

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

The Social Work Interview: Structure.
Content and Verbal Behaviour.

A model for understanding and teaching interview skills
based on an analysis of tape recorded interviews.

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by

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Abstract

The Social Work Interview: Structure, Content and Verbal Behaviour. A model for understanding and teaching interview skills based on an analysis of tape recorded interviews.

The research involved an analysis of 40 tape recorded interviews between social workers and their clients in the Greater Manchester area over 1983/4. The sample covered a wide range of clients in a number of different settings.

The main aim of the study was to construct a theoretical model for the analysis of interviews for the purpose of further research and for teaching.

The interviews were searched and re-searched and all worker utterances noted and codified. A 12 category system of verbal behaviours eventually emerged: open questions, closed questions, giving information, offering practical help, interpretation, worker self-revelation, support, challenge, reflection of content, reflection of feeling and listening.

The content, structure and development of interviews was also examined.

Each variable was examined across interviews with reference to its frequency, its relationship to other variables and to interview content. The sub-types of each

verbal behaviour was examined, together with its usage and client reactions to it.

It was found that interviews varied greatly as to form and structure. Content varied less; practical problems and relationship problems featured in most exchanges. The dominant verbal behaviour was asking questions backed up with reflections of content to keep the client talking. There was also a great deal of information and advice given. Open questions and reflections of feeling [counselling techniques] were relatively little used and there was little evidence of participative discussion with the client.

From the research data it was possible to construct a model for learning about interviews for use by fieldwork supervisors with their students.

Jennifer Berkson.

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Introduction

The present study consists of an analysis of 40 recorded interviews between social workers and their clients in Greater Manchester during 1983/4. The social workers operated in hospital, child guidance and area based settings and the clients represented a wide variety of client groups including the elderly, the mentally ill and children.

The main body of work concerns the construction of a model of the social work interview which could be used in a wide variety of settings. The structure and content of interviews are examined and a classification system for the analysis of verbal behaviours is developed.

The model is then used to compare and contrast the sample interviews and to illuminate some of the processes involved. The results of this study are placed in the context of the literature and research on the subject.

Finally, a structured programme for teaching interview skills is outlined based on the model developed in this research.

Background

There are perhaps two main motives for embarking on a research project. The first is the researcher's own curiosity and the second is the desire to make a contribution to the field.

My own curiosity was stimulated by working in a psychiatric hospital where there was considerable interest in training doctors in the skills of interviewing, and also by my experience as a social work field supervisor there. I was struck by my lack of skill in talking about interviews with students.

The planning of aims and objectives did not seem to answer the question, "but what do I do when I get there?" It was partly to learn how to answer this question and others that led me to develop a categorisation of social work interview behaviour as a way of thinking and talking about interviews.

A number of factors convinced me that such a project would make a contribution to the field. The first reason for studying interviewing is that social workers spend quite a lot of time doing it. Baldock and Prior [1981.b] described social work as,

"An oral culture with a methodological reliance on talk".

Stevenson and Parsloe [1978 para 5.96] report that,

"Virtually all the social workers we interviewed indicated that the most common approach was working with clients on an individual basis and sometimes involving other family members where appropriate."

Crousaz [1981] in her review of social work research reports that on average, studies show that around one third of social work time is taken up with client contact.

A second factor which makes a study of interviewing relevant at the present time is the growing interest in interview training on social work courses combined with a relative lack of empirical data on the subject. Hudson [1981 p.120] after reviewing this trend and noting the wide variety of skills covered by different courses and the different methods of presentation, comments,

"None of these syllabuses has backing other than the teacher's beliefs about what is relevant and important for beginning social workers."

Indeed, a review of the literature revealed that there was a growing body of research derived partly from the American counselling field, partly from the casework tradition and partly from the study of social skills, but only a couple of studies specifically concerned with the British social work interview. [Baldock and Prior, 1981a and Lishman 1985].

The aims of the research, therefore, were

1. To describe and illuminate the social work interview with regard to content, structure and the verbal behaviours of social workers.
2. To develop a research tool that would enable interviews to be described and compared in a way that is meaningful to those involved in social work.
3. To examine the results of the study in the light of practice theory and knowledge.

4. To develop a model for the teaching of interviewing to students.

The assumption underlying these aims is that social work interviews have a broadly similar structure and are concerned with broadly similar problems. In addition it is postulated that there is an identifiable body of verbal behaviours which are common to most social worker/client interviews regardless of the situation.

Some social work transactions will fall outside this range. For example, a small minority of social workers might be involved in specific therapies, either psychotherapeutic or behavioural, with clients. This study is not concerned with them. Neither is it concerned with group work, joint marital counselling, community work or any other method of working outside of the one-to-one interview.

By the end of the study period, the original aims had been achieved in that a model of the social work interview had been constructed and used to analyse and illuminate the sample interviews. In addition the model had been successfully used in a teaching forum.

The Study

The study is divided into five main sections: methodology and the development of research instruments to analyse the

sample interviews; analysis of interview content; analysis of structure; the discussion of individual verbal behaviours; the application of the model in a teaching situation.

I. Methodology

Following a review of the literature, it was decided to cast aside any preconceived notions on interview analysis and to start afresh looking at the raw data and trying to organise the taped interviews into their constituent parts according to topics and verbal behaviours. Individual statements were described as they occurred and later organised under general headings. Over nearly two years, the original classification which contained over 80 items of verbal behaviour was reduced to only 12. In the event, the literature was again referred to in order to refine and hone down the categories and to ensure that they were applicable within the general context of social work.

II. Content

The content of interviews contained few surprises. Content was divided into 9 main subject areas:- client's feelings, relationship problems, practical problems, general activities such as work, school or leisure pursuits, significant events in the client's life, health matters, the role of the worker/department, statutory matters and arranging appointments. Practical problems, feelings and relationships were most commonly discussed.

III. Structure

The structure of interviews is discussed under several headings: the length of interviews, beginnings and endings, the number of topics per interview, how topics are ordered within interviews, who initiates each theme [worker or client] and how the interview progresses from topic to topic.

No fixed format was discovered. Workers on the whole employed a conversational style in which topics seemed to emerge naturally from the flow. Workers, however, were usually responsible for beginning and ending interviews and for raising the majority of topics, indicating that they were actually firmly in control, despite the conversational tone.

IV. The Verbal Behaviours

Nine verbal behaviours were identified from the data:- Open Questions, Closed Questions, Giving Information, Direct Guidance, Offering Practical Help, Self-Revelation, Interpretation, Supportive Behaviours, Challenging Behaviours, Reflection of Content, Reflection of Feelings and Listening [not strictly a verbal behaviour but included here for completeness].

Each form of verbal behaviour is discussed in a separate chapter with reference to its importance in literature and

practice, its main types and sub-types, its frequency over the sample as a whole, its correlation with other variables, its correlation with the content of interviews and its main use within the sample. The effect of the variable on clients and clients' reactions are also discussed.

This section of the research produced a wealth of data which are presented in an overview at the end. Some of the main findings were that social workers on average talked more and listened less than expected, and that they used fewer counselling techniques such as open questions and reflection of feelings. There was little evidence of participative discussion. As expected, insight oriented behaviours were relatively rare but a considerable amount of practical help was given. In the main the interviews were dominated by a succession of closed questions backed up with reflection of content to keep the client talking, peppered with a good deal of information and advice.

This set of behaviours left the social worker firmly in control of the interview although the client was allowed time to raise concerns and, in general, had a chance to express him/herself and be listened to.

V. The Application of the Model

Based on exploratory work with social work students who had been asked to prepare a taped interview for analysis, a system for teaching about interviewing behaviours was

devised. Fourteen exercises were constructed which were designed for use by students with fieldwork supervisors. The exercises are intended, not as a prescriptive model, but as a means of raising awareness about the issues involved in interviewing. The exercises are formulated around topic development and the 12 categories of verbal behaviour identified in the study. Students are asked to listen to their interviews and to make notes under suggested headings. Questions are based on the findings of the study and discussion focuses on the issues raised in the text.

It was especially satisfying to be able to complete the research work with a practical teaching model as the frustration I had felt as a fieldwork supervisor, faced with teaching interviewing skills to my students, had been one of the starting points for this study several years before.

While it was not possible, within the limitations of the present research, to test out the model, it is hoped that it will be taken up by others and that they will be able to amend and add to the prototype.

Literature Review

As the present study is based on a series of taped interviews between social workers and their clients, the literature was searched for ways of analysing interviews which would be useful in this context.

The British Literature

Relatively little work on this topic was found in the British literature. Texts of the 1970's such as Bessell's Interviewing and Counselling [1971] tended either to concentrate on underlying principles such as Client Self-Determination or Confidentiality, or on external factors such as whether to conduct the interview at the office or at the client's home. The question of what to do and say during the interview remained largely unanswered.

Since that time, there have been a few studies which have looked at the social work interview in more detail. Baldock and Prior [1981a] examined the structure, form and content of 24 tape recorded interviews and also commented upon the interactive process. Their own starting point was a previous study of doctor-patient interviews by Byrne and Long [1976] which had examined the structure of medical interviews and identified the verbal behaviours used by doctors. Both these works in some ways provided a jumping off point for the present study, as they illustrated the value of analysing real interviews in considerable detail in order to discover key behaviours.

Lishman [1985] used video-tapes as the basis for her analysis of social work interviews. Although also concerned with casework effectiveness and the theory of self-fulfilling prophesy, Lishman made direct observations of interview behaviours, noting their frequency and use. Her emphasis on the non-verbal behaviours available on video-tape meant that the observations themselves did not marry well with the present study of interviews on audio-tape.

Social Work in Focus [Sainsbury, Nixon and Phillips 1982] is a study of long term casework in three social work agencies. As part of this wider research, the authors examined the content of interviews, the frequency of discussion of specific topics as well as certain worker behaviours in the interview such as giving advice and what the authors term "therapeutic interventions". These themes are also taken up in the present study.

Teaching Interview Skills

As one motive for embarking on the present study was to find a way of talking about interviews which would be helpful in student supervision, some texts were examined which deal with this issue.

Given the overall paucity of British literature on interviewing it is not surprising that there is little consensus as to what to teach. Hargie, Tittmore and Dixon

[1978] picked on the skills of questioning, explaining, reinforcement, reflection of feeling, paraphrasing and sustaining for their programme of training for social work students at Ulster Polytechnic.

Hudson [1981] writes that on her own course they have chosen to concentrate on the therapeutic qualities of empathy, warmth and genuineness as well as picking up on the non-verbal cues, questioning, attending behaviour and the like. Hudson admits that the choice is wide and there is little research to back up the decision to teach one interviewing skill as against another.

Marsh and Pymn [1981] list attending skills, encouraging the client to talk, awareness and reflection of the client's feelings, explaining, supporting, confronting and the handling of their own feelings, as important skills to teach beginning social workers.

Priestly and McGuire [1978 p.5] adopt a pragmatic approach,

"We advocate the adoption of a jackdaw attitude towards anything at all that may be of value in particular problem solving approaches".

Much of the work on training can be seen to derive from the American literature and the literature on client-centred counselling in particular. This will become evident in the following sections. How far this work is relevant to British social work practice is a matter for

debate.

Models of Interview Analysis

Research and analysis of interview behaviour derives from five main sources:

1. Client-Centered Counselling
2. Social Casework
3. Group Work
4. Social Psychology
5. Other Disciplines.

1. Client-Centered Counselling

Much modern counselling owes a debt to the seminal work of Rogers [1957] and his exposition of the key components of effective counselling. Through intensive study of taped sessions with experienced counsellors, Rogers identified Respect, Empathy and Genuineness as necessary and sufficient conditions for effective change in a broad range of clients and across all types of psychotherapy. These were known as the "Core Conditions".

Rogers, however, did not define explicitly which behaviours actually constituted these three variables. Consequently, Truax and Carkhuff [1967] later developed scales for measuring these dimensions based on an identification of the skills involved. They constructed nine point measuring scales for each of the core conditions, which attempted to describe what was going on

at any particular time. Taking empathy as an example, at low levels of empathy, the worker might be correctly describing what the client is expressing but in the wrong language or at the wrong time; at levels 4 or 5, the worker's expressions are virtually interchangeable with those of the client; at higher levels [6 to 9], the worker's interventions may add significantly to what is being expressed.

These scales were later revised by Carkhuff [1969 and 1971] into 5 point scales and the core conditions renamed "empathetic understanding", "respect" and "genuineness".

Truax and Carkhuff [1967] questioned whether the core conditions alone inevitably led to growth and change in the client as predicted. They suggested the need for a more active dimension and began to conceptualise counselling as a "learning" experience rather than a "growth" experience. The authors suggest a new model for counselling, that of the "psychoeducator", in which the role of the worker in reinforcing certain client behaviours is recognised.

This concept was taken up initially by Ivey [1971] and later expanded by Ivey and Authier [1978]. Behaviours which influence the client directly such as giving advice and information were added to the list of counselling skills, along with confrontation.

Ivey and Authier suggest a comprehensive taxonomy of

interview behaviours which they term "microskills". They believe that the behaviours present in any counselling interview can be broken down into their constituent parts and may be taught to counsellors through a process of "microtraining". The authors focus heavily on basic attending skills - such as eye contact, body language and vocal tone - and on verbal skills such as asking open and closed questions, paraphrasing, reflecting back the client's feelings and summarising. Influencing skills such as giving directions, advice and information are also included.

Ivey and Authier also focus on the way themes and subjects are developed as well as on the underlying facilitative conditions for helping which the authors label as concreteness, immediacy, respect, confrontation and positive regard.

This taxonomy is based on an impressive body of research on interview skills reviewed by Ivey and Authier. Given its clarity and comprehensiveness, it is not surprising that many aspects of it have been taken up and used by social work educators.

Fischer [1978] takes a more eclectic approach to social work. He acknowledges the importance of the core conditions as set out in the Rogerian model and has devised a detailed training programme to teach them based on the Truax and Carkhuff rating scales for empathy,

warmth and genuineness. In general however, Fischer sees effectiveness as the only worthwhile goal and emphasises the role of the social worker not only as counsellor but also as social broker, consultant, advocate and social actionist. Unfortunately, the microskills involved in these processes are not included in the training programme.

Egan [1982] works within the framework presented by Ivey and Authier [1978] but the influence of the helper is more openly acknowledged than in their model. He sees the worker in a consultant role; not only listening, observing, collecting and reporting observations but also teaching, training, coaching, providing support, challenging, advising, offering suggestions and even becoming an advocate for certain positions.

Egan calls his model of the helping process "problem management". It is divided into three stages: problem clarification, goal setting and action and he takes the model a step further by suggesting the relevant skills for each stage.

Although the American microskills model has been an important influence on interviewing technique, skills are usually tied in to a particular model of counselling and in many cases are also tied in to specific training programmes. Hill [1978] makes this point in her review of the American counselling literature from 1945 to 1977.

She notes that in the study of verbal behaviours, the number and type of categories vary widely amongst systems and that even similar categories across systems do not always measure the same behaviour. She also questions the validity of some of the systems themselves.

Hill herself proposes a 17 category system for counsellor verbal behaviours which she maintains has been rigorously tested and high inter-rater reliability obtained. It is quoted here in full as most of the categories accord well with the 12 category system finally arrived at, although by a different route, in the process of the present research:

1. Minimal encourager to talk
2. Approval - reassurance
3. Structuring
4. Information
5. Advice
6. Closed question
7. Open question
8. Reflection
9. Restatement
10. Non-verbal referent
11. Interpretation
12. Confrontation
13. Self-disclosure
14. Silence

15. Friendly discussion
16. Criticism
17. Unclassifiable.

Client-centred counselling has considerably influenced interviewing in this country. As Hudson [1981] points out, a social work style that is not based on a warm sympathetic approach is rarely discussed in the literature. There must be some doubt however, as to whether a counselling approach in itself is an appropriate model to apply to British social work transactions. There are many situations in which the prime concern might be something quite different, such as imparting information on practical problems or gaining factual data from the client. Social Service Departments here see themselves as offering a wide range of services of which counselling may be only one. In addition, not all local authority clients are voluntary. These factors put together may require the British social worker to acquire a different set of skills from his/her American counter-part.

2. Social Casework

Another stream of social work process research based on the work of Florence Hollis developed during the 1960's. Hollis [1969] put forward a treatment model based on psychodynamic principles. She factor-analysed process recordings of social work interviews in order to develop a typology of worker intervention which could then be used

as a precriptive model for all worker-client transactions.

Hollis's typology is set out in an article in "Social Casework" [1967] and later more fully in "Casework: A Psychosocial Therapy" [1972]. Each category describes the aim or intention of the worker's verbal intervention:

a] Sustaining procedures - expressions of interest, sympathetic understanding, acceptance and approval of the client.

b] Direct Influence - suggestions, advice, advocacy.

c] Exploratory description and ventilation - exploring the client's current or past situation, and the feelings associated with it.

d] Person-situation reflection - expressions aimed at understanding the clients' own world, their behaviour, causes and outcomes of certain behaviours.

e] Pattern-dynamic reflection - aimed at developing an understanding of underlying patterns of behaviour and personality characteristics.

f] Developmental reflection - to encourage understanding of aspects of the client's early life that may influence present behaviour.

These six categories of "direct treatment" were complemented by a further six complementary categories of

"indirect treatment" which were aimed not at the clients themselves but at the social environment and at other people with whom they were involved.

William J. Reid [1969], who worked closely with Hollis around this period, constructed a similar typology. His list approximates to that of Hollis but he uses different terminology:

- a] Reassurance
- b] Advice
- c] Exploration
- d] Identifying specific reactions
- e] Clarifying current intrapsychic causation
- f] Clarifying developmental causation.

Anne E. Fortune [1981] reviews these two typologies together and finds them adequate for the analysis of social work processes within the treatment model based on ego-dynamic psychology which the authors espouse. The weakness of the system, in her opinion, lies in the fact that both are based not on what the worker actually says but on "inferences about the likely effect of the whole expression".

There was some evidence at an early stage that social workers found it difficult to think in casework categories and to apply them. For example, Mullen [1968] explored the use of the Hollis typology using 87 taped interviews with 35 clients. He found that exploration and reflection

together made up 83% of all worker interventions and that the other categories were very little used.

A British study by Butrym [1968] Medical Social Work in Action used the Hollis classification system. Butrym gave social workers in the sample, a written explanation of the meaning of the different helping procedures and directions as to how they were to be carried out. She found that her medical social workers were not familiar with the system and found great difficulty in the application of their work to the Hollis framework.

Despite the expansion of social work practice beyond the boundaries of ego-psychology within which Hollis worked, her comprehensive attempt to analyse client-worker transactions using process recordings and, later, taped interviews, serves as an influential model for later research.

Reid later went on to develop his own typologies. In Brief and Extended Casework [1969], Reid and Shyne were faced with the problem of describing and comparing sets of interviews. They developed a 10 category system of social work communication:

1. Exploring the client's milieu and his relation to it.
2. Exploring the client's behaviour.
3. Structuring the worker-client relationship or communication within it.

4. Reassurance.
5. Advice.
6. Logical discussion.
7. Identifying specific reactions.
8. Confrontation.
9. Clarifying current intrapsychic causation.
10. Clarifying developmental causation.

The first five categories on the list represented "active" communications and the second five categories represented "passive" communications. Using this taxonomy, Reid and Shyne found that short-term casework contained more active communications, it seemed to help clients more, and clients themselves said that they preferred it. This study shows how a typology of interview behaviours linked to outcome research can be used to provide a prescriptive model for effective casework.

Based on these findings, Reid and Epstein [1972] went on to develop a task centred model of social work based on a structured approach to working with clients. The approach is based on the use of a short time-limit, the selection of target problems from the problems presented, the setting of tasks to work towards a resolution, and negotiation between client and worker on the target problem, the time limits and the tasks. The authors suggest a list of only 5 categories to describe all worker verbal interventions:

- a] Exploration
- b] Structuring
- c] Enhancing awareness
- d] Direction
- e] Encouragement.

