview schedule<br>Dissemination: Write for publication – theoretical rationale for the research project (British Journal of Social Work) |
| January 07 | Questionnaires – $2^{nd}$ data collection ($2^{nd}$ Stage of data collection) |
| February 07 | Data analysis – stage 1 and 2<br>Semi-structured interviews – data collection ($3^{rd}$ stage of data collection) |
| March 07 | Dissemination: Write and Send abstract for JESW 2007 conference |
| April 07 | Write interim report in light of results obtained in stage 1, 2 and 3 of the research project |
| May 07 | Application to external / internal funding body regarding collaboration with additional departments within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Coventry University or other HE institution |
| June 07 | Focus Groups – data collection ($4^{th}$ stage of data collection)<br>Data analysis |
| July 07 | Dissemination: write for publication – findings of the research project (Journal of Social Work Education)<br>Dissemination: Workshop at annual TALC conference |

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