Martin Davies [1981] in a general text book for British social workers, comments that although the task centred approach is regarded as an extremely valuable contribution to practice, its successful employment almost certainly requires the development of a range of skills not yet regarded as automatically available in social work. Reid and Epstein's categories although useful in themselves, may be difficult to apply in the context of the average English fieldwork interview.

The categories discussed above are also at a high level of generality. While it is true that a wide variety of verbal interventions may be subsumed under broad headings, from the point of view of their usefulness in the present study, the Reid typology lacks fine detail.

3. Groupwork

It is not the intention of this review to focus on groupwork but mention must be made of the early work of Bales [1950], because of the impetus it provided for the analysis of one-to-one interventions. Bales' work is interesting as it derives from a system of direct observation and is not designed to fit any preconceived

model of what "ought" to be happening. Another feature of the classification system is that it is divided into task oriented and process oriented behaviours.

Bales' analysis of group intervention behaviours contained 12 categories:

Task oriented

Asking for information

Giving information

Asking for opinions

Giving opinions

Asking for suggestions

Process oriented

Agreeing

Disagreeing

Increasing tension

Decreasing tension

Integration

Disintegration

This classification is at a high level of generality. It would be difficult to argue that any of the behaviours did not occur in any given group, but, on the other hand, it does not provide a tool for detailed analysis.

Schwartz [1971] compiled a mid-range model of helping skills for groupwork which avoided broad categories but

did not attempt to identify micro-skills. Twenty-seven worker behaviours were involved. Skills such as "Clarifying purpose", "Putting client's feelings into words", "Holding the focus", give an idea of the order of generality.

Shulman [1979] took Schwartz's categories and attempted to test them empirically in the setting of a Canadian welfare agency. Client feedback on the use of certain skills was correlated with a service satisfaction questionnaire. Shulman [1981] also used a category observation procedure to analyse over 120 hours of taped individual and group practice. From this he developed an 11 category system [with a further 2 categories specific to groupwork], based on Schwartz's framework but refined through clinical observation:

1. Clarifies purpose
2. Encourages elaboration of theme of concern
3. Reaches for, accepts and offers feelings
4. Makes a demand for work
5. Directs flow away from theme of concern
6. Criticises behaviour or feelings
7. Provides solutions
8. Remains silent in response to silence
9. Listens while client talks.

Another dimension of Shulman's work which applies to individual casework is the focus on the client and the

interactive process in general rather than solely on worker behaviours. All Shulman's interviews were rated for "themes of concern". As the raters viewed the tapes they would make a judgement as to whether or not the worker was attempting to help the client to elaborate his/her theme or ignoring the client's agenda and introducing his or her own. This "keying in" of the client's responses as "in mode" or "out of mode" is a new variable in the studies reviewed so far. It introduces a dynamic dimension into an otherwise static system of categories.

In addition, an interaction matrix was constructed by pairing each intervention with the one before and after, and counting the number of times the same pairs occurred. This gave a measure of how often one behaviour was followed by another: e.g. how often a silence was followed by directing the client away from his/her theme.

Another feature of Shulman's analysis is the division of the interview into three stages; beginning, work phase, and ending or transition phase. Different skills are identified for each stage. Although based on Schwartz's model of group development, Shulman maintains that all these phases can take place within a single interview and it is not necessary to relate these phases over time.

In the present study also, it was felt important to focus on the client and the element of interaction within

interviews. The development of themes or topics was also examined. There was an early attempt to divide the interviews into phases but this was later abandoned for reasons which described below in Chapter 6 on the development of the analytical model.

4. Social Psychology

It is not surprising that social workers and other professional groups who engage in face to face interaction have taken up and adapted many of the ideas developed in this discipline which deals with the psychology of interpersonal behaviour.

Argyle [1976] sets out a theoretical model for a social skill. He suggests that the sequence of behaviour occurring during a social encounter can be broken down in much the same way as any motor skills such as playing the piano or skating.

In his model Argyle brings out several key themes which have been important in interview analysis. Firstly, he demonstrates the hierarchical nature of social skills. Higher level units, such as asking questions, are made up of lower order skills such as verbal, paralingual and non-verbal behaviour sequences.

Secondly, he emphasises the importance of non-verbal behaviour [not available in the present study on audio-tape] and also of timing and rhythm within social

interactions which involves turn-taking, not interrupting, adjusting the flow and tempo of speech to one another.

Thirdly, he brings out the importance of reinforcement. If an action by one party is reinforced or rewarded by another, then that act is more likely to be repeated. In the interview, reinforcement can be a nod or a smile or some form of words.

Argyle's work has had direct applications in the teaching of social skills to mentally ill patients with social skills deficits [Trower, Bryant and Argyle 1978] and in the field of relationships between mental health professionals and their clients [Argyle, 1981] as well as in other settings.

The problem remains, however, which skills to focus on in any particular setting. Hargie, Saunders and Dickson [1981] working at Ulster Polytechnic produced a compendium of skills in interpersonal communication which draws on this literature and singles out 8 main skill areas which were held to be important across settings:

1. Non-verbal communication
2. Reinforcement
3. Questioning
4. Reflecting
5. Set induction and closure
6. Explanation

7. Listening
8. Self-disclosure.

Heron [1975] devised a six category intervention analysis which, he claims, applies equally to one-to-one, one-to-group and inter-group interventions. Furthermore, the categories apply across the board to all tutoring, counselling, interviewing and other professional situations. Heron's classification system is at a higher level of inference than that of Hargie et al, and he tends to concentrate more on what he terms "facilitative" forms of interaction. Heron's categories are as follows:

Authoritative

1. Prescriptive - advice, evaluation
2. Informative - instruction, information, interpretation
3. Confronting - challenging, giving direct feedback.

Facilitative

4. Cathartic - encouraging laughter, crying, releasing tensions
5. Catalytic - encouraging reflection, problem solving
6. Supportive - approving, confirming, validating.

These categories describe helpful interventions. There are also degenerative forms of the 6 categories which "hinder" rather than "help".

Although it is difficult to fault this classification, it operates at a very high level of generality. Heron gives concrete examples [in inverted commas] but it is not clear where these are derived from or how they apply to specific situations.

Gambrill [1983] takes up Argyle's notion of a level of competency in social skills. In her book Casework: A Competency-Based Approach, she lists the social skills developed by Trower, Bryant and Argyle [1978] in connection with teaching skills in the field of mental health. These deal with:

1. Voice quality - tone and pitch
2. Conversational skills - length of statements, greetings, partings
3. Non-verbal behaviour - proximity, gaze, appearance.

Gambrill's work must be one of the most comprehensive texts on casework to date, drawing as it does on a vast body of social work and social skills literature. In her approach, she tries to bring out the importance of social influence. She believes that to be effective, the worker has to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the client. She also deals with "coping behaviour" or the way in which social workers deal with problem situations, such as the client who hogs the conversation or does not speak at all.

Gambrill takes as her main body of skills:

1. Questioning
2. Structuring
3. Listening
4. Modelling behaviour
5. Skills of self - expression
6. Concreteness
7. Confrontation
8. Interpretation
9. Offering feedback.

She goes on to discuss the core conditions of Empathy, Warmth and Genuineness and the skill of being Non-judgemental, also adding a section on the use of humour.

Gambrill's work comprises a compendium of casework skills culled from a wide variety of social work settings but in that it is rooted in a social skills approach it has been discussed under this heading.

6. The Contribution of other Disciplines

a] Education

Although not concerned with one-to-one interaction, the analysis of classroom behaviour has made a significant contribution to the methodology of interview analysis. Ivey [1971] acknowledges a direct debt to micro-teaching as developed at Stanford University, between 1967 and 1972 by D.W. Allen and his associates.

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Flanders [1970] provides an example of one 10 category system for classroom interaction:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1. Accepts feelings | } | Teacher talk |
| 2. Praises or encourages | | |
| 3. Accepts or uses ideas of pupils | | |
| 4. Asks questions | | |
| 5. Lecturing | | |
| 6. Giving directions | | |
| 7. Criticising | | |
| 8. Pupil talk-response | } | Pupil talk |
| 9. Pupil talk-initiation | | |
| 10. Silence. | | |

He uses time-point sampling, coding ongoing behaviour into one of his 10 categories every 3 seconds. He also analyses pupil talk as well as teacher talk.

Ellis and Whittington [1983] are critical of much of the educational methodology. They comment that although the classroom skills tests by Allen and Ryan [1969] were ostensibly observable, they were not derived from empirical analysis.

Equally, they say, Flander's system [1970] which purported to measure all interaction in the classroom was developed from a wide variety of sources including the curriculum and prevailing staff attitudes. Nevertheless, the isolating and labelling of skills in the classroom

provided a powerful impetus for skills analysis in counselling and ultimately in other fields of social work.

b] Medicine

The work of the doctor can perhaps be compared more closely with social work in that it often takes place within the framework of a one-to-one encounter.

Byrne and Long [1976] tape recorded 2,500 general practitioner consultations in an exploratory study of doctor - patient interaction. They divided the consultation into 6 phases including verbal or physical examination, diagnosis and discussion of any treatment plans and then set out to discover behaviours typical of each phase. They developed a category observation system containing 55 categories with a further 8 dysfunctional or negative ones. The authors then grouped these categories and were able to deduce from these groupings, evidence of different interview styles. They use a patient-centred, doctor-centred axis which they represent as a 'balance of power' model within the interview. Skills such as Listening and Reflecting are at the patient-centred end of the continuum while skills such as Gathering Information, Analysing and Probing appear at the doctor-centred end. Three quarters of the interviews were doctor-centred. They were able to show that styles changed but only within a limited range. Doctors had a preferred style which was standardised to a remarkable degree.

Byrne and Long define a consultation as a goal-seeking activity and in many of their categories, the goals of the interaction are inferred. Doubting, Chastising, Persuading are examples of this, whereas the categories of Closed Question and Broad Opening Question are more directly observable. The unit of analysis for these authors is a "Unit of Sense", by which they mean the sentence or sentences which carry the meaning of what is being said.

Byrne and Long's study is not only interesting methodologically but is also notable as providing the inspiration for the only direct study of the social worker-client interview to be found in the British Literature. Baldock and Prior [1981] studied 24 interviews by 12 social workers and assessed them according to the Byrne and Long model [1976]. They tried to pinpoint characteristics of social workers' verbal behaviour compared to doctors talking to patients. They found social work interviews long and rambling compared to the doctors' consultations. They comment on the sense of aimlessness but point out that, in fact, the social worker remains very much in charge, using a deceptively low profile.

Clark [1982] criticises Baldock and Prior for trying to fit social work into a model designed for doctors. They question the validity of trying to compare mid-term social

work interviews of long term cases with the brief, surgery interviews of the general practitioners. Nevertheless, as the authors point out in a companion article in 'Community Care' [1981] the research indicated that social workers had developed quite complex techniques, ploys and routines to manage their conversations with clients, and this may be taken as a starting point for further research.

c] Psychiatry

The psychiatric interview is perhaps more analagous to the social work interview than that of the general practitioner. Rutter and Cox [1981] state the purposes of the initial interview in psychiatry as:

- i. a means of asking questions to obtain factual information
- ii. a means to elicit emotions, feelings and attitudes
- iii. a means of establishing relationships which will constitute the basis for further therapeutic contact.

Furthermore, the interviews they studied lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes, which is again, closer to the social work model.

Rutter et al [1981] in a series of six articles in the British Journal of Psychiatry investigate the merits and demerits of differing techniques and strategies in the initial psychiatric interview. A part of the research plan was to develop ways of measuring clinical interview

styles and interview behaviour.

The behaviours themselves were developed from a search of the relevant literature, discussions with experienced clinicians on the crucial features of interview style and the direct observation of interviews. The categories used in this series of investigations were:

- i. Interview activity and talkativeness
- ii. Directiveness
- iii. Types of questions and statements
- iv. Interventions designed to elicit and respond to feelings
- v. Interviewer's non-verbal behaviour.

These were measured in various ways. Talkativeness was measured by counting the number of floor-holdings, the number of words spoken per unit of time and the mean number of words per floor-holding. Directiveness was measured by the number of times the interviews actively attempted to direct the content of the interview by raising a new topic area, by the number of probes per topic area, by the number of direct requests for detailed descriptions plus a count of the number of interviewer interruptions. All these counts were available from typescripts while other categories such as non-verbal behaviour were rated from the video-tapes.

Types of question were broken down into simple closed questions, double or multiple choice questions, leading

questions, open questions and clarification probes. Interventions concerned with feelings were broken down into direct requests for feelings, interpretations, sympathetic statements, open questions and closed questions. These behaviours were linked to the patient's response to each intervention in terms of whether it elicited self-disclosure or descriptive material.

This study also contained a third, experimental phase in which the four interview styles which emerged from the naturalistic study were tested out in an experimental situation. The styles were paired in such a way as to allow controlled comparison of their effects. The research findings indicated that the expression of emotions by the patient was best encouraged by a response to emotional cues, a reflective style with little cross questioning, the use of direct requests for self-disclosure, the optimal use of interpretations and expressions of sympathy and direct requests for feelings. They indicated that factual information was best elicited by encouraging the patients to talk freely about their concerns, possibly combined with some more specific questions on key issues of a factual nature.

Another study by Neu et al [1978] describes a method for measuring interventions employed by psychotherapists in the short-term treatment of depressives. This study is interesting in the present context as it borrows from the

Hollis [1968] typology of Descriptive and Reflective categories of casework:

Reflective, i.e. those which encourage reflection in the patient.

1. direct advice
2. decision analysis
3. developmental awareness

Descriptive, i.e. those which encourage the patient to describe the situation.

1. non-judgemental exploration
2. elicitation of material
3. clarification

[There was a further category labelled "Other".]

Results showed that descriptive categories were most frequently used and this was consistent with the interviews containing mainly descriptions of simple everyday events by the patients.

General Texts

Before embarking on this literature review, I wrote to a sample of social work training courses [one third of all courses] to ask for their book lists on interviewing skills. Many of the books listed have already been mentioned in the preceding sections [see above] but there were also a number of general texts on interviewing, all

of them American, which drew on much of the research described in this review.

Kadushin [1972] often appears on student reading lists. This work reviews the whole field of interviewing from the structure of individual interviews and the use of key behaviours such as questions and giving advice to the social and cultural implications of the worker-client relationship. Other popular books were Benjamin [1981], Danish and Hauer [1973] and Munroe [1979]. Each of these texts are written from the particular perspective of the author and emphasise different interview behaviours. They are quoted where appropriate under discussion of individual behaviours in the results of the study.

Literature Review - Summary

A review of the literature shows that behavioural classification systems relevant to interviewing have been derived from many different sources rooted in different disciplines. The literature also reveals a great diversity along several other dimensions of interview analysis:

1. Aims
2. Function
3. The number of categories used
4. The level of inference of categories
5. The classification of categories

6. Interview structure
7. Worker-client dynamics
8. Methodology
9. Research instruments.

1. Aims

- a] Studies which aim to describe the universal attributes of all interventions regardless of setting. e.g. Argyle [1969], Heron [1975], Hargie et al [1981].
- b] Studies which aim to observe and describe existing interaction within a given setting. e.g. Bales [1950], Byrne and Long [1976], Baldock and Prior [1981].
- c] Studies which aim to find which behaviours are most effective in achieving certain pre-established goals. e.g. Truax and Carkhuff [1967], Hollis [1972], Reid and Shapiro [1972].
- d] Studies which aim to test out how far existing practice fit with preconceived theories. e.g. Butrym [1968], Mullen [1968].

2. Function

- a] Studies designed as part of a teaching programme. e.g. Fischer [1978], Gambrill [1983].
- b] Studies to describe and illuminate existing practice

in order to develop models of practice. e.g. Byrne and Long [1976], Baldock and Prior [1981].

c] Outcome studies designed in order to improve practice. e.g. Shulman [1981], Reid and Shyne [1969].

3. The Number of Categories Used

Classification schemes ranged from only 5 categories [Reid and Shapiro, 1972] to over 50 [Byrne and Long, 1976]. Most taxonomies seemed to contain between 6 and 17 categories. e.g. Hollis [1972], Hill [1978], Shulman [1981]. Some systems consist of a small number of major units which can be broken down into an almost limitless number of smaller units - the microskills approach. e.g. Ivey and Authier [1978].

4. The Level of Inference of Categories Used

Some categories of behaviour such as asking a question or giving a piece of factual information can be observed directly. With other categories such as advice or support, the meaning has to be inferred from the words. Some categories have a higher level of inference than others, e.g. "Pattern dynamic reflection" or "person-situation reflection" [Hollis, 1972] is at a higher level than "advice" or "confrontation" [Reid and Shyne, 1969]. Considerable judgement has to be exercised in placing utterances in categories at high levels of inference.

Most studies tend to use a combination of categories at different levels and then rely on a high level of correlation among raters to establish reliability.

5. Classification of Categories

Lists of verbal behaviours may be sub-divided within systems. Hollis [1972] uses categories of Direct and Indirect treatment. Bales [1950] uses a Task oriented and Process oriented division. Reid and Shyne [1969] refer to Active and Passive communications. Byrne and Long [1976] draw a distinction between doctor-centred and patient-centred communications.

6. Interview Structure

Some commentators have considered the beginnings, middles and ends of interviews and the different worker behaviours involved in each phase, e.g. Egan [1982], Shulman [1981]. Byrne and Long [1973]. Baldock and Prior [1981], searched social work interviews for phases analogous to the medical model but failed to find any.

Ivey and Authier [1978] considered topic development and the behaviours which signalled the beginnings and endings of topics. Shulman [1981] paired worker interventions to find out which ones commonly preceded and followed each other.

7. Worker-Client Dynamics

Little attention is paid to the client in most of the literature. Shulman [1981] categorises worker speech as being "in mode" or "out of mode" with client talk. Reid and Shyne [1969] used client feedback in their study of short and long term casework but no taxonomies of client speech were found, similar to categorisations of worker speech.

8. Methodology

Behaviour classification systems have been derived from theory. e.g. Hollis [1972], Truax and Carkhuff [1967]. Egan [1982].

Systems have also been derived empirically using observational methods. e.g. Bales [1970], Baldock and Prior [1981], Lishman [1985].

Some classifications have been derived from the literature. e.g. Hill [1978], Heron [1975], Gambrill [1983].

Many studies use a combination of all three.

9. Research Instruments

- a] Process recording. e.g. Hollis [1972]
- b] Audio-tape. e.g. Mullen [1968], Baldock and Prior [1981]
- c] Video-tape. e.g. Shulman [1981], Lishman [1985]
- d] Direct observation. e.g. Bales [1950], Shulman

[1981]

e] Transcripts. e.g. Rutter et. al. [1981].

Some studies used a combination of research tools.

Although such diversity leaves the researcher with no clear guidelines as to how to proceed, it also provides a very rich source of ideas, methods and theory to draw on.

The literature on individual verbal behaviours will be reviewed as appropriate in the discussion of the study results.

Part I
Methodology

- Chapter 1. Theoretical Considerations
- Chapter 2. Access - A Case Study
- Chapter 3. The Sample
- Chapter 4. Notes on the Use of the Tape Recorder
- Chapter 5. The Development of the Analytical Model -
Topic Development
- Chapter 6. The Development of the Analytical Model -
Verbal Behaviours
- Chapter 7. Data Analysis.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Considerations

The primary aim of the study was to develop a model for the analysis of social work interviews which could be used for research purposes and which also had a practical application in the teaching of interview skills. In this endeavour, I was particularly influenced by the methodology of Glaser and Strauss [1967] and by the views of Hammersley and Atkinson [1983] on ethnography.

In ethnography, data analysis is not a distinct stage of the research; as information is collected, it is sorted into categories which emerge as theory is developed and more data are added. Hammersley and Atkinson describe this process as progressive focussing;

"Progressive focussing has two analytically distinct components. First, over time the research problem is developed or transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently only over the course of the research that one discovers what the research is really about".

[p.175]

I applied this method in my own research which was based on interviews collected over a fifteen month period. During this time, various models emerged which were used, in turn, to analyse the data.

In the early months of the study I found the work of Glaser and Strauss [1967] particularly helpful. In The Discovery of Grounded Theory, the authors describe a

strategy for qualitative research which is based on the notion of generating general categories and their properties, using only the data available and disregarding all previous models and a priori assumptions;

"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 other areas".

[p.43].

This method seemed appropriate in the beginning phase of the study as, based on a review of the literature, I had already decided that existing models of the social work interview were inadequate and that I needed to start afresh.

Grounded theory is purely inductive. Typologies are created using the constant comparative method, which consists of examining each piece of data in turn, noting its properties and its relevance to any other piece of data. By this means, all the data with common properties are sorted into groups, their range and variation is mapped and the types and sub-types noted. I proceeded with this methodology well into the first year of the study. [Chapter 6, together with Appendices 15 to 26 describes this process in detail]. However, the taxonomies of verbal behaviours which emerged proved confusing and difficult to use when first presented to outside raters. [These problems are also described in

Chapter 6]. I was aware of the need both to simplify the model and to make it more intelligible to those in the social work field. While not losing sight of the data, I now needed to test the model against established theory and patterns of practice.

I found theoretical support for this approach in the views of Hammersley and Atkinson [1983] who argue that development theory rarely takes the purely inductive form implied by Glaser and Strauss. Theoretical ideas, common-sense expectations, and stereotypes, they maintain, often play a key role. Hammersley and Atkinson use the concept of triangulation to expand on this idea;

"The term triangulation derives from a loose analogy with navigation and surveying. For someone wanting to locate their position on a map, a single landmark can only provide the information that they are situated somewhere along a line in a particular direction from that landmark. With two landmarks, however, their exact position can be pinpointed by taking bearings on both landmarks".

[p.198]

In the analysis of interviews in the research sample the data itself provided a primary landmark, while other landmarks included the views of supervisors, social workers and students, my own knowledge and expertise, the use of independent raters, and literature on the social work interview.

Reliability

Independent raters were important in establishing the reliability of the model. During the first two years of

the project, a number of social work colleagues agreed to act as informal raters and to analyse interviews as the model developed. Using feedback from these informal trials, it was possible to identify positive and negative features of the category system which could be used to develop improved models. By the end of the second year, I was confident enough to approach two colleagues who agreed to formally rate a sub-sample of interviews using the twelve category system of verbal behaviours as finally adopted. The methodological difficulties encountered in these trials are described in Chapter 6, but, in the end, a satisfactory level of inter-rater reliability was attained.

The problem with this approach is that it is difficult to establish the true independence of the raters as they need to undergo training by the researcher in order to carry out the task. One way to neutralise the effect of researcher bias would be to give only written instructions to raters. This approach was not considered practical given the difficulties in recruiting raters in the first place and the need, therefore, to be as helpful and encouraging as possible. In these circumstances, the problem of unduly influencing the judgement of the raters had to be weighed against the benefits of a more personal approach.

Validity

The validity of the model is best demonstrated by its practical application in the field. Part IV illustrates how the 12 category system of verbal behaviours was used to analyse the interviews in the sample; Part V illustrates how the model was successfully transferred to a teaching setting and used by students to analyse their own interviews. The fourteen exercises designed for use by practice teachers with their students [Chapter 2] have yet to be tested in their final form.

Access

As Johnson [1975, p.58] points out, there are certain theoretical problems concerned with gaining access to the research data: in order to be allowed to conduct research it is necessary not only to have a plausible rationale for the work but also to be able to explain it in terms that make sense to potential participants; on the other hand, it is in the nature of exploratory work that problems, interests, and questions commonly emerge only during the course of the research. This inability to define the exact nature of the work or to point to its tangible benefits at the beginning phase, may have contributed to the difficulties that I encountered over access at middle management level in the organisation. [See Chapter 2]. The problem was solved, to some extent, by trying a more direct approach to workers, which I was able to do at that

time as I was employed in the same department. At worker level, the potential participants were found to be more interested in what they might gain personally from involving themselves in the project. All I could offer was a reasonably lengthy personal feedback session in which the social worker's interview was discussed in detail in the light of the current stage of the research. This proved sufficient incentive for some workers, although it was a time consuming exercise.

The practical problems I encountered concerning access are illustrated in Chapter 2 which takes the form of a case study.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure had three component aspects: the interviews, the social workers, and the clients.

It was decided to define the interview in broad terms as any purposeful meeting between a social worker and a client. The interview had to involve face-to-face contact [they could not be telephone interviews] and they had to be one-to-one. This last was because it was suspected that different behaviours might be used when interviewing more than one person and also because, on tape, it can be very difficult to pick out who is speaking if the participants are not known personally. The last criterion was that the interview should be with a previously known client or relative of a known client. This was for

ethical reasons: it was considered that recordings should not be "sprung" on clients but discussed with them first; it was also considered that attempts to record initial interviews might deter first time clients from seeking help.

As the purpose of the research was to study behaviours common to all social work interviews, it was important that as many different types of interview as possible should be included. Accordingly, social workers in a variety of settings were approached. Given the problems over access, described in Chapter 2, the researcher had rather less control over the composition of the sample, than was originally hoped. However, a reasonable spread of social workers was finally obtained.

The characteristics of the sample are described in Chapter 3. In effect, the sample consisted of those workers who were willing to expose their style to scrutiny. Their motivation can only be guessed at but some said that they were interested in learning more about their own practice, some were interested in the research project itself; and some undoubtedly did it as a favour to the researcher.

It was not considered that the rather informal way in which the sample of workers was obtained had an adverse effect on the quality of the study, as the aim was not to evaluate one worker against another. Even if half the workers who came forward were "good", and the others were

ranked from mediocre to bad, this would not alter the analysis, because the purpose of the study was to identify interview behaviours as such. The good interviewers would make better use of the behaviours, or more use of them, while the bad interviewers would make poor use of them, or less use, but the categories themselves would be applicable to all social work interviews.

If there was a limited amount of control over the selection of social workers, there was even less control over the choice of clients as the workers themselves chose which of their clients to approach. Informal feedback suggested that four main selection criteria were operating: they chose clients who they felt comfortable with; they chose clients who would not object to being taped; they chose clients who they thought would be of interest to the researcher; they chose clients who they were due to see in the near future.

The size of the sample was a crucial issue. It was important that there should be sufficient numbers to ensure that all the relevant categories of interview behaviour had been tapped and that no new categories were likely to emerge as a result of further sampling. It was also important to ensure that there were sufficient numbers to provide a reasonable range of illustrative material as a basis for discussion. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, it was impossible to

say at the beginning of the project, what this number should be. This was an on-going problem producing much uncertainty until 15 months into the study when it was decided that there would be no advantage in collecting any more interviews on the grounds that no new data of any significance were being generated.

Despite the problems described over the compilation of the sample, a fair spread of interviews was eventually obtained. Social workers from a variety of settings took part, all the major client groups were represented and a wide range of problems were discussed.

The use of non-probability sampling of this kind, however, poses certain problems. As Kidder et al. [1981, p.80] point out;

"One can never be sure in evaluating such studies whether their conclusions are unique, artificial results from a specific population or whether the conclusions have broader, scientific usefulness".

The quantitative research presented in parts II to IV of this study is subject to the limitations described above. The frequency with which verbal behaviours were used over the sample as a whole, the number of topics per interview, the correlations noted between certain key variables, and other findings, have to be treated with caution. Nevertheless, it could be argued, that some findings are strong enough to warrant the formulation of hypotheses which could be tested in an experimental situation.

In the context of the development of a general model for the social work interview, the range of the sample was an advantage. It limited the likelihood that there was a pocket of social workers in a particular setting who were using an altogether different model of practice with a wholly different set of clients. The varied nature of the sample showed that the model could be applied across client groups and settings. Theoretical models such as those developed in this study, are not dependent on probability sampling; they cannot be proved or disproved, although they may be improved; they are ultimately validated only by their usefulness in helping the reader to describe and understand the interview process.

The Client Contribution

Problems were encountered in trying to include the client dimension into the analysis of the interview process. It was decided, initially, to analyse client speech using the same classification of verbal behaviours as that used for social workers. This was not successful because nearly everything that the clients said could be classified as "giving information" under this system. One option was to devise a separate set of categories in order to analyse clients' responses, but this was not possible, given the time and resources available. Instead, it was decided to give a descriptive account of clients' responses to each of the worker verbal behaviours. Textual material is open

to more than one interpretation and, while the descriptions all contain direct quotations which enable the readers to make up their own minds as to the significance of the clients remarks, these passages are also discussed by the researcher with an inevitable degree of subjectivity. Despite this methodological weakness, it was considered important to give clients a voice in this study and I have tried to record faithfully their views and options as well as some of their pain and their humour.

Chapter 2

Access - A Case Study

"Published reports of researchers' entry experiences describe seemingly unlimited contingencies which may be encountered, ranging from being gleefully accepted to being thrown out on one's ear!".

Johnson [1975] p.50.

Gaining access in this study was a continuous process extending from Summer 1983 to Christmas 1984. As more interviews needed to be collected, more agencies were approached.

Obtaining Permission

Early informal approaches were made in the Spring of 1983 to senior management in the Social Service Department where I worked and I was encouraged to apply to the Director for formal permission to undertake the study.

In August 1983, a letter was sent to the Director. I stated that I wished to obtain tapes of social worker-client interviews in order to study interview processes. The precise terms of the research were left open to allow for any changes later. I mentioned that this was in connection with work for a higher degree and assurances of confidentiality were given. I added that, as I already worked for the department, the best approach might be to contact area officers, hospital principals and others directly, to discuss the project in more detail.

Formal permission was granted and the letter was handed to the Assistant Director for Casework Services who circulated it to departmental heads with a memorandum from himself asking for comments. Nothing happened. I telephoned to remind him and he said he would look out the file. Nothing happened. I pressed him for the go-ahead to approach individuals by telephone. He agreed but said that approaches must be through heads of departments. We discussed the issue of confidentiality and I agreed to contact the Research, Planning and Publicity Department. It took about three weeks before consent forms were finally approved. Meanwhile I had been telephoning heads of departments and social workers to try to arrange meetings.

By November 1983 I was finally ready to begin collecting interviews. It had taken three months of negotiation.

In Spring 1984, three other Social Service Departments were approached in order to collect more interviews. In one case I did not receive a reply. In the second case, I was asked for further details but on supplying these was rejected on the grounds that the social workers were very hard pressed at the present time. In the third case, a personal approach was made to the Director on a friendly basis, through a mutual contact, and permission was granted.

Middle Management

I endeavoured to telephone all department heads in my own Department. Responses were mixed. A few were not interested at all, the most common reason given being pressure of work. Others said they would raise it at a Seniors' meeting and see if anyone was interested. I soon learnt that this method was unlikely to produce any response and so I began to press for a chance to meet senior social workers, to attend team meetings and to "sell" my ideas face to face. The length of time this took might be frustrating but it was more likely to produce results.

Social Workers

As expected, the majority of social workers did not wish to take part. Saying "no" took various forms:

1. Making an excuse; e.g. pressure of work or no suitable clients.
2. Saying "yes" but not 'phoning back or following it up.
3. Accepting the tape and the machine but not actually getting the interview done.
4. Suspecting that I might be in league with management or the Operation and Methods team.
5. Unavoidable reasons; e.g. leaving the job, illness.

6. Stating that they did not want to be involved.

Those who said "yes" were as conscientious and helpful as possible and I was immensely grateful for the trouble they took. I was embarrassed by being able to offer so little in return, although feedback sessions on each interview were arranged with individual social workers.

Obtaining Interviews. An Example

The following is an account of the process of obtaining three interviews from an area office in my own social service department.

9.10.83 Telephone call to Area Director to discuss project. He was helpful and suggested that I attend a Seniors' meeting.

18.11.83 Attended Seniors' meeting. They approved of the project in principle and suggested a further meeting of interested team leaders with their own social workers.

2.12.83 Meeting with those social workers whose team leaders were interested.

13.1.84 Meeting with those social workers from the previous meeting who were interested in participating. [4]

27.1.84 Telephoned the office but no interviews

obtained as yet.

6.2.84 Telephoned again. Only one social worker available. He said he would do an interview as soon as possible.

17.2.84 Interview completed and collected.

This social worker subsequently completed a further two interviews. In this case it had taken over four months to obtain three interviews.

In other cases obtaining interviews required practically no input from me. Sometimes the worker was a colleague who had agreed to take part informally and it required only clearance from a head of department before the interview could be recorded.

Data Collection

Data collection was also a time consuming process. Each interview necessitated at least three visits to the social work agency as well as the various telephone calls to arrange these. On the first visit, the researcher deposited the recorder, a blank tape, and the consent and information forms with the worker. On the second visit, these were collected and the researcher talked over any problems with the worker. On the third visit sometime later, the worker's interview was discussed in detail. The distance of the agencies from the base varied between

7 and 20 miles so that the travelling time could be considerable. As there was only one tape recorder, some problems were encountered in getting equipment from one agency to another in time for interviews to take place and this held up the research in some cases.

Factors Affecting Access

1. Being Known

I have no doubt that access to the Social Services Department in which most of the work was done, was facilitated by my being an employee, known to both management and social work colleagues. Apart from being able to draw on existing relationships, I was known by sight or by reputation to many more and this helped to establish a relationship of trust. I was not an outsider who might misconstrue what was being presented.

2. Academic Credentials

The fact that I was registered for a higher degree may have helped to convince participants that this was a serious academic project. On the other hand it may have put other people off who regard academic research as being of doubtful value in the real world of practice.

3. The Nature of the Project

There had recently been in the Department an evaluative study by an outside group which had caused a great deal of

concern. Social workers were reassured that this was not an evaluative exercise and neither was it examining sensitive areas of practice such as decisions in child care cases or mental health admissions.

4. The Information given to Workers

Social workers needed to understand the goals and ultimate applications of the research. They were offered feedback sessions which gave them a chance to discuss their interviews in some depth.

5. The Time Factor

Social workers are busy people and they needed to be assured that being involved in the research would not take up too much of their time. The fact that the requirements of this project involved them in very little extra work [they were taping interviews they would be doing anyway] was clearly an important factor in gaining co-operation.

Conclusion

Problems with access have three main effects; they hold up the research process, they use up valuable time and resources, and they affect the quantity and quality of the sample. In the case of the present study, the length of time it took to collect the sample was not a disadvantage as I needed time to work on interviews as they came in and to use the models derived from the first interviews to analyse subsequent interviews. The spread of the sample

was also beneficial to the study although this would have had profound implications for any experimental design. The time it takes to negotiate access, however, can become a crucial issue, especially when projects can only be funded for limited periods.

Chapter 3

The Sample

Forty tape-recorded interviews between social workers and their clients were collected between October 1983 and December 1984.

Characteristics of the Sample

These were collated under 7 main headings:

1. The Social Workers
2. The Agency Setting
3. The Clients
4. Length of Involvement and Frequency of Contact
5. Location of Interview
6. Interview Length
7. Aims of the Interview as Stated by Social Workers.

Information on the characteristics of the sample was obtained from the social workers who were asked to fill in a form giving a few brief details about each interview. [See Appendix 2]. In addition, each interview was timed by the researcher.

The Social Workers

Twenty-one social workers took part. Five recorded two interviews and seven recorded three interviews. Ten of the social workers were women and eleven were men.

The social workers were asked to state the number of years

agency and team settings together with the number of interviews recorded in each. [See also Appendix 3].

Table 2 - List of Agencies, Number of Interviews, and Number of Social Workers per Agency

| <u>Agency</u> | <u>No. of Interviews</u> | <u>No. of Workers</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Hospital: geriatric unit | 1 | 1 |
| medical unit | 3 | 1 |
| adult psychiatry | 7 | 3 |
| child psychiatry | 1 | 1 |
| alcohol treatment unit | 2 | 1 |
| de-toxification unit | 1 | 1 |
| Area: child care teams | 6 | 3 |
| mental handicap [adult] | 1 | 1 |
| mental handicap [child] | 3 | 1 |
| elderly | 3 | 2 |
| homeless families | 2 | 1 |
| intake team | 1 | 1 |
| deaf section | 1 | 1 |
| adoptions unit | 1 | 1 |
| Child Guidance | 6 | 2 |
| Health Centre | 1 | 1 |
| | ----- | ----- |
| | N = 40 | N = 21 |

The Clients

There were 39 clients. One was interviewed twice by

of post-qualification experience. This ranged from 2 to 32 years. Table 1 shows how the length of experience was distributed in the sample.

Table 1 - Number of Social Workers and Length of Experience

| <u>Length in Years</u> | <u>No. of Workers</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 0 - 5 | 9 |
| 6 - 10 | 4 |
| 11 - 15 | 4 |
| 16 - 20 | 3 |
| 20+ | 1 |
| | ----- |
| | N = 21 |

The largest group of workers had under 5 years experience [nine out of twenty-one social workers]. Eight workers had over 10 years experience: two of these were area based workers; five were hospital based and one worked in a child guidance clinic. [See also Appendix 3].

The Agency Setting

Interviews were collected from a wide range of agency settings. Eight social workers were hospital based, eleven were in area teams, two were in child guidance clinics, and one worked part-time in an area office and part-time in a health centre. All the workers were employed in specialist teams. Table 2 gives a list of

different social workers. Twenty-two were female and 17 were male. Their ages are set out in Table 3. [See also Appendix 4].

Table 3 - Client Ages

| <u>Age</u> | <u>No. of Clients</u> |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Under 18 years | 5 |
| 19 - 30 years | 6 |
| 31 - 40 years | 9 |
| 41 - 50 years | 9 |
| 51 - 60 years | 4 |
| 61 - 70+ years | 6 |
| | ----- |
| | N = 39 |

Excluding the five children under 18 years, there were 12 married clients, 8 single clients, 12 separated or divorced clients and 3 who were widowed.

Ten major client groups were represented:

1. The elderly
2. Mental illness [adult]
3. Mental illness [child]
4. Alcoholism
5. Mental handicap [adult]
6. Mental handicap [child]
7. Children
8. The deaf

9. Homeless families

10. The sick.

As the social workers were organised into specialist teams, these divisions tend to reflect official classification systems rather than the presenting problem. For example, one woman who was being visited by a member of the homeless families team had great problems in the field of child care, compounded by her homelessness. Similarly, an old man who was being visited by a member of the team for the elderly was also mentally ill.

Period of Involvement and Frequency of Contact

None of the interviews were initial interviews. They were all with known clients or the relatives of known clients. In only one case [interview 1] the social worker had not previously met the interviewee, the client's daughter.

Data are available for only 30 out of the 40 interviews. Of these, nearly half [14 interviews] represented open cases of 4 months duration or less. In three cases there had been involvement for about 8 or 9 months; in four cases, workers had been involved for between 1 and 2 years; and in 7 cases they had been involved for over 2 years.

Of the 30 interviews for which there are data, contact was on a weekly basis in 17 cases. In 3 cases, contact took place fortnightly; in one case contact was every three

weeks; in 3 cases it was monthly; and in 2 cases, it was every 6 weeks. Contact was described as "infrequent" or "sporadic" in 5 cases.

The frequency of contact was related to the length of involvement. In the 5 cases in which contact was described as "infrequent" or "sporadic", the workers had been involved with their clients for over 12 months. Of the 13 cases in which there were weekly meetings, 10 had been open for four months or less. Three social workers who had known their clients for over a year described weekly meetings but it is not clear whether this had been a constant pattern or was a response to a particular situation. [See also Appendix 5].

Location of Interviews

There were 17 office interviews and 21 home visits. Hospital social workers tended to use office interviews more than area based workers. Only 2 out of the 8 hospital workers recorded interviews at the client's home whereas 13 out of the 18 interviews by area workers were recorded at the client's home. One interview, by a child guidance worker, was recorded at a school, and another interview by a child care worker was recorded at a children's home. [See Appendix 6].

Interview Length

The interviews varied in length from 7 minutes to 75

minutes. [See Appendix 7]. Table 4 illustrates the distribution of interviews by length:

Table 4 - The Distribution of Interviews by Length in Minutes

| <u>No. of Interviews [N=40]</u> | <u>Length in Minutes</u> |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4 | 0 - 10 |
| - | 11 - 20 |
| 10 | 21 - 30 |
| 10 | 31 - 40 |
| 6 | 41 - 50 |
| 2 | 51 - 60 |
| 3 | 61 - 70 |
| 1 | 71 - 80 |

Four interviews lasted less than ten minutes and four lasted over an hour. Half the interviews [20] lasted between 21 and 40 minutes.

Twelve social workers recorded more than one interview. Only four of these workers showed consistency as to length. A worker in child guidance did three 25 minute interviews, a psychiatric social worker did three 50 minute interviews, and an area based worker with the elderly did two 35 minute interviews. A worker with the homeless families unit did one interview of 10 minutes and another of 15 minutes. In the case of the other 2 social workers, the variation was considerable. For example, a

worker in child guidance recorded a 9 minute interview followed by a 45 minute interview. A child care worker in an area team recorded a 25 minute interview followed by one of 70 minutes.

Aims of the Interview

Social workers were asked to state the aims of the interview in their own words. Some responded in general terms such as "review" or "assessment". Others described more specific purposes such as the completion of a taxation form or a discussion of Housing Benefit. They used different words to describe similar aims. For classification purposes, all these different statements were collected together under 4 main headings:

1. Support.

This included reassurance, encouragement, sympathetic listening.

2. Practical Help/Information/Advice.

The social worker is offering some form of overt help to the client.

3. Assessment.

This is sometimes called monitoring or reviewing.

4. Counselling.

This could be an insight oriented interview, or one in which the client is encouraged to find solutions to his/her own problems through discussion or

through the application of specific techniques.

The categories were not mutually exclusive. Almost without exception, the interviews contained elements of support; most interviews included an element of assessment; many contained help and advice. Some social workers stated more than one main aim and in these cases both aims have been included in the classification. [The number of aims is therefore greater than the number of interviews].

It must be stressed that these were the main aims as reported by the social workers. Listening to certain interviews it is possible to discern alternative aims and, often, additional aims; but for the most part the aims as stated accorded well with the interviews that followed.

Table 5 - Main Aims of the Interview as Stated by the Social Workers

| <u>Main Aim</u> | <u>No. of Interviews [N=40]</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Support | 10 |
| Assessment | 24 |
| Help/Information/Advice | 12 |
| Counselling | 11 |

List of Interviews Contained in the Sample

For reference purposes the interview numbers are those subsequently referred to in the text.

1. A medical social worker in a geriatric unit talking to the daughter of an elderly man about to be discharged from hospital, about the services he might require.

Female worker, 32 years experience. Female client, mid-40's, married. Office interview. 43 minutes. Stated aim - support.

2. An area social worker specialising in adults with a mental handicap interviewing a young man who has recently moved from a hostel to a house in the community.

Male worker, 3 years experience. Male client, 18, single. Office interview - 35 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

3. An area social worker specialising in children with a mental handicap talking to a foster mother who offers respite foster care to a severely handicapped child of 7 years.

Female worker, 3 years experience. Female client, mid-40's, married. Home interview. 65 minutes. Stated aims - support, assessment.

4. An interview by the same worker as in 3 [above] with a different foster mother.

Female worker, 3 years experience. Female client,

mid-30's, divorced. Home interview. 55 minutes.
Stated aims - help/advice, assessment.

5. An interview by the same worker as in 3 and 4 [above] with the respite foster mother of a mentally handicapped teenager.

Female worker, 3 years experience. Female client, mid-30's, married. Home interview. 40 minutes.
Stated aims - help/advice, assessment.

6. A social worker from the Adoption Unit discusses access to birth records with a young man who wishes to trace his natural parents.

Female worker, 6 years experience. Client, 20's, single. Office interview. 25 minutes.
Stated aim - counselling, help/advice.

7. A social worker for the deaf is talking to the mother of a deaf child about housing problems.

Female worker, 10 years experience. Female client, 20's, married. Home interview. 10 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, help/advice.

8. A social worker with the elderly is engaged in bereavement counselling with an elderly widow.

Male social worker, 18 years experience. Female client, 73, widowed. Home interview. 50 minutes.
Stated aim - counselling.

9. The same worker as in 8 [above] is interviewing a

client with severe anxiety problems.

Male social worker, 18 years experience. Female client, 52, married. Office interview. 70 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

10. An area social worker talking with an elderly schizophrenic in the community.

Male social worker, 2 years experience. Male client, 60's, single. Home interview. 35 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, help/advice.

11. The same social worker as in 10 [above] talking to an elderly recluse about getting his flat cleaned up.

Male social worker, 2 years experience. Male client, 50's, single. Home interview. 35 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, help/advice.

12. A social worker in a de-toxification centre interviewing a client about to leave hospital to go to a hostel in the community.

Male social worker, 3 years experience. Male client, 40's, divorced. Office interview. 25 minutes. Stated aim - support, assessment, help/advice.

13. A social worker in a child guidance clinic talking to a boy who has been disruptive at school.

Female social worker, 10 years experience. Male client, 13 years. Home interview. 45 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

14. The same worker as in 13 [above] interviewing the mother of an immature 13 year old girl whom the worker is seeing separately.

Female worker, 10 years experience. Female client, 35, married. Office interview. 40 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

15. The same worker as in 13 and 14 [above] interviewing a young client who was a non-attender at school and has recently changed schools.

Female worker, 10 years experience. Male client, 14 years. Home interview. 9 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

16. A social worker in the Homeless Families Unit helping a young unmarried mother with financial and accommodation problems.

Male worker, 7 years experience. Female client, 19 years, single. Home interview. 15 minutes. Stated aim - help/advice, support, assessment.

17. The same worker as in 16 [above] talking to the father of three children about child care and housing problems.

Male worker, 7 years experience. Male client, 25, married. Home interview. 10 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, help/advice.

18. An area social worker interviewing a chronically

depressed man and encouraging him to attend a group.

Female worker, 2 years experience. Male client, 35, single. Home interview. 7 minutes. Stated aim - help/advice.

19. A medical social worker interviewing a discharged patient who has had cancer and has been in receipt of a charitable grant.

Female social worker, 16 years experience. Female client, 47, divorced. Home interview. 36 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, support.

20. The same worker as in 19 [above] interviewing the mother of a small boy recently discharged from hospital. She has financial problems and needs a job.

Female social worker, 16 years experience. Female client, 28, married. Home interview. 40 minutes. Stated aim - help/advice.

21. The same worker as in 19 and 20 [above] interviewing a woman recently discharged from hospital following treatment for breast cancer.

Female social worker, 16 years experience. Female client, 56, single. Home interview. 24 minutes. Stated aim - support, assessment.

22. An area social worker interviewing the father of three children currently in Care, in connection with a court report regarding custody of the children.

Male social worker, 2 years experience. Male client, 30's, separated. Home interview. 25 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

23. The same social worker as in 22 [above] interviewing a 17 year old boy who is in foster care about his job prospects.

Male worker, 2 years experience. Male client, 17, single. Office interview. 30 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

24. The same social worker as in 22 and 23 [above] discussing the return home of three children currently in Care with the children's prospective step-father.

Male worker, 2 years experience. Male client, 45, co-habiting. Home interview. 70 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, counselling.

25. A hospital based psychiatric social worker interviewing an ex-patient about her current life situation.

Female worker, 17 years experience. Female client, 44, divorced. Office interview. 20 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

26. The same social worker as in 25 [above] talking to an out-patient about entering an elderly persons' home.

Female worker, 17 years experience. Female client, 69, widowed. Office interview. 40 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

27. Interview by the same worker as in 25 and 26 [above] with a disturbed patient who is the subject of a compulsory detention order.

Female worker, 17 years experience. Female client, 24, married. Office interview. 15 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

28. A hospital based psychiatric social worker interviewing an out-patient about employment.

Male social worker, 12 years experience. Male client, 37, single. Office interview. 50 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

29. The same worker as in 28 [above] interviewing an out-patient who has been treated for depression.

Male social worker, 12 years experience. Male client, 45, divorced. Office interview. 50 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

30. Interview by the same social worker as in 28 and 29 [above]. He is using a technique known as "solution training" to encourage her to learn to solve her own problems.

Male social worker, 12 years experience. Female client, 41, divorced. Office interview. 50 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

31. Interview by a hospital based worker with the mother of a schizophrenic girl about to be discharged from

hospital.

Male social worker, 2 years experience. Female client, 40's, married. Home interview. 37 minutes. Stated aim - help/advice, assessment.

32. A social worker in a child guidance unit interviewing the mother of three young children about child care problems.

Male social worker, 5 years experience. Female client, 20's, single. Home interview. 25 minutes. Stated aim - counselling, help/advice.

33. The same worker as in 32 [above] interviewing the mother of a young boy who is having difficulties at school.

Male social worker, 5 years experience. Female client, 40's, widow. Home interview. 25 minutes. Stated aim - counselling, help/advice.

34. The same social worker as in 32 and 33 [above] interviewing a boy who was being disruptive in class and has recently changed schools. Same client as in interview 13 [above].

Male social worker, 5 years experience. Male client, 14 years. Interview at school. 25 minutes. Stated aim - assessment, help/advice.

35. An area social worker interviewing a divorcing husband in order to prepare a custody report.

Male social worker, 13 years experience. Male client, 53, separated. Office interview. 25 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

36. The same worker as in 35 [above] helping a divorced mother of four young children to come to a decision about the children's future care.

Male social worker, 13 years experience. Female client, 33, divorced. Home interview. 40 minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

37. A social worker in a child psychiatry unit talking to a mother whose teenaged daughter has severe obsessional problems and is an in-patient at the unit.

Male social worker, 5 years experience. Female client, 36, married. Office interview. 75 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

38. An area social worker in a child care team talking with a young client who has been brought into Care on a permanent basis following total rejection by his parents.

Female social worker, 4 years experience. Male client, 13 years. Interview at Children's Home. 28 minutes. Stated aim - counselling.

39. A social worker in an alcohol treatment unit interviewing a woman about the possibility of her co-habitee taking a course of treatment for his drinking.

Female social worker, 15 years experience. Female client, 38, co-habiting. Office interview. 12

minutes. Stated aim - assessment.

40. The same worker as in 39 [above] talking to an out-patient at the alcohol unit about various family problems.

Female social worker, 15 years experience. Male client, 59, married. Office interview. 21 minutes.

Stated aim - support.

Conclusion

Some aspects of information about the sample proved more useful than others. For example, the age, sex and marital status of clients could not be correlated with any other variables. Length of experience for social workers also proved to be largely irrelevant, although it is not possible to say whether this is a significant finding or whether the sample was too small to allow differences between groups to emerge. The aims of the interview proved to be an unreliable category; social workers noted "assessment" as their main aim in 23 cases while the researcher placed 32 of the 40 interviews in this category.

The sex of the social worker was found to be associated with certain verbal behaviours: male workers on the study were more likely to use direct guidance, challenging behaviours and self-revelation while female workers were more likely to use the "softer" reflections of feeling. [See Chapter 26]. The length of the interview was found

to be associated with the aims of the interview as stated by the workers. Counselling interviews, for example, tended to be longer than those giving practical help or advice. [See Appendix 8].

Although not all the data proved equally useful, for statistical purposes, the information obtained about the sample serves to provide a thumbnail sketch of each interview and also provides a sound descriptive base for further analysis.

Chapter 4

The Use of the Tape Recorder

The decision was taken to use the tape recorder as a research tool as it seemed to provide the best means of obtaining full and reliable data on interviews. This method eliminates the bias of worker and client in reporting, and it is convenient and relatively cost effective. Barring technical failure, the drawbacks are few, yet, as with any research method, the question remains as to the effect of the instrument on the process studied.

Considering the number of workers given the chance to participate, relatively few came forward. Was this because workers were fearful of exposing their work on tape or would the response have been the same whatever the method, if it involved them in roughly the same amount of time and trouble? A few clients were known to have refused to take part in the study but, again, it is not known whether this was due to anxiety about being recorded or whether they would have refused to participate in any form of research. Available evidence suggests that the recording did not pose problems for the vast majority of workers and clients. Only 3 of the 39 clients interviewed showed any concern about the use of the tape recorder. In the other 19 interviews in which the tape is referred to, only positive or neutral comments are made.

Greater availability and familiarity with recording equipment over the last few years have probably helped in this respect. The younger workers may have used tape recorders in their training and some may have used them in their work. Both clients and workers are quite likely to have used them in their leisure time.

The evidence is incomplete on this subject, but in the 22 interviews for which there are data, the majority of workers' and clients' comments indicated that the recording had no adverse effects on the interview process. The absence of comments on the recording in the other 18 interviews could also be taken as a positive sign in that the recording caused no overt disturbance.

Social Worker Reactions to the use of the Tape Recorder

Most of the discussion about the use of the tape recorder probably took place before it was actually switched on. Possibly, discussion continued after it was turned off. In 22 of the 40 interviews, the recording was alluded to during the course of the interview and from these fragments it is possible to glean something of the different reactions to the process.

The social workers referred to the recording in 18 interviews. In six interviews, the social worker could be heard adjusting the machine at the beginning, or testing it with the client to see that it worked properly. In interview 6, the worker is heard actively

enlisting the help of the client in getting the recorder set up. She begins the interview by saying,

"Well, thank you for helping with that because I'm not very good with things like that if I've never practised them before".

The social workers in interviews 1 and 17 began their interviews with an announcement of who they were, who the client was and what they were going to do. Most other social workers took a less formal approach;

"We'll just stick that there and forget it".

[Interview 31].

Only one social worker [interview 17] seemed particularly aware of the recorder throughout the interview. There are three breaks in this interview when the recorder was switched off, and in each case the social worker offers an explanation to the listening researcher as to what was happening. This tended to give the interview a more artificial air than the others as if it had suddenly become a three-way process rather than a dialogue.

Two social workers were heard to offer overt reassurance to their clients at the beginning of the interview;

"- and we're going to talk normally - we'll just carry on talking like we always would and then that should be picking it up and recording it". [Interview 11].

"Sooner or later we'll forget about it after a while".
[Interview 24].

Five workers thanked their clients for co-operating with the recording.

Client Reactions

Clients referred to the recording in 14 of the 40 interviews. Most of these were positive references but in three cases the client evidently found the recording intrusive. The child in interview 38 became very conscious of the tape on two occasions and the worker asked him if he would like it switched off. When she mentioned their next meeting he asked if it would also be recorded and the worker was able to reassure him that it would not. In this interview the worker was able to allay the client's fears and to keep the recorder going; but in interviews 17 and 24, the machine was switched off while more sensitive issues were discussed. In interview 24, the client is quite definite:

"er, that can be turned off now - er, no, turn this off please if you don't mind. I don't want this on tape if you don't mind".

In interviews 10 and 36, the tape reminded clients of other occasions on which their interviews had been taped. In one case this had been with a solicitor and in the other with a doctor at the hospital. In interview 24, the

recording reminded the client of the time he had worked for a radio company.

In some interviews the clients got some amusement out of the tape. In interview 25, the client was surprised to find how Irish she sounded. In interview 32, some visitors arrived at the end and did not realise that their comments were being recorded. The young boy in interview 34 wanted to know who was going to listen to the interview and concluded the interview with a cheery,

"Hope you like this Mrs Wood. See you, Mrs Wood".

Of the clients who mentioned the tape, most indicated that they had not been bothered by it. The reaction of the elderly lady in interview 26 is an example,

Worker: "And thank you very much for agreeing for it to be taped".

Client: "Ee, I didn't think about that".

Worker: "Good, I'm glad about that".

Client: "Never thought about it at all".

Worker: "No, that's good".

Client: "No, never thought about it at all. Hope it'll be alright".

One client, a Nigerian lady, felt that the recording had a significance beyond that of the research,

"This machine is helping me to bring him up, isn't it, and

if I die and he is doing well, I won't need to worry
because I am in there, my spirit".

Chapter 5

Development of the Analytical Model - Topics

1. Learning to Listen

The first tape was received on 3.11.83. It was an interview between a medical social worker and the relative of an old man shortly to be discharged from hospital. It was difficult at first to pay attention to the intrinsic nature of the language as opposed to reacting professionally to the needs presented and making an assessment. For instance, it was interesting to learn that day centre facilities could be offered at the hospital; I began to feel a great deal of sympathy for the woman whose job it was to care for this difficult old man; questions occurred such as "what about a home help?"

2. Topic Development

In order to aid concentration I began to jot down what the social worker and client were talking about at each point. This provided a list of topics for each interview. Noting the numbers on the tape counter gave a measure of the duration of the topics in units of tape. This had the additional advantage of enabling the topic to be easily found again.

By January 1984 enough interviews had been collected to begin work on grouping and comparing them. It was

apparent that:

- a] Some interviews contained more topics than others.
- b] The number of topics was not necessarily related to the length of the interview.
- c] Some topics were longer than others.
- d] Some topics were returned to once or more within the same interview.

The simplest way of collating all four of these variables seemed to be by representing them graphically. The content of topics was presented on the vertical axis and the length of topics on the horizontal axis. This gave a picture of how the structure of the interview was built up topic by topic. [See appendices 9, 10 and 11].

3. What Constitutes a Topic?

Topics sub-divide the content of the interview and represent the subjects under discussion. In order to identify a topic it is necessary to know when it begins and ends. This is signalled by a change in the subject of discussion. At first, topic changes were recognised intuitively but later it was realised that certain behaviours accompanied the change, such as a natural pause or an alteration in the quality of the voice.

Ivey and Authier [1978 p.54] see the interview as a series of islands and hiatuses;

"The island consists of a topic [response class] or a

series of very closely related topics, sometimes small, sometimes broad in nature. The island is clearly a unit and there is almost complete agreement among observers of a tape of the point where the counsellor and client reach the end of an island. At this point a hiatus occurs, a pause or respite."

Topics constitute the natural divisions of the interview. They are made up of the subjects under discussion but are not defined by them. In one interview the discussion of Home Help Services and Meals-on-Wheels may constitute two separate topics, but in another interview they might simply be mentioned as themes or strands in a topic about the Provision of Services. A judgement is made, but as mentioned above, there are behavioural indicators such as pauses, changes in voice quality, "beginning" and "ending off" phrases that signal the start and finish of topic "islands".

4. Problems

There were problems associated with this method of analysis:

a] Short Topics

Sometimes a new topic would be introduced by the social worker and briefly dealt with. For example,

Social Worker: "By the way, how's your father?"

Client: "Fine".

Social Worker: "No problem there".

This type of exchange only takes a few seconds. It

was decided to exclude it on the grounds that to constitute a topic the subject must be taken up and developed. Potential topics may be raised by the worker but if they are not a matter of concern to the client they will not be developed.

A second methodological reason for excluding short exchanges of this nature is that the scale of measurement does not permit an accurate record of very brief transactions. Some fine detail is lost by this decision but I would argue that the total picture is not affected.

b] Seamless Interviewing

At the other extreme, some interviews seem to consist of a single topic. One theme develops out of another in apparently uninterrupted flow. The researcher however, will be aware at the end of the interview that certain themes have been dealt with and with close textual analysis it becomes possible to pick out the points at which subtle changes of direction have occurred.

c] Interwoven Themes

Sometimes topics which have occurred separately earlier in the interview, such as a mother's feelings and a daughter's feelings, are interwoven at a later stage when the effect of the daughter's feelings on

the mother may be discussed. In this case, a new category, Mother-Daughter Relationship may be constructed, but the development of a new measurable category remains a problematic activity.

5. The Uses of Topic Analysis

a] Structure

Topic analysis was used to identify typical interview structures within the sample. From the graphs, it was possible to identify three main interview patterns:

i] Unbroken steps - topics of approximately equal lengths are dealt with in turn. No topics are returned to. [Appendix 9].

ii] Step and Plateau - a major topic which is discussed at some length is surrounded by a number of shorter topics. [Appendix 10].

iii] Broken Steps - the interview ranged back and forth over a number of topics. [Appendix 11].

[Structural types are described in Part III, Chapter 3].

b] Topic Initiation

As topics were marked on the graphs, it was also noted whether it was the social worker or the client who has initiated the theme. In over one-third of all cases

it was the client. [These results are discussed in Part III, Chapter 12].

c] The Development of Content Analysis

At a later stage, the topics in each interview were subsumed under broader categories of content. This was done by listing all topics contained in individual interviews and trying to categorise them into sets under major headings. Appendix 12 shows how this was achieved in the case of interviews 24 and 25.

Nine main categories of content were identified: client feelings, relationships, practical matters, activities, events, health, making appointments, the role of the department [or worker], and statutory matters. In addition, summaries were considered separately and there was a "catch all" category of "other" for a minority of topics which were outside the normal run. [The content of interviews is considered in Part II, Chapter 8].

e] The Relationship between Topics and Verbal Behaviours

This could only be considered when the development of the verbal behaviours category system was sufficiently advanced [see Chapter 6], and when transcripts had been prepared of all the interviews. By ruling a line across the page at the beginning and end of each topic, it was possible to see at a glance where topics

began and ended and which behaviours were contained within topics.

Appendix 13 is a transcript of an interview divided into topics and scored for the worker's verbal behaviours. It is possible to see from this which behaviours the worker uses to introduce each topic or to respond to topic initiation by the client. When this information was collated from interviews, it revealed patterns of development applicable to all forty interviews. For example, it was found that workers introduced approximately one-fifth of all topics by using an open question. [See Part III, Chapter 10 and Part IV, Chapter 14].

Conclusion

Topic Analysis developed in two main ways:

1. Graphs were used to list all topic areas within interviews, to give a visual presentation of the relative duration of each, and to show how the interview was organised structurally. From the list of topics it was possible to construct broader categories of content which were used to compare interviews across the sample as a whole.
2. Transcripts of interviews were used to link topic analysis to the verbal behaviours of social workers. Once the transcripts had been coded it could easily be

seen which behaviours were associated with topic change and topic development.

Chapter 6

The Development of the Analytical Model - Verbal Behaviours

This was a continuous process which took place between January 1984 and November 1985. It went hand in hand with the collection of the interviews. The interviews were used to develop categories for analysis and the category system was then tested out on the interviews. Sometimes data collection was halted to allow time for reflection and sometimes work on the categories was set aside while more interviews were collected.

Aims

The main aims were to develop a system of categories which:

1. Would describe and illuminate the social work interview as accurately as possible.
2. Would enable data on social work interviews to be collated, compared and contrasted.
3. Would be meaningful and useful to those working in the field of social work.
4. Would be useful in teaching about interviewing.
5. Could be scored by different raters with a reasonable degree of reliability and agreement.

Method

The main choices of method were:

1. To take and adapt a previously constructed category system.
2. To construct a hypothetical system based on categories of social work behaviour derived from the literature and/or practice wisdom.
3. To inspect the interviews themselves for categories and groups of categories without a preconceived plan or a priori assumptions.

The preferred method was the last, although reference was made to existing category systems as appropriate throughout the research.

Process

There were various overlapping stages in the development of the category system:

1. The development of a full list of all verbal behaviours derived from social worker speech.
2. The grouping of this list under headings.
3. The further refinement of groupings.
4. The reduction of groupings to a workable list of

categories.

5. The testing of the category system by co-raters at various points in its development.

Several issues arose during the course of this process which had to be resolved before further progress could be made. These included:

1. Deciding on the unit of analysis. This could be a grammatical sentence, a word, phrase or other unit of meaning or a total "floorholding".
2. The relationship between "task" behaviours and "process" or "structuring" behaviours.
3. The status of clients' verbal behaviours within the interview analysis.
4. The dynamic or interactive elements in the system.

The development of the categories of verbal behaviour will be described chronologically to give some insight into how the system grew from one stage to the next.

The Chronology of Development

January - March, 1984

The Development of the Initial Lists

Listening over and over again to the first interviews as they came in, certain themes, patterns and variables began

to emerge in answer to the question "What is the social worker doing?"

The behavioural categories were derived initially by a process of listening and noting down almost verbatim what was being said. Behavioural groups emerged such as "Listening" and "Questioning" and within these groups, different categories of behaviour or different ways of doing the same thing. As new interviews came in, new examples were added to the list. Some fitted in to previously established categories while for others new categories had to be constructed. This process of listening to what was being said, noting it down and organising the notes into categories continued until no new behaviours had emerged for some time and all new data could be fitted into previously established categories.

The first list contained 85 categories. It was divided into five groups: "Questions" containing 15 categories; "Responses" containing 16 categories; "Statements/Questions" containing 4 categories; "Statements" containing 41 categories; and a "Miscellaneous" section containing 9 categories. The list was arranged in alphabetical order. [Appendix 14].

It was realised at once that 85 categories was a large number for analysis and an attempt was made to reduce them. Different types of open and closed questions, observations and information were reduced to single

categories. It was decided that "open question to elicit feelings", "open question to elicit facts", "open questions to elicit opinions" were best regarded as descriptions of ways in which a single category of behaviour could be used for different purposes rather than as separate categories of behaviour in themselves.

Although these fine distinctions do not appear in the final list of verbal behaviours, they were not lost from the descriptive analysis of the sample interviews. Chapter 14 on Open Questions, Chapter 15 on Closed Questions and Chapter 16 on Information give detailed accounts of how these broad categories of behaviour are used in different ways and examples are given from the taped interviews. These are derived from work undertaken at this early stage of the development of the category system.

The list as revised now contained 70 categories. In addition to the changes described above, "Statement/Questions" had been incorporated into the main body of the list as had the "Miscellaneous" group of behaviours. [See Appendix 15].

The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis chosen at this stage was the "Unit of Meaning". This was a portion of speech of any length which conveyed to the listener the sense of what was being said. It was felt to be a natural unit and one that did

not impose artificial divisions on the interview. The alternative of using a grammatical division was rejected as it was considered that a single phrase or sentence might not be sufficient to convey the full meaning of the speech, while a paragraph might contain several different categories of behaviour.

Later in the analysis the "Unit of Meaning" was found to have serious limitations as it was difficult to obtain agreement between raters on the unit to be scored. The "Floorholding" or the complete unit of speech between two client utterances was finally adopted as the unit of analysis as this could not be interpreted differently by different raters.

Preoccupation with the development of the behaviour category system perhaps obscured the need to work on this important variable early on.

[For further notes on the Unit of Meaning, see Appendix 17].

April - May 1984

Re-Grouping the Initial List

In April 1984, a colleague tried to score a few tapes using the initial list, now pruned down to 70 categories of verbal behaviour. She reported that it had been very difficult for her to find her way about the system.

Although it was relatively easy to score Questions and Responses, it was very difficult to sort out the very long list of Statements. It was decided to re-organise the category system using further headings. This led to the development of 8 groupings.

1. Information seeking behaviour
2. Responses
3. The use of professional knowledge
4. Behaviour supporting client's ideas or actions
5. Discussion behaviour
6. Behaviour to do with the process of the interview
7. Social behaviour
8. Other.

[See also Appendix 16]

The heading "Questions", had become "Information Seeking" as it was realised that some other behaviours were also interrogatory in form, e.g. suggestions. "Responses" remained unchanged. The "Use of Professional Knowledge" was an attempt to summarise those functions such as giving advice, explanations and practical help which may be said to arise from a body of social work expertise.

This system also separated out Supportive Behaviour which was a category retained in the final version. At this stage it included reflective statements which was later found to be an important category in its own right. Endorsing, praising, giving encouragement and reassuring

however, remained under this general heading and are described with examples in Chapter 24 on Supportive Behaviours.

Another idea which first appeared in this list was the identification of Process Behaviours or statements to do with structure. Although Process Behaviours were taken up in some detail at first, they were subsequently subsumed under the general heading of "Direct Guidance". In the final version which used the floorholding as the unit of analysis, Process Behaviours inevitably formed part of some larger unit and were not scored as a separate category. However, for analytical purposes they were later separated out and described under the general heading of the structure of interviews. [See Chapter 12 on topic development].

It was also decided at this point that social behaviours might be an important category to tap and several examples [thanking, apologising] were removed from the "Miscellaneous" category [now labelled "Other"]. Social Behaviours were not included in the final list because they proved numerically insignificant and because it was assumed that many of the conventional social behaviours would have taken place before the tape was switched on or after it had been switched off, thus making meaningful scoring impossible.

Two colleagues agreed to rate some interviews using the

new list together with notes on the categories used. [See Appendix 17]. They both found extreme difficulty using the system. The distinction between Supportive Behaviours and Discussion Behaviours was seen as particularly confusing. A note in the research diary at this point read "Back to the drawing board".

Despite the problems in organising a coherent system of categories for analytical purposes, many of the ideas which emerged at this stage were to prove useful later when it came to describing in detail what social workers were saying in individual interviews.

Summer 1984

Problems

One problem was that the categories as they stood were not uniform. They represented different levels of inference. A question is clearly recognisable as a question but categories such as Persuading or Convincing are at a higher level of inference, i.e. the listener has to infer that a particular behaviour would have a particular effect. The higher the level of inference, the more the rater's judgement has to be exercised and the greater the likelihood of error.

A second problem was that many of the categories were ambiguous. "Putting a Point" was really a catch-all category for utterances which did not clearly fit anywhere

else. "Chit-chat" which appeared under the heading of Social Behaviours could cover all sorts of different statements and was probably defined more by topic than by behaviour.

A third problem was to devise a system of headings which were more easily recognisable by social workers and which more accurately reflected current thinking in the field.

A fourth problem which was not fully recognised at this stage was that the number of categories was still far too high.

This was a time of further discussion with colleagues and supervisors and a fresh search of the literature for ideas. During the summer, the category system was in a continual state of flux until in September a list finally crystallised which was presented to co-raters that winter.

Appendix 18 represents the first stage of this process. Questions and Responses remain substantially unchanged; but for the first time there is a recognition that social workers offer practical as well as verbal help and Practical Intervention becomes a category in its own right. Reflection of Content and Reflection of Feeling are no longer seen as Supportive Behaviours but are now subsumed under Responses. The true importance of these two categories was still not recognised at this stage. Structuring Behaviours are still part of the taxonomy as are Social Behaviours and the definition of Discussion

Behaviours is still somewhat confused.

Appendix 19 shows how this list was developed. Supervisors pointed out that many Verbal Interventions were not "value free" but contained a moral imperative. These formed a category of Prescriptive Behaviours, which came to be labelled Direct Guidance in the final version. Other Verbal Interventions were "value free" and these came under the heading of Giving Information/Opinion. In the final version this was further reduced to Giving Information. At this stage, there were three major categories of information; general information was about factual matters; personal/specific information related directly to the client and information about self related directly to the social worker [See Appendix 20 for 0 definitions].

The categories at this time were beginning to look more like social work definitions. Social workers were now seen to be offering practical help, advice [direct guidance] and information. Reference to the literature suggested that insight oriented behaviour might be important and this was added to the list. Further reading suggested that worker self-revelation might also be a significant category although this was not separated out until a later stage.

May - November 1984

Throughout this period, much thought was devoted to the problem of tapping the process of the interview and giving it a dynamic dimension. This went alongside the development of the verbal behaviour category system and was clearly hampered by the fact that the categories themselves were not yet finalised.

The dynamic element of the interview was approached in three main ways, none of which remained in the final version but all of which contributed significantly to a growing understanding of what was happening in the sample interviews. These three approaches are described below.

May 1984

1. Division into Three

As a rough-and-ready experiment the interviews were divided into thirds mathematically to assess whether there were any differences in the type of behaviours used at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the interview. No evidence could be found however, that this was likely to be a fruitful line of enquiry. It had the disadvantage of imposing artificial divisions on a continuous process and it gave no account of changes within portions of the interview. In addition, the length of the portions varied widely from interview to interview. In a 9 minute interview, one third is only three minutes while in an

interview lasting an hour, one third is 20 minutes.

June - July 1984

2. Categories of Process Behaviour

It was decided to re-inspect the interviews with a view to devising a set of categories for process in the same way as the original categories of verbal behaviour had been devised.

The resulting category system is set out in Appendix 21. There are 9 main headings dealing with opening and closing the interview, opening and closing individual topics, responding to topic induction by the client and various behaviours within topics.

Interviews now had to be scored twice; once for the original verbal behaviour categories and once for the new process behaviours. This was a cumbersome and time consuming procedure. In addition, it was quickly realised that the behaviours within topic areas was virtually the same for both lists.

The next stage was to isolate those process behaviours which occurred at the beginning and end of topics and to assume that behaviours within topics had already been recorded using the original categories. This allowed a new short list of behaviours which referred to the structure of the interview, to be included with other verbal behaviour categories on the same rating sheet,

[see Appendix 22]. Structuring behaviours now included only those verbal behaviours which indicated to the client that he/she should begin to talk, stop talking or change the subject and in addition, certain other behaviours which helped to set the interview in context.

In the final version, structuring behaviours were not included as a separate category, but the notion of isolating those verbal behaviours which were used to begin and end interviews and topics remained. When transcripts were prepared and it was easy to see at a glance where topics started and finished, opening and closing behaviours were noted and this proved useful in understanding how the interview flowed from one subject to the next. These results are contained in Chapter 10 of this thesis which concerns the beginning and ending of interviews and Chapter 12 which is concerned with topic development. There are also references to the use made of certain verbal behaviours in structuring the interview in Part IV of the thesis under the relevant chapter headings. For example, in Chapter 14 it is noted that open questions are often used to begin interviews.

October 1984

3. Client Verbal Behaviours

As an experiment, the client's contribution to the interview was analysed using the categories of verbal

behaviour devised from social worker speech. This did not prove illuminating. Nearly all client speech fell into the information giving category. Clients rarely asked questions and as expected, they did not give advice or guidance. It became apparent that in order to tap this element of the interaction, a separate system of verbal behaviours would need to be constructed, through searching and re-searching the interviews as had been done for social worker behaviours. This was not practically possible given the constraints on the present research.

In the final version, the client's contribution was described as it occurred in relation to each of the verbal behaviours. In Part IV of this thesis, each chapter contains a section which illustrates how clients reacted to individual verbal behaviours such as Open Questions or Reflections of Feeling. Examples are given and the words of the clients are quoted. Although it was not possible to construct a model of client verbal behaviours analogous to that of the social workers, this serves to present the interview as a dynamic process.

December 1984 - January 1985

Testing the Category System

Two co-raters were recruited both of whom had been practising social workers. Six interviews were selected for analysis, the only criterion for selection being clear audibility. Transcripts were also prepared as an aid

although raters were still expected to score the interviews directly from the tapes at this stage.

Training of raters took place over two sessions. In the first session the general principles of the category system were explained and practice tapes were played to familiarise the raters with the system. They were then left with a few practice tapes, transcripts, scoring sheets and notes on the definitions of categories to work on over the next week or so.

In the next session, problems were discussed and more tapes were played until the researcher was reasonably satisfied that the method was understood. The raters were then left to complete the tapes in their own time.

Despite this comprehensive and time-consuming training, the results from both raters showed very poor inter-rater reliability. One of the most striking aspects was that the two raters did not agree on the total number of units to be rated. There was also quite wide variation in the proportional use of the categories although the general shape of the interviews did show some similarity. If giving information was the most frequent category in one interview, it tended to be the most frequent category for both raters. Similarly, if giving advice was a low frequency category in one interview, it tended to be so for both raters.

These results were taken as a general indication that the major categories of behaviour were probably valid but it was clear that both the categories and the unit of analysis had to be revised.

February - March 1985

The Development of a New Category System

During this period the category system underwent radical change. The number of categories was reduced from over 50 [Appendix 22] to only 14 [Appendix 23]. There were two main reasons for this decision:

1. The former list had proved too complex for raters to handle with any degree of reliability. It was probably impossible to grasp the complexities of the system without becoming familiar with it over a considerable period of time.

2. In data analysis, only the main categories of behaviour were used to describe the interaction. The sub-categories provided much illustrative detail but could not be easily referred to when discussing the interview as a whole. There was a need for a much simpler system for discussing interviews in both analytical and teaching contexts.

The reduction of the list to only 14 categories was not as abrupt and radical as it first appears. None of the sub-categories was lost. They form the basis for much of the

qualitative analysis and detailed discussion of the interviews which occurs in Part IV of this thesis in which individual behaviours are discussed.

In deciding which categories to keep and which to discard, three main criteria were used: the frequency with which a behaviour was used, its assumed importance and the ease with which it could be scored by raters.

a] Frequency

Some behaviours which were very infrequent were rejected. Social behaviour for example, was a rare category. [Most social behaviours probably took place before the tape was switched on and after it was switched off]. Similarly, the number of structuring behaviours used by social workers was consistently low and it was decided that these could safely be subsumed under the main category headings. For example, "Personal/Specific Information" [Appendix 22] would now be coded under "Gives Information" [Appendix 23].

b] Assumed Importance

Certain verbal behaviours which were infrequent were retained on the basis that they were important to a full understanding of the interviews. Skills such as Interpretation and Self-Disclosure [Worker] figure prominently in the literature on interviewing and it

seemed wise to retain them. [See Chapters 19 and 20].

c] Rating Reliability

Most of the sub-categories of verbal behaviour were discarded because they proved impossible to score with any reliability. There were too many of them to be easily mastered even by trained raters. As they represented variations of the main categories rather than discrete behaviours in their own right, little would be lost by their omission for analytical purposes. Henceforth, sub-categories were regarded as descriptive detail, valuable for detailed qualitative analysis but unnecessary for a theoretical model of the interview designed for use by students and supervisors.

Changes in the Main Categories

Some of the main categories of verbal behaviour also underwent changes at this time:

1. The Feedback category was abandoned as this had proven particularly confusing to raters.
2. Listening/Following behaviour was condensed into the categories of Minimal Encourager ["mm", "yes"] and Positive Reinforcement [indicating agreement or approval].

3. Negative Reinforcement now included the old categories of Challenging and Confronting.
4. Restatement and Reflection, previously called Reflection of Content and Reflection of Feeling now became separate categories in their own right.

April 1985

A Practical Application of the Model

The new 14 category system of verbal behaviours was tested out during a teaching session with social work students. Six students submitted tapes for analysis. Feedback was obtained from the students and their supervisors in small group sessions lasting about two hours. The sessions are written up in full in Part V, Chapter 27, but at this stage there were various points of interest which arose out of the student tapes and led to further changes in the category system:

1. The category of Minimal Encouragers was not found to be useful. Students claimed that "Mm's" and "Yes's" did not accurately reflect Listening/Following behaviour. Those students who used very few of them described different, non-verbal behaviours to encourage the client to talk such as nodding or leaning forward expectantly. In support of this, when the time spent listening [as measured by the amount of time spent not talking] was compared with the number of Minimal Encouragers per tape,

no correlation was found. In addition, the ratings obtained in December 1984 and January 1985 [see above] indicated that Minimal Encouragers represented the least reliable category in the system. For these reasons it was decided to discard the category of Minimal Encouragers altogether. A new category, Listening, was substituted and although this could not be scored in the same way as the other verbal behaviours, it could be measured in minutes and described in qualitative terms using some of the data gathered under the previous heading of Minimal Encouragers. [See Chapter 25].

2. In trying to explain ideas about Positive and Negative Reinforcement to supervisors and students, it became clear that these were unfamiliar ideas in the content of interviewing. The social workers tended to think in terms of Supportive and Non-Supportive/Challenging behaviours. There seemed nothing to be lost in re-labelling these categories in ways with which the workers themselves felt comfortable. This was easier to do once the category of Minimal Encourager had been eliminated and it was no longer necessary to find a main heading such as Reinforcement under which they had originally been included.

3. There was some confusion about the categories of Restatement and Reflection and in view of this, it was decided to relabel them in a less ambiguous way. The

categories of Reflection of Content and Reflection of Feeling proved to be more generally understood and were in line with the nomenclature in most of the literature on the subject.

4. None of the students scored in the category of Silence. Indeed Silence as defined in the category system [over 5 seconds] occurred very infrequently in the sample interviews as a whole. Yet feedback from students suggested that they did make use of this skill as a minimal encourager to talk, in the sense that simply keeping quiet could serve to encourage the client to continue. This type of silence probably relies on a system of non-verbal communication which signals that the worker is not about to speak. If this is understood by the client then he/she may continue to talk and so a silence does not actually occur. This clearly makes scoring impossible. For this reason, the category of Silence was abandoned although the use of silence is discussed in Chapter 25 [Listening].

When the changes suggested by the sessions with students had been incorporated into the taxonomy, a final list containing 12 verbal behaviours emerged. Listening is included as a category for the sake of completeness although it cannot be scored in the same way as the other categories. The category of "Other" was abandoned. Any utterances which did not fit into the 12 categories [for example, interruptions from neighbours or telephone calls]

were not regarded as part of the interview process. They were to be noted but they were not scored and did not appear in the final analysis.

Appendix 24 contains a list of behaviours. Appendix 25 contains notes on the categories used. The only amendment to this list came at a later stage when Process Behaviours or directions about the interview itself were extrapolated from the general text for analytical purposes. These are discussed in Part III, Chapter 12 on Topic Development.

Co-Ratings.1

September - October 1985

In order to test out the validity of the new list of twelve verbal behaviours in social work interviews, two co-raters were found to listen to six interviews selected from the total sample of forty interviews.

The two co-raters were both social workers who had been qualified for about ten years, but neither was currently employed because of family commitments.

The interviews for co-rating were selected on a random basis after those tapes on which the worker and client were not both clearly audible had been eliminated. The tapes ranged in length from 8 minutes to 25 minutes. All except one were complete interviews. One was cut off at a convenient point after 20 minutes as it was not felt

necessary to place such a heavy burden of analysis on co-raters.

The six interviews selected were:

Interview 33 - a social worker in a child guidance clinic interviewing a widow in her forties about her teenage son who was having difficulties at school.

Interview 7 - a social worker for the deaf interviewing the mother of a deaf child about re-housing.

Interview 18 - an area social worker interviewing a depressed client about attending a group.

Interview 16 - a worker from the Homeless Families Unit talking to a young unmarried mother with multiple problems including financial and housing difficulties.

Interview 12 - a worker at an Alcohol Treatment Unit talking with a client who is about to visit a rehabilitation hostel.

Interview 37 - a worker in a child psychiatry unit interviewing the mother of a severely obsessional girl who was an out-patient at the unit.

Training

The co-raters had to become familiar with the definition and use of the twelve category verbal behaviour system in order to analyse the interviews.

Five practice tapes were prepared [interviews 39, 25, 15, 3 and 8]. These were copied on to separate tapes and were used in conjunction with transcripts of the interviews, the list of categories, and the notes on the definitions of the categories, for training purposes.

The researcher visited each co-rater and spent about two hours going through the categories, playing the practice tapes and rating these tapes together with the co-raters. The co-raters were then given around a week to code some of the practice tapes themselves.

Meanwhile, the researcher also coded the practice tapes and then returned to the co-raters in order to compare scores. At this stage certain discrepancies were noticed. One co-rater had trouble identifying the unit of analysis. She had taken part in previous trials in this project when a different unit had been used. She was rating too many behaviours within a single floorholding. This problem was discussed until she felt she understood the principle involved. The second co-rater had trouble distinguishing certain categories, notably "interpretation" and "self-disclosure" and these problems too were dealt with in discussion. Later, during a telephone conversation, the first co-rater asked for further clarification on the difference between open and closed questions.

Procedure for Co-Rating

When the practice tapes had been rated and any problems discussed the co-raters were left with a Rating Pack consisting of:

1. A list of the tapes to be rated.
2. Copies of the tapes to be rated.
3. Transcripts of each interview.
4. A sheet of instructions for co-raters. [See Appendix 26].
5. Six copies of the rating sheets, plus some spares. [Appendix 24].
6. The notes on the verbal behaviour categories. [Appendix 25].

The co-raters were then given two weeks in which to code the interviews. During this time the researcher also coded the same interviews. The interviews were then collected in and the results compared.

Results of the Co-Ratings

The results illustrated that the raters were still not rating the same number of units over the interview as a whole. Co-rater 1 consistently rated more units than the researcher while co-rater 2 consistently rated fewer units than the researcher. Co-rater 2 in all cases came nearer to the researcher's own idea of the number of units. The maximum discrepancy was 8 units [interview 7] while the lowest discrepancy was only 1 unit, [interview 12]. There was a greater discrepancy between the researcher and co-rater 1. In interview 33, the researcher rated 68 categories while co-rater 1 rated 109. In interview 16, the researcher rated only 71 categories of behaviour while co-rater 1 scored 89.

For co-rater 1 there were examples of over-rating in all categories but the greatest discrepancies can be seen in the categories of Supportive Behaviour and Reflection of Content. In interview 12, almost all the discrepancy is accounted for by 4 extra Supportive Behaviours and 11 extra Reflections. Similarly, in interview 33, there are 17 extra Supportive Behaviours and 11 extra Reflection Behaviours. There are however, also more questions recorded in all interviews as well as discrepancies in other categories.

The most noticeable difference between co-rater 2 and the researcher was in the categories of Open and Closed

Questions. The co-rater consistently scored more closed questions and fewer open questions although the total number of questions when the two categories were taken together, were almost the same. Co-rater 2 also tended to score fewer behaviours in the Information category which may have accounted for much of the lower score overall. Table 6 shows the total number scored by each rater for each category over all six interviews.

Table 6 - Total Scores over 6 Interviews
by Individual Raters

| | Researcher | Rater 1 | Rater 2 |
|-------------------------|------------|---------|---------|
| | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Closed Question | 107 | 125 | 117 |
| Open Question | 36 | 43 | 16 |
| Giving Information | 63 | 69 | 43 |
| Direct Guidance | 19 | 20 | 11 |
| Offering Practical Help | 14 | 17 | 13 |
| Interpretation | 6 | 1 | 11 |
| Worker Self-Revelation | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Supportive Behaviour | 34 | 65 | 32 |
| Challenging Behaviour | 18 | 13 | 24 |
| Reflection of Content | 28 | 62 | 34 |
| Reflection of Feeling | 8 | 11 | 3 |

Discussion

The results of the co-rating exercise were not good enough to warrant the use of the category system for rating the sample interviews as a whole. There were four possible reasons for this:

1. The categories themselves had no validity and did not accurately describe worker behaviour during the interviews.
2. The categories were valid but the definitions were imprecise.
3. The co-raters were not adequately trained.
4. The unit of analysis was ambiguous and needed further definition.

There was no reason at this stage to believe that the categories were not valid in themselves; they had been arrived at by a process of deduction and seemed to accord well with both practice wisdom and the literature on the subject. There was some evidence to suggest that the definitions of the verbal behaviours were not precise enough; for example, co-rater 2 appeared to have difficulty in distinguishing between open and closed questions. Although it was possible that further training might produce better results, the unit of analysis remained a major stumbling block. In floorholdings which were lengthy and contained more than one type of verbal

behaviour, it was difficult to achieve agreement between raters on the number of units to be scored.

Following a discussion of these problems with supervisors a new approach to rating was devised, a key feature of which was that interviews were no longer to be scored directly from the audiotapes. Henceforth, raters were to use transcripts of the interviews which had been previously divided into units of analysis by the researcher. A full account of this second set of ratings is given below.

Co-Ratings.2

November 1985

In view of the difficulties described in the previous section [Co-Ratings.1], it was decided to ask the same co-raters to analyse the same interviews once more. This time, a new strategy was adopted:

1. The unit of analysis was pre-coded.
2. The system of marking categories on a separate sheet was abandoned. Instead, bar lines were drawn on transcripts of the interviews to mark the unit of analysis. Sufficient space was left beside the transcript so that categories could be entered in the right-hand margin. [See Appendix 13].
3. Rater 1 was then asked to re-rate the interviews "blind", but with the units pre-coded.
4. The researcher re-rated the six interviews and rater 2 was then asked to indicate on the transcript whether she agreed or disagreed with the researcher in each case.
5. The notes on the categories were further clarified with the raters.

Pre-coding the unit of analysis ensured that raters would be rating the same thing and this would allow meaningful

comparisons to be made. Nothing would be lost by this process as the ratings were designed only to test out the verbal behaviour categories and not the raters' ability to identify units correctly. In fact, the verbal behaviour analysis should work equally well whatever unit is chosen. In this case, the total floorholding was the major unit, but units of meaning, grammatical sentences or phrases could be rated in the same way.

Although possible danger of using transcripts was that raters could come to rely too heavily on the written word and fail to listen carefully enough for the tone of voice on the tape, the value of scoring interviews directly on to transcripts soon became apparent. It was now possible to see at a glance exactly where raters disagreed and how they disagreed on each individual behaviour. A secondary benefit was to provide an accurate picture of how behaviours changed as the interview progressed and of different behaviour patterns across topic areas.

Two separate methods of rating were adopted at this stage as a consequence of the results obtained in the first trials. Rater 1 was rating considerably more units than either the researcher or rater 2. If this factor was controlled it would be possible to see whether the problem lay in the number of units or whether she was actually rating behaviours into different categories. Accordingly, she was asked to re-rate the interviews "blind" but with

bar lines delineating the beginning and end of each unit.

On the first trial rater 1 scored a similar number of units to the researcher but there was only a relatively low level of agreement as to categories. Rater 2 was therefore given the transcripts which had been pre-coded by the researcher and asked to indicate whether she agreed or disagreed with each behaviour. If she disagreed she was asked to say how she would rate the behaviour.

To assist the raters, the category notes were again revised as a result of some perceived errors in the first trial. The use of Supportive and Non-Supportive Behaviours was further clarified. The idea of Support as endorsement or agreement with clients was emphasised. Non-Supportive Behaviours were seen as non-agreement or Challenge. As some other behaviours such as reassurance or advice could also be seen in some circumstances as supportive, it was stated that only those behaviours which could not be fitted into any other category should be rated as supportive. In addition, notes were included on the use of multiple questions, rhetorical questions, and interrogative endings such as "isn't it?" and "doesn't it?".

Results

Rater.1

Table 7 - Level of Agreement on Verbal Behaviour Categories. Rater 1 and Researcher

| <u>Interview</u> | <u>No. of Verbal Interventions</u> | <u>No. of Disagreements</u> | <u>% Agreement</u> |
|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 7 | 40 | 9 | 78% |
| 12 | 56 | 19 | 64% |
| 16 | 74 | 10 | 83% |
| 18 | 55 | 16 | 61% |
| 33 | 61 | 20 | 68% |
| 37 | 39 | 18 | 54% |

Total Interventions = 325

Total No. of Disagreements = 92

Overall Agreement = 72%

Table 7 indicates an acceptable level of agreement between raters over the six interviews, taken as a whole. There were however, considerable discrepancies between interviews. Agreement varied between 54% and 83%, giving a range of 29%.

In order to account for these differences, various sources of disagreement were examined. There seemed to be 4 main reasons for researcher-rater discrepancies:

1. Human error.
2. Genuine disagreement.

3. Genuine ambiguity.
4. Insufficient understanding of the verbal behaviour categories.

Human errors are more likely to occur when a rater is tired and finding it difficult to concentrate. Interview 37, which has the lowest level of agreement, shows evidence of this factor. In the first 19 interventions there were only three disagreements between the researcher and the rater. In interventions 20 to 39, there were 15 disagreements. This would argue for a factor of rater fatigue. Indeed, when this hypothesis was checked out with rater 1, she said that this interview had been done late in the evening and she had considered stopping because she was tired.

Elliott [1982], who employs a similar type of behavioural category system, comments on this factor in the introduction to his training manual:

"Rating help-intended communication is challenging work, requiring much patience, care and attention to detail required. It is not a good idea to do rating when you are tired or for more than a few hours at a time."

Other than offering such pieces of worldly advice, there seems little to be done about the factor of human error.

Genuine disagreements are rare but are bound to occur. In interview 12 for example both co-raters scored the following intervention as supportive while the researcher felt that it was a piece of information:

"That sounds very reasonable to me. I think you do have a good understanding at this point in time, that gives you a good grounding on which you can work over the next few months...."

Although this speech is undoubtedly supportive in tone, it was rated as information by the researcher because it expressed the worker's opinion which represents a new piece of information to the client. It is taking what the client has said and adding on a new element. Both co-raters however, presented the view that the speech was meant as an endorsement of what the client had already said. No doubt both interpretations are possible.

As well as the cases where raters may disagree, there are other cases which may be seen as ambiguous by all parties. In these instances, a decision one way or the other has to be made and this can be another source of inter-rater discrepancy. For example in interview 12 where the worker has been discussing with the client an imminent move to a hostel, he remarks:

"But you don't seem to mind or you don't seem too worried about the speed things are moving at the moment[?]"

The researcher heard this as a question, checking out the client's feelings about the transfer. Rater 1 however, heard it as a reflection on what had gone before. The client responds by giving more information but this could happen both in answer to a question and in response to the empathy and understanding shown in a reflective statement.

At this distance from the original interview there is no way of checking out what was in the social worker's mind. It perhaps has to be accepted that there will be a small proportion of worker utterances that remain ambiguous. This is more of a problem in research than in practice. Social workers who are rating their own interviews or who are being rated by supervisors would be able to make the necessary interpretations.

Misunderstanding the Category System

While human error, verbal ambiguity and some disagreements are bound to occur, the problem of raters misunderstanding the use of the category system is more serious. It is difficult to tell whether the fault lies with the rater or with the category system.

1. Rater Problems

There is evidence to show that rater 1 misunderstood the category system in two respects. These were the use of interpretation and the use of Open and Closed Questions.

a] Interpretation

There were six instances of Interpretation over the six interviews which were coded by the researcher and agreed by rater 2. None of these were scored by rater 1. As Interpretation is a rare category - it did not occur at all in three out of the six interviews - it

may be easily overlooked by raters who fall into a mental pattern of scoring mainly Questions and Information. In addition it may not be so obvious in its format as Direct Guidance or Self-Revelation. Nevertheless, it can be an important turning point in an interview, leading to client insight and fresh perspective.

There were four instances of Interpretation in interview 37. Of these rater 1 coded one as Challenge, one as Reflection of Content and two as Information. This suggests that she was missing the category altogether rather than confusing it with any other single category.

b] Open and Closed Questions

There is evidence that rater 1 was also confused over the use of Open and Closed Questions. Over the six interviews there were 25 instances of rater 1 coding an Open Question when the researcher and rater 2 had both coded it as Closed. There were no instances of her rating Open Questions as Closed.

Closed Questions have a limited number of possible responses while Open Questions are exploratory in nature and do not attempt to limit the response. Rater 1 seems to have misunderstood these definitions in that she rates as Closed Questions only those

questions with one "correct" answer. For example in interview 7, she rates as Closed :

"When did you come back from South Africa?"

and

"How old is your other child?"

which have only one possible answer.

In interview 33, she rates as Open :

"Does he have a lot of friends coming round for him?"

and

"Does he do as he's told when you say that?"

These both have yes/no answers, or answers that can be drawn from a limited range of alternatives. Rater 1, consistently scores such questions as Open.

This finding helps to account for the different scores across interviews. Interviews containing Interpretations and a high proportion of Closed Questions could be expected to have a higher rate of researcher/rater disagreement than the others. This was particularly true of interviews 12 and 18.

If Open Questions and Interpretations are omitted as a factor in researcher/rater discrepancy, then the number of disagreements over all six interviews drops to only 61 out of a total of 325 worker utterances. This represents an agreement rate of 81%, when errors due to obvious misunderstanding are eliminated.

2. Problems with the System

Despite problems with Open and Closed Questions, over the interviews as a whole, questions were identified as questions by rater and researcher in nearly all cases. There was a difference of opinion over this in only 16 instances in the six interviews. In twelve out of the sixteen instances, the confusion was with the category of Reflection of Content. For example in interview 33, when the worker is discussing problems about the client's son, he remarks :

"You seem to talk to him a lot, don't you?"

This could be seen as Reflection of Content or as a request for more information. In a sense, it could be seen as both.

It has to be acknowledged that the categories as devised are not totally unambiguous and sometimes a judgement has to be made on the best evidence available. On the whole however, levels of agreement between rater 1 and the researcher reached an acceptable level at over 70%.

Rater 2

Rater 2 was presented with a set of pre-coded interview transcripts and asked to indicate whether she agreed or disagreed with the researcher's judgement in each case.

There was no disagreement at all about any of the ratings in interviews 7, 16 and 18. Rater 2 disagreed with the researcher twice in interview 33 and three times in both interviews 12 and 37. This makes a total of 8 disagreements over the six interviews.

The different ratings seemed to stem from genuine differences of opinion rather than any errors in interpretation. For example in interview 37, when the client describes her strategy for dealing with her daughter's tantrums and the worker responds :

"Well, yes, that would keep the peace".

The researcher had heard this as Support, but rater 2 felt that the tone was rather sarcastic and that in fact, the intervention was more of a Challenge.

In the same interview, the worker says to the client :

"So can you think some more about that? Because I think that's important you know".

The researcher had scored this as an Open Question but rater 2 felt that it was Direct Guidance. [Rater 1 supported her in this].

Apart from these few instances, rater 2 and the researcher had a very high level of agreement. It is difficult to say whether this represents the reliability of the category system or the tendency to see things as accurate

once they have been written down in black and white, especially when the author is also the researcher who may, rightly or wrongly, be assumed to have greater knowledge and experience.

Conclusion

The experiment with rater 2 was perhaps not wholly successful in view of the suspiciously high level of researcher/rater agreement. However, the new trial with rater 1 provided encouraging results and gave some illuminating insights into the weaknesses and strengths of the system. An overall agreement rate of 72% was considered satisfactory.

Chapter 7

Data Analysis

When all the tapes had been collected, the data obtained yielded 23 hours of recorded interviews, comprising 348 topics and 4,129 separate verbal behaviours. Transcripts were prepared from the tape-recorded interviews and these were then coded using the 12 category system of verbal behaviours described in Chapter 6 above. Appendix 13 shows an interview which has been analysed in this way. Lines were ruled across the page to divide off each topic while vertical bar lines were used to mark the beginning and end of each unit of worker speech. In analysing the data thus obtained, four main aims were kept in mind:

- i] To describe the interviews as accurately as possible.
- ii] To look for broad patterns in the structure of interviews and in the use of verbal behaviours which would enable a model to be developed for the analysis of social work interviews.
- iii] To convey the "flavour" of the interviews through detailed textual analysis in order to illustrate not only which behaviours were used but also how they were used.
- iv] To ensure that the analysis was relevant to professional social work practice and related to current themes of concern.

1. Background to the Analysis

Each chapter of interview analysis begins with a review of the appropriate literature. This leads to certain themes being pursued if the literature indicates that they are important and relevant to current social work practice. It would have been possible to concentrate on, say, introductory remarks or the use of leading questions, but these verbal behaviours were not seen to be of major interest. On the other hand, behaviours such as giving practical help, information and advice were pursued as the literature indicates that these are common themes of concern. Thus, the direction of analysis has been determined partly by the data themselves and partly by the context of current thought and practice in the field.

2. Structural Analysis

a] Interview length

Each interview was timed. Appendices 9, 10, 11 gives the duration of each interview in ascending order. Interview length is discussed in Chapter 9.

b] The Organisation of Topics

Chapter 5 describes how graphs were constructed to show how the interviews progressed from topic to topic. The topics were listed on the vertical axis and units of time were indicated along the horizontal. [See Appendix 3]. From these graphs it

was possible to identify three main types of structural development: Unbroken Steps [Appendix 9], Step and Plateau [Appendix 10] and Broken Step [Appendix 11]. [See also Chapter 11].

3. The Number of Topics

The number of topic changes, including returns to previous topics, was counted for each interview. [Appendix 27] shows the number of topics per interview and illustrates the relationship between the number of new topics and the number of topic returns.

4. Topic Development

Appendix 28 provides a list of the number of topics introduced by clients and workers respectively for each interview. Opening topics were omitted as these were invariably introduced by the social workers. Development within topics was illustrated by the analysis of patterns of verbal behaviours. [See 8 and 13 below].

5. Topic Development and Content

Categories of content were derived from topic analysis. Topics were grouped and re-grouped under various headings until 9 main categories of content emerged. Each topic was then placed into one of these 9 categories. Appendix 12 illustrates the relationship between topics and content in the case of two interviews in the sample. The content

of interviews is discussed in Chapter 8.

6. The Analysis of Verbal Behaviours

When each interview had been coded according to the 12 category system described in Chapter 6, the frequency of each verbal behaviour was noted for all interviews [See Appendix 29]. From these figures it was possible to see which behaviours were used most and which were used least across the sample as a whole. Various other calculations could be derived from this table: for example, Appendix 33 shows the most frequent and second most frequent verbal behaviour for each interview in the sample; Appendix 34 shows the total number of questions [open and closed together] as a percentage of all verbal behaviours in each interview; Appendix 35 shows the number of open and closed questions per interview as against the number of statements giving information.

7. Listening

The analysis of Listening Behaviour presented special problems as Listening cannot be "counted" in the same way as verbal behaviours. It was addressed by timing the amount of worker speech and the amount of client speech in each interview, using a stop-watch. While the client was speaking, the worker was assumed to be listening. The ratio of worker-talk to client-talk is set out in Appendix 33. A discussion of issues involved in this method of analysis is presented in Chapter 25.

8. Linking Verbal Behaviours to Topic Analysis

When transcripts of the interviews had been divided into topic areas and coded according to verbal behaviours, it was possible to ascertain which behaviours were used to initiate topics. Appendix 34 gives a list of verbal behaviours used by social workers to open up new areas for discussion, while Appendix 35 gives a list of verbal behaviours used by workers to respond to a change of topic by the client. These results are discussed in Chapter 10.

9. The Correlation of Verbal Behaviours

Each verbal behaviour was tested against every other verbal behaviour in order to establish the correlations between them. Given the characteristics of the sample, the Pearson Test for correlation co-efficients was chosen as the most suitable procedure. The test was run through the computer twice, once to search for correlation between the numbers of behaviours per interview and once to search for correlations between the percentage use of each variable. The results of these tests are set out in Appendix 39 and 40 respectively. For a full discussion, see Chapter 26.

10. The Correlation of Verbal Behaviours with Other Variables

Using the Pearson Test for correlation co-efficients,

verbal behaviours were tested against certain other variables. These included the sex of the social worker, the length of his/her post-qualification experience, the age and sex of the client, the length of the interview and the number of topic changes per interview. None of the verbal behaviours was associated with any of these variables except for the sex of the social worker. Male social workers were found to use more Direct Guidance, Worker Self-Revelation and Challenging Behaviours; female social workers were found to use more Reflections of Feeling. The significance of these results is discussed in Chapter 26, "Verbal Behaviours - an Overview".

11. Verbal Behaviours and the Content of Interviews

The verbal behaviours in each interview were subsequently linked to content analysis. Using the coded transcripts, the number of Closed Questions, Open Questions, Reflections and other behaviours were counted within each topic. The topics were then grouped into categories of content and the number of each type of behaviour within a single category of content [for example, Relationships or Practical Matters] was obtained. Appendix 38 shows how behaviours were listed for each topic and each category of content in interview 1.

Appendix 39 shows the number of each type of verbal behaviour which fell under the heading of a discussion of Practical and Material Issues for all interviews in the

sample. Similar tables were prepared for the other categories of content such as Activities, Events and Relationships; from these data it was possible to ascertain the frequency with which a particular verbal behaviour was used within a given category of content. Appendix 40 illustrates the percentage use of each verbal behaviour within each category of content for all 40 interviews. These results are discussed in Chapter 8 and also under the relevant sections of Chapters 14 to 26.

12. Sub-types of Verbal Behaviour

Most verbal behaviours could be divided into sub-types. The category of Supportive Behaviours, for example, was divided into Re-inforcing and Sustaining behaviours. These categories were obtained by listing all worker-statements of a given type in each interview and then searching the data for groups of statements which could be placed under general headings. The statements were then grouped and re-grouped until key headings emerged. Appendix 41 shows how this was done with respect to Supportive Behaviours for interviews 1 to 10 in the sample.

The definition of sub-types is partly a subjective process as data can be grouped in various ways to illustrate a particular point or perspective. The selection of categories was guided by themes derived from the literature and by the need to illustrate certain key

points in the text.

13. Ways of Using the Verbal Behaviours

Quantitative Methods

The coded transcripts were used to identify sequences of behaviours. It was possible to pick out individual behaviours such as Open Questions and to note the behaviours immediately preceding or following them. Appendix 42 provides a list of behaviours which followed Open Questions in the sample. One point to emerge from this table was that the most common behaviour to follow an Open Question was a Closed Question and this information was used to show how sequences of questions tended to become narrowed down, moving quickly from the general to the specific. [See Chapter 14]. The transcripts were also used to illuminate the use of individual behaviours. It could be seen, for example, that Open Questions were used to introduce interviews in 17 of the 40 cases and that Closed Questions were used to introduce new topics in almost one third of all cases. [See Chapters 14 and 15 respectively].

Qualitative Methods

Lists were prepared containing all statements in a given category of behaviour. Appendix 43, for example, shows how Worker Self-Revelation was used in the 14 interviews in which it occurred. Notes in bold type indicate whether the researcher considered that the behaviour had been used

in a supportive way or in a challenging way.

In some cases, direct quotation was used to illustrate ways in which a behaviour could be used [or misused]. Chapter 16, for example, contains a lengthy quotation from interview 35 which was chosen to illustrate how a worker's explanations can lack form and clarity. The disadvantage of using direct quotation is that it can be interpreted in different ways; the advantage is that it can convey to the reader a feeling for the texture of the interviews. Throughout the thesis, dialogue is quoted at length. The quotations mostly speak for themselves but where interpretations are offered these must be judged by the reader for their accuracy.

14. Verbal Behaviours and the Client

There being no separate analysis of client's speech, the clients' contribution was analysed only in relation to that of the social worker. Many pages of worker-client dialogue were prepared, much of which was used to convey the "flavour" of individual interviews or to illustrate key points in the text.

Certain quantitative methods proved useful: for example, in order to ascertain whether the use of Reflection of Feeling by workers encouraged the clients to talk more, the clients' responses were timed using a stop-watch. Appendix 44 shows the results of this exercise for

interviews 14 to 25. It was found that, in just over half of all cases, the client talked for 15 seconds or more. [See Chapter 24].

Other methods of analysis were more subjective. In considering how clients in the sample responded to Direct Guidance by the worker, three categories of response were created; "accepts", "rejects" and "non-committal". Each client-response was placed under one of these headings according to the researcher's view of it as positive, negative or neutral in intent. In over half of all cases, the client appeared to reject the guidance offered. [See Appendix 45 and also Chapter 17].

Summary

The information from the coded interviews was analysed according to a variety of dimensions and techniques. Graphs were drawn to illustrate the organisation of topics; a stop-watch was used to time worker and client speech; verbal behaviours were counted and correlations noted, using statistical tests; direct quotation was used extensively to illustrate key points and to demonstrate workers' and clients' reactions to each other's comments.

Part II

The Content of Interviews

Chapter 8

Introduction

1. Categories of Content
2. The Main Subject Matter of the Interview
3. The Content of Interview and the Verbal Behaviours of
Social Workers

Summary and Conclusion

Part II

Chapter 8

The Content of Interviews

Introduction

Although there was considerable variation in the way the sample interviews were conducted, there seemed little disagreement as to what they should be about.

The range of content was relatively limited and almost entirely predictable. Discussion of the clients' feelings and relationships and discussion of material needs figured prominently in most interviews along with the clients' health and the incidents and events that made up their lives.

A search of the literature revealed very little on the content of interviews. Sainsbury [1975, p.39-49] touched on this issue in his study of 27 families receiving help from the Family Service Unit in Sheffield. Sainsbury asked workers and clients in the sample to estimate the single most important topic of discussion for each family. Money matters, the health and feelings of the wife and the care of the children were the most frequent areas of concern. Various other topics were mentioned but for the most part, material lack, feelings and relationships were seen as central.

More recently, Sainsbury, Nixon and Phillips [1982 p.16-

18] devised a nine category system for analysing the content of interviews as part of their study of long term family casework in three social work agencies. The nine "need areas" comprised material need, housing, employment, legal matters, health, family and external relationships, education and information giving. There were some discrepancies in the results of this study due to the fact that clients and workers disagreed about the range of needs and issues raised over the course of one year, but there was broad agreement that discussion of family issues and relationships outside the family were the most time-consuming. Material problems were discussed less frequently but took up a great deal of time when they were discussed. None of the other areas of content was regarded as very time consuming by either clients or workers.

Although the categories chosen differ, the findings from the two studies described above are broadly in line with the findings from the present study. These are described in detail in the following section.

Categories of Content

In order to discuss the content of interviews, topics were subsumed under broad headings. The figures relating to the content of interviews do not represent the number of topics discussed. For instance, in interview 31 a child's progress at school is discussed and, later on, his involvement in the drama class. These two subjects represent separate topics within the structure of the interview but for the purpose of content analysis they would both be subsumed under the main heading of "activities" and the sub-heading of "school". Appendix 12 shows how the topics contained in interviews 24 and 25 respectively were coded according to categories of content. Over the sample as a whole, nine major categories of content were identified together with "Summaries" which could contain many categories and "Other" which contained topics of individual interest or a general exchange of views.

1. Clients' Feelings

A discussion of clients' feelings took place in 33 of the 40 sample interviews. This could be an expression of the clients' current feelings or more exploratory work based on past situations and patterns of behaviour. For example, in interview 26, an older client explores her feelings about going into an elderly person's home; in interview 27, a client describes her feelings of

helplessness and confusion as a patient in a psychiatric unit; in interview 30, the client talks about her feelings of depression and reflects on times in the past when she has had similar feelings.

In one way, everything a client says during an interview tells us something about the way he/she is feeling at the time. This typology attempts to separate out the occasions on which the client is encouraged to concentrate on those feelings in some depth rather than focusing on someone or something else.

2. Relationships

This was the second major category of content. Clients talked about relationships in 29 out of the 40 sample interviews. The most common form of relationship discussed was that of parent-child or child-parent. In 9 interviews, a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend was discussed and in 8 cases, relationships outside the immediate family.

It is not always easy to distinguish talk about a relationship from the feelings that go with it. The divorced wife in interview 14 who is complaining about how her ex-husband never calls her or answers her letters, is not only talking about her husband but also describing her own feelings.

Many clients, however, were able to discuss relationships

with some degree of objectivity. For example, the mother in interview 31 talks about her daughter's ability to cope at home when she returns from hospital; the mother in interview 33 discusses her son's progress at school; the father in interview 33 talks about the way in which his three children have settled down with his ex-wife and her new husband.

3. Practical Matters

Twenty-four of the sample interviews contained a discussion of practical matters [20 contained offers of practical help]. Financial problems were the most common [17 interviews]. There was a discussion of accommodation problems in 8 interviews. Four interviews included a discussion of the need for additional services such as meal-on-wheels or home nursing.

Some clients had problems in all three major areas. The young unmarried mother in interview 16 was homeless, impecunious and in dire need of support services. In contrast, the mother in interview 7 was married and her husband was working, but she needed help with finding a council house near to where her child went to school.

4. Activities

This general term related to the way in which the client spent his/her time. It was taken to include references to school, paid work, leisure pursuits or any regular

commitments such as groups or day centres.

Eighteen interviews contained discussions of clients' activities. In interview 23, the subject was the client's need to find a job. In interview 18, the social worker was encouraging a depressed client to attend a regular group. For young clients, the talk tended to centre around school [interviews 34, 13 and 15].

5. Events

In fourteen interviews, clients spent some time describing incidents, events or happenings in their lives. For example, in interview 29 the client talks about his day out at Blackpool with his girlfriend and his mother. In interview 21, the client, who is recovering from breast cancer, describes a follow-up visit to the clinic with her friend. In interview 24, the client tells the worker about how he was attacked on the way back from the pub one night. This type of subject matter seems designed primarily to inform the social worker of what has been happening since their last meeting.

6. Health Matters

The client's health was discussed in 12 out of the 40 sample interviews. This included both mental and physical health as well as discussion about medication.

Subjects covered by this category ranged from cancer

[interview 19], agoraphobia [interview 26] and depression [interview 18] through to a nasty cough [interview 13].

The subject was not always the client's own health. In interview 31, a mother discusses the effects of her daughter's schizophrenic illness on family life. In interview 20, one of the subjects in the interview is the client's little boy who has a bowel disorder.

It is not surprising that most of the interviews containing subject matter of this kind were recorded by either psychiatric social workers, or medical social workers or, in one case, by an area social worker attached to a general practice.

7. Arranging Appointments

In 10 interviews, making arrangements to meet took up so much time that it had to be classed as a separate category of content.

There were various reasons for this. For example, in interview 9, there was some difficulty about finding a mutually convenient time. In interview 10, the worker wanted to be sure that when he next called the client would not only be at home but would also be sober. In interview 29, in addition to fixing a date the worker also wished to discuss his level of involvement with the client in terms of how often they needed to meet.

8. Role of Worker/Department

This was discussed in only 7 of the sample interviews. The subject arose in several ways. In interview 9, the worker enquires about the kind of work the client has undertaken with the previous social worker. In interview 2, the client enquires about the possibility of changing his social worker. In interview 33, the client wishes to know whether or not the department will continue to be involved with his children after custody proceedings are completed.

9. Statutory Matters

This was the least used category of content [4 interviews]. Interview 24 concerned a review of children in care; interviews 15 and 35 concerned custody proceedings; interview 27 concerned detention under the Mental Health Act.

10. Summaries

Eight interviews contained summaries of some length and these were separated out for analytical purposes as they were likely to contain a number of different subject areas.

11. Other

Thirteen interviews contained topics which did not fit easily into the nine major categories of content. These

included topics which were specific to the client such as the publication of a foster child's picture in a magazine in interview 3, or a discussion of pop music in interview 24.

The main categories of content are summarised in Table 8 below.

Table 8 - Categories of Content in the Sample Interviews

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Client Feelings | 33 interviews |
| 2. Relationships | 29 interviews |
| 3. Practical Problems | 24 interviews |
| 4. Activities | 18 interviews |
| 5. Events | 14 interviews |
| 6. Health Matters | 12 interviews |
| 7. Arranging Appointments | 10 interviews |
| 8. Role of Worker/Department | 7 interviews |
| 9. Statutory Matters | 4 interviews |
| Summaries | 11 interviews |
| Other | 13 interviews |
| N = 40 | |

The Main Subject Matter of the Interviews

Although talk about client feelings and relationships tended to occur in most of the sample interviews these were not necessarily the main subjects.

The length of time taken up by the various subjects within interviews was calculated in units of tape on the tape counter. This was recorded using the graph developed for topic analysis. For example, in interview 23 the subject of "getting a job" which was introduced in the first part of the interview, and later returned to, took up the most time. It accounted for 178 units of tape in an interview comprising 504 units. This represents about 35% of interview time and would be included under the heading of "Activities". The client's account of his day's work which occurs at the beginning of the interview would also be included under "Activities". The two topics together account for 238 units of tape or over 47% of interview time.

This calculation was made for each of the sample interviews. The results are set out in table 9 below.

Table 9 - The Main Subject Matter of Interviews

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Talk about Relationships | 15 interviews |
| 2. Talk about Practical Problems | 10 interviews |
| 3. Talk about Client Feelings | 8 interviews |
| 4. Talk about Activities | 5 interviews |
| 5. Statutory Matters | 1 interview |
| 6. Health Matters | 1 interview |

N = 40

The table shows that despite the fact that a discussion of clients' feelings occurred in 33 out of the 40 sample interviews, it was the main topic in only 8 of these. Talk about relationships and talk about practical problems were the most frequent main topics. Together these comprised the main topics in over half the sample.

It should be noted that in a number of interviews, although there was a clear main topic in terms of the number of units on the tape counter, other subjects came close to taking up the same amount of time and were accorded similar emphasis. Some interviews contained two or more main themes. For example, in interview 29 considerable time was spent discussing the client's depressive illness as well as his relationships with his mother and his girlfriend. In interview 33, the client spent considerable time discussing her own feelings as well as her son's problems at school.

It should also be noted that some subjects, although given

less time, might be very important. For example in interview 34, the social worker spends most time discussing his teenage client's problems at school. The section of the interview in which they go on to discuss his mother's reaction to this is possibly of equal significance, although it is not accorded very much time.

The Content of Interviews and the Verbal Behaviours of
Social Workers

In order to analyse the relationship between content and verbal behaviours, transcripts of the interviews were first divided into topic areas and then coded using the 12 category system of verbal behaviours described in Chapter 6. From these coded transcripts it was possible to obtain the number of each type of verbal behaviour within each topic area. When topics were subsumed under broad categories of content, the figures within each topic were summated to give the total number of each type of verbal behaviour for each of the nine categories of content. From these figures it was possible to calculate the percentage use of individual behaviours within a given category of content [see Appendix 43].

The relationship between content and verbal behaviour was much as expected. It was found that Closed Questions were most frequently used when discussing practical matters as was Information Giving. Social workers used more Open Questions when discussing clients' feelings, relationships, health, and events in the clients' lives. The use of Reflection of Feeling was most common in discussions about the clients' own feelings and health problems.

Differences within categories of content were not as significant, however, as differences in the overall use of

behaviours across the sample. Closed Questions, for example, figured highly in all categories of content while rarer behaviours such as Interpretation or Worker Self-Revelation had a low incidence in all categories.

The relationship between content and individual verbal behaviours is described in more detail in Part IV of the thesis, under the relevant chapter headings.

Summary and Conclusion

A discussion of client feelings occurred in 33 out of 40 interviews and a discussion of relationships in 29 out of 40 interviews. Practical problems were the next most frequent subject of discussion [24 interviews], followed by talk about the clients' activities [18 interviews].

When the length of time spent on different categories of content was considered, a different order emerged. Talk about relationships was the most common main subject, followed by talk about practical matters such as finance and accommodation. Discussion of clients' feelings was third in rank order. Although a rather different set of categories was used, these findings are broadly in line with those of Sainsbury [1975] and Sainsbury et al. [1982].

Certain verbal behaviours were found to be associated with certain categories of content. For example, there was a greater use of Closed Questions when discussing practical matters and a greater use of Open Questions when discussing the clients' feelings.

These findings indicate that, to a certain extent, workers were prepared to alter their verbal behaviour in accordance with the subject matter. Over the interviews as a whole, however, certain styles still tended to dominate. Social workers might use relatively more Open

Questions when discussing clients' feelings and relatively more Reflections of Feeling when discussing clients' health, but if Closed Questions was the most frequent verbal behaviour throughout an interview, it tended to be the most frequent for all categories of content.

Part III

The Structure of Interviews

Introduction

Chapter 9 - Interview Length

Chapter 10 - Beginnings and Endings

Chapter 11 - The Organisation of Topics

Chapter 12 - Topic Development

Chapter 13 - An Overview

The Structure of Interviews

Introduction

In the following chapters, the structure of the interviews within the sample is considered with reference to the length of the interview, the beginnings and endings of interviews, the organisation of topics, and how the interview progresses from topic to topic.

Baldock and Prior [1981a] found little evidence of formal structure in the 24 social work interviews they studied. They found the interviews in their sample long and rambling in contrast to the interviews of general practitioners as described by Byrne and Long [1976]. Doctors, the authors maintain, divide their consultations into six clear stages: greeting the patient, finding out why they are there, a physical or verbal examination, a consideration of the condition, a discussion of treatment, and the termination of the interview. Baldock and Prior found no equivalent stages in social work interviews and therefore concluded that they lacked any sort of structure at all.

Although in the present sample no universal or typical format emerged, a great variety and versatility of structure was found. Some interviews were tightly controlled by the worker and moved from topic to topic in orderly progression, while others ranged more loosely round a number of themes; some demonstrated a combination

of a structured approach followed by a more loosely controlled discussion; in only a very few cases did the interviews become rambling or difficult to follow.

As Shulman [1979] points out, structure is related to control within the interview. A more explicit structure gives the worker a greater degree of control over the interaction. A more open structure affords the client a greater degree of freedom to direct the interview.

Chapter 9

Interview Length

Ours is a culture of clocks and watches. We pay our workers by the hour and measure much in terms of time. The length of time we choose to spend with people can be a token of how much we value them. Having only a short time for people can indicate how busy and important we consider ourselves to be.

Social workers in the sample spent a considerable amount of time with clients. Although the length of interviews varied between 8 and 69 minutes, only 7 of the 40 interviews lasted less than 20 minutes. Eighteen interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes and a further 15 interviews lasted over 40 minutes [see Appendix 7].

Baldock and Prior [1981a] obtained similar results. In their sample of 24 social work interviews, the length varied from 15 minutes to over an hour with most interviews lasting between 30 and 45 minutes.

1. Factors Associated with Interview Length

It is difficult to account for the wide variations in length between interviews. Some possible factors are discussed below:

i] Number of Topics

There was no relationship between the number of topics introduced and the length of the interview. For example, interview 12 which lasted 22 minutes contained 12 topics while interview 38 which lasted 28 minutes contained only three major topic areas.

ii] Individual Workers

In the case of the nine workers who recorded only one interview it is not possible to say whether or not the length of the interview represented a typical pattern.

Twelve workers recorded more than one interview. Four of these showed some consistency regarding interview length. A worker in a Child Guidance Clinic did three 25 minute interviews; a psychiatric social worker did three 50 minute interviews and an area social worker for the elderly did two 35 minute interviews. A worker for a Homeless Families Unit did one interview lasting 10 minutes and another lasting 15 minutes. These results show that some workers at least seem to be working to a preconceived time scale.

The majority of workers, however, were clearly influenced by other factors when deciding on the length of time to spend with clients. For example, a Child Guidance worker recorded a 9 minute interview with one client followed by a 45 minute interview with

another. A child care worker in an area team recorded a 25 minute interview followed by one of 70 minutes.

Although workers may not work to a regular pattern, it is reasonable to assume, given the constraints of a normal working day, that they have some idea of how long an interview should last before they begin. There is no evidence that this is communicated to the client, but if workers are specifically challenged on this issue, their sense of timing is revealed.

In interview 34, the client, a schoolboy being interviewed on the school premises reminds the worker that it is 3.30 pm and time to go home. This clearly upsets the worker's schedule:

Worker: "Already? You're right! Well, hang on, just one thing before you go then....."

In interview 25, the client's stated desire to get to her Bingo session necessitates some clarification as regards the length of the interview:

Worker: "How long have you got? I know you want to go to Bingo. What time is the Bingo?"

The client says she can go at any time.

Worker: "Oh, yes. Well, I think about another quarter of an hour if that's alright with you."

iii] The Client

The two examples above illustrate cases in which the client takes some responsibility for determining the length of the interview. There is only one other instance of this in the sample interviews. The client in interview 23 informs his social worker that he has to be away by ten-past-one in order to meet his girlfriend.

iv] Location

The sample contained 17 office interviews and 21 home interviews, [see Appendix 6]. No correlation could be found between the location and the length of the interviews but it is worth noting that if travelling time is considered, the home visits take up considerably more of the worker's time than office interviews.

v] Aims of the Interview

Social workers used different words to describe their aims. For the purpose of analysis, these were collated under four main headings: assessment, support, counselling, and giving information or practical help. [see Chapter 3, Table 5].

No relationship could be found between the length of interviews and either assessment or support as a

stated aim but the evidence pointed to a possible correlation between length and counselling and also between length and the giving of practical help, advice or information.

Interviews in which the stated aim was insight orientation or counselling tended to be longer than interviews in which the main aim was to help or advise.

None of the 12 interviews in which counselling was a stated aim lasted less than 20 minutes and 8 out of the 12 interviews lasted more than 40 minutes. Indeed, these were amongst the longest interviews generally, two of them were more than an hour in duration.

In contrast, interviews in which the giving of practical help and advice was a stated aim tended to be shorter. Twelve out of the 14 interviews in this category lasted less than 40 minutes and 4 interviews lasted less than 20 minutes [see Appendix 8].

It must be stressed that these figures refer only to the main aims of interviews as noted down by the workers themselves. Listening to the interviews, it is possible to discern additional aims and sometimes alternative aims. In terms of the workers' perceptions, however, there is some evidence to show that they saw counselling interviews as needing a

greater length of time than the more practical type of interview.

2. Interruptions

One of the findings which surprised Baldock and Prior [1981a] in their sample of social work interviews was the frequency of interruptions. These occurred in 16 out of their 24 interviews. Even more surprising was the fact that nobody seemed annoyed or put out by any of these interruptions. For the authors, this is evidence of the low value put on social work time. The transaction is not considered important enough to warrant the undivided attention of both parties.

Against this it could be argued that frequent interruptions are part of the "real life" atmosphere associated with the social work interview. They are tolerated because they are part of the social work role that has to do with befriending. In conversation with friends, we do not normally take the telephone off the hook and, when at home, clients would normally deal with callers, small children and other demands on their time.

The findings in the current sample confirm the findings of Baldock and Prior but not their interpretations. There were interruptions in 17 out of the 40 sample interviews, all of which were accepted with good humour as part of the natural course of events. Neither client nor worker felt

the need to apologise when interruptions occurred.

Although the frequency of interruptions was about the same, the type of interruption varied according to whether the interview took place in the office or in the client's home.

A telephone call was the source of interruption in 5 of the 9 office interviews. In interview 28, the worker received three calls during the interview, one for himself and two for a colleague with whom he shared a room.

In three office interviews, people coming in and out of the room caused an interruption. In interview 39, a colleague came in at the end, needing to use the room. In the other two interviews people came into the room needing to speak to the worker for one reason or another. In interview 35, the client interrupted the interview to go to the lavatory.

The most frequent cause of interruption in the home interviews was people other than social worker and client. Children made demands: in interview 20, a two year old refused to sit down and be quiet; the baby was crying; later the son of the house was making a considerable noise upstairs and the client had to go and tell him to be quiet. In interview 4, older children wanted to show the worker some photographs and later demanded money for ice cream. In interview 8 there is an interruption while the client goes off to make the tea and a second one later

when a man calls to fix the bathroom light. Interview 32 breaks up when visitors arrive. In interview 10, a friend keeps wandering in and out to ask for various bits of information. In interview 22 there is a friend [or relative] in the room who sometimes interrupts to offer his own opinion and is usually told to keep quiet by the client. [For a complete list of interruptions see Appendix 46].

Summary and Conclusion

There is a wide variation in the duration of social work interviews but most tend to last between 20 minutes and one hour. There is evidence that some social workers work to a regular pattern - for example, the 50 minute or the 20 minute interview - but most seem to adapt the length of the interview in accordance with a range of factors. They tend to allow more time if they consider that counselling or the discussion of personal problems is involved and less time for dealing with more simple, practical matters.

It has been argued that the high number of interruptions which are tolerated in interviews is an indication of how little value social workers place on their own time and that of their clients. On the other hand, while interruptions may distract from the main purpose of the interview, they may also contribute to the spontaneous, friendly atmosphere in which many social work transactions are conducted.

Lengthy, open ended interviews help create the illusion that clients have all the time in the world but in reality, the worker has only a limited amount of time before his/her next appointment. This situation leaves the clients relatively disadvantaged. If clients do not know when an interview is coming to an end, then it is difficult for them to judge the best time to raise topics. If they do not know how long an interview is likely to

last, they cannot participate fully in planning their own roles within it.

Chapter 10

Beginnings and Endings

1. Beginnings

The researcher looked in vain at the beginning of interviews for evidence of an orientation phase variously described in the literature as "set induction", "getting in" or "tuning in". Social workers and clients alike moved straight into interview mode and got down to business without delay.

It is possible that the use of the tape-recorder cut out some preliminary comments necessary to establish good rapport but in most cases, switching on the recorder appeared to mark the beginning of the interview.

Worker or Client Beginnings

Workers were responsible for opening the interview in 33 out of 40 sample interviews. Clients began interviews in 5 cases and in a further 2 cases [interviews 21 and 40] the beginnings were lost due to recording difficulties.

Opening Gambits

Workers used an open-ended question to begin interviews in over half of all cases [18 out of 33]. In a further 9 cases they made some statement as to the purpose of the interview or regarding their own role. The remaining 6 interviews began either with a piece of general

information or with a closed question. This information is summarised in Table 10 below:

Table 10 - Behaviours Used by Social Workers to Begin Interviews

| <u>Behaviour</u> | <u>No:</u> |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Open Question | 18 |
| Statement of Purpose/Role | 9 |
| General Information | 2 |
| Closed Question | 4 |
| Client Begins Interview | 5 |
| Data unobtainable | 2 |
| | ----- |
| | N = 40 |

a] Open Questions

Most beginning questions were general and unfocussed. For example:

"Now, how can I help?" [Interview 1]

"How are you and how have things been generally?"
[Interview 18]

"So how's things?" [Interview 29].

Only 4 out of the 18 open questions at the beginning of interviews referred to specific topics:

"Are things going o.k. at the home?" [Interview 2]

"Tell me about your job. How's it working out?"
[Interview 3].

An open question at the start of an interview was a signal that the interview had commenced rather than a predictor of how the interview was likely to progress. Fourteen out of the 18 interviews which began with an open question, included a closed question in the next two behaviours. In interview 1, an initial open question was followed by a sequence of 17 closed questions. In interview 3, an initial open question was followed by 15 closed questions. This narrowing down of the interview process from less focussed to more focussed discussion is reflected throughout the sample interviews [see Chapter 14 on Open Questions].

b] Statements of Role and Purpose

A definition of social work role occurred in only 2 cases at the beginning of interviews. It more commonly occurred during the course of the interview, often in response to a client request. Accordingly, it is discussed in Chapter 16 on Giving Information.

A statement concerning the purpose of the interview occurred in 7 out of the 40 sample interviews. Such statements were usually brief and imprecise:

"So all I wanted to do really was to find out how things were going at the house at the moment". [Interview 2]

"One of the reasons that I wanted to talk to you now is because you've reached a point where you have to make quite an important decision". [Interview 12].

Interview 38 is unusual in that the worker spells out what she hopes to achieve in a little more detail. The client is a 13 year old boy who has recently come into care. The social worker's aim is to absolve the client from guilt about his circumstances without laying the blame directly on his parents:

"What we want to do is to look at what has happened to you since before you came here - understand perhaps better for you how these things came about - because like I said to you before, I don't believe that all this is your fault. I think you need to understand a bit more what has happened to you".

Hargie et al. [1981 p.130], outline the importance of describing function:

"This technique of providing guidelines about the probable content of a forthcoming interaction allows participants to set themselves fully. They will therefore be mentally prepared for the topics to be discussed, and will be thinking about possible contributions they may be able to make. It also means the individual often feels more secure in the situation, knowing in advance what the purpose of the interaction is....".

The social workers in the present sample gave very little indication of function or purpose. Does this leave clients bewildered and at a loss? Baldock and Prior [1981a] who obtained very similar results from their own

sample believe that it does. They judged from a study of twenty-four recorded interviews that clients seemed to be in a state of confusion concerning the object of the social work interview. Indeed, they claim that clients had trouble knowing when it was over, precisely because they did not know what it had been about in the first place.

The researcher gained no impression of confusion or misunderstanding in the present sample. The purpose of the interview was generally clear to her [a trained social worker] and there is no reason to suppose that it was not equally clear to the clients although it may not have been spelt out.

Much depends on the definition of purpose. In some cases, if the general aim of the visit was to see if the client was coping reasonably well, to give him/her a chance to talk about any major worries or concerns and to offer help if appropriate, then it would seem that this was well understood by both client and worker. If the worker had other aims such as making a detailed evaluation of the client's child rearing skills, ability to live independently or suitability to continue as a foster parent, then these were not necessarily revealed to the client.

Although Hargie et al. [1983, p.129] stress the importance of outlining goals for any forthcoming interaction they

add:

"This is not possible in many contexts, notably during client-centred counselling sessions where the client is allowed to structure the interaction and decide what should be discussed".

The interviews in the sample each contained a mixture of directive and non-directive styles linked to the topics under discussion. Within this, however, it would seem that workers were committed to leaving some space in the interview for clients to use as they wished. It is perhaps for this reason that they seemed unwilling to prescribe the boundaries of the exchange at the outset.

2.

Endings

Kadushin [1972, p.207] writes that interview endings should be "friendly, collaborative and definite". Behaviours associated with this phase of the interview are summarising and arranging new appointments.

In the present sample, social workers used both these devices as well as reassurances, offers of practical help, general terminating remarks and in some cases the final question, "Anything else?".

Worker or Client Endings

The worker brought the interview to a conclusion in 34 out of 40 interviews. In one case the interview was terminated by the client [he needed to get home] and in

the other five cases the interview became inaudible as the participants presumably moved towards the door or turned off the tape.

Ending Behaviours

Table 11 below, summarises the behaviours used by workers to end interviews. There was often more than one behaviour. For example, in interview 5 the worker asks if there is anything else the client wants to say, arranges a further appointment and in the meantime offers to complete the paperwork pertaining to the client's taxation form.

Table 11 - Ways of Ending Interviews

[N = 34]

| | |
|--|----|
| Direct Statement, Announcement or Excuse | 14 |
| Reference to the Next Meeting | 12 |
| Summary | 7 |
| "Anything else?" | 7 |
| Reassurance | 5 |
| Offer of Practical Help | 3 |

a] Statements, Announcements and Excuses

These amounted to official notices of dismissal:

"Well, I think we've said everything". [Interview 22]

"Well, I won't keep you". [Interview 23]

"Shall we leave it there?" [Interview 37].

Sometimes the blow was softened with a mild excuse, especially if the client seemed reluctant to terminate:

"I must be going 'cos this guy has been waiting".
[Interview 28]

"I really ought to be getting back to the office 'cos I've lots more work to do". [Interview 33].

b] Reference to Further Meetings

Arrangements to meet took place in 16 out of the 40 sample interviews but occurred at the end of interviews in only 12 cases. In these cases, moving on to talk of the next interview can be seen as one way of indicating that the present interview is effectively over.

Arrangements tended to be left vague. No time is mentioned in interview 8:

"I'll call in and see you next Wednesday".

No day is mention in interview 11:

"And in about 3 weeks I'll come and I'll tell you the day that we are going to come and do the cleaning".

No time or day is mentioned in interview 20:

"Well, we can always take it further when I come to see you again".

This casual attitude to making appointments was noted in the literature of the 1970's. Rees [1974] in a study of 8 cases with unsuccessful outcomes, comments on a breakdown of communications between social worker and client with regard to the relatively simple business of arranging to meet. Workers, he contends, felt they were "leaving the door open". Clients, on the other hand may have felt let down.

Stevenson et al. [1978] in their review of social service teams, found that appointments were rare except for first visits and statutory work such as preparing a report:

".....definite appointments were rarely made but clients were usually given an approximate indication of the date for the next visit.....nearly everyone had a few clients whom they believed they could drop in to see at any time". [Chap.5, para.11].

The system of casual visiting which is evident in the present sample contrasts strongly with the practice in other professions. Doctors' appointments are made through the receptionist. Solicitors' appointments are made through their secretaries. In cases where payment is involved, dentists and chiropodists may even charge for missed appointments.

The social worker's informal attitude to appointments reflects the informal structure of most of the interviews. Workers may prefer to see themselves as "popping in for a chat" rather than organising a definite time for a formal interview.

c] Summaries

Egan [1975 p.15], defines a good summary thus:

"A good summary is not a mechanical pulling together of a number of facts; it is a systematic presentation of relevant data. The helper makes some decisions as to what is relevant but bases this decision of listening to and understanding the client".

In the present sample, summaries occurred at the end of only 7 interviews. Most of these were short, hurried interventions which concentrated on brief plans for action, rather than on a thoughtful reappraisal of the main themes of concern discussed earlier in the interview. For example, in interview 36 the placement of the client's children is in some doubt. The worker has decided to call a meeting between the client, her ex-husband, his new wife and the children's foster mother to discuss this issue. At the end of the interview he sums up the plans:

"So I think that's the way we'll have to tackle it. We'll adapt that plan should we? Week after next, arrange a meeting - you, me and Maggie. Also some time next week I'll sound out the kids themselves. See if I can get Dick to come to a meeting with you. If it appeases Carol, it could be the three of us together and then we'll see what the decision is after all this lot. If it's what we fear, then we can start working for it".

It is noted in Chapter 16 [Giving Information] that social

workers in the sample gave little thought to the presentation of information in terms of order and clarity. This is also reflected in the lack of summarising of key points throughout the interviews. It is perhaps most lacking at the end of the interviews where it could serve to check any misconceptions and ensure that the most important points have been noted by both parties.

d] "Anything Else?"

This question occurred in some form at the end of 7 interviews. It seemed to be used as a quick checking device which signalled the end of the conversation rather than as a serious attempt to elicit further information. In only one case [interview 12] did it produce a positive response from the client; he revealed that his Giro cheque had not arrived from the DHSS.

e] Reassurance

Reassuring statements at the end of interviews can be seen as attempts to finish on a positive note despite discussion of an emotionally laden and possibly distressing nature earlier on.

In the sample interviews, reassurances typically consisted of an assurance of the worker's continued concern and a promise to stay in touch.

For example, in interview 1 which has consisted largely of a catalogue of errors on the part of the hospital where

the client's father is a patient, the worker concludes thus:

"We'll try to get it right this time and I'll keep in touch with the Day Hospital. You know where I am if you want me for anything at all".

Similarly in interview 34 the worker wants the client to know that despite his difficulties at school, he will stand by him:

"Obviously if something crops up and I need to see you in the meantime someone will give me a ring. Otherwise, I hope things go well for the next fortnight 'cos I want you to carry on doing your work".

f] Practical Help

Baldock and Prior [1981a] suggest that an offer of practical help by social workers [writing a letter or agreeing to telephone another agency] is equivalent to the doctor handing out a prescription at the end of a surgery session. There was no evidence to support this contention in the current sample. Practical help was offered at the end of interviews in only 3 cases. In interview 5, the worker agreed to have some forms photocopied; in interview 12, the worker agrees to find out about the client's missing Giro cheque; and in interview 30, the worker goes off to contact the client's doctor about her next appointment. In all other instances, offers of practical

help formed part of the body of the interview.

Summary and Conclusion

The way workers began and ended interviews typified their informal approach to interviewing in general. There was no clear introduction or "warm up" phase - worker and client plunged straight in. There was no gradual slowing down of interviews towards the end - workers and clients stopped when they felt everything had been said.

There were certain verbal cues which marked the beginning and endings of interviews. Open questions of a general nature were commonly used to start interviews, as they are in everyday conversation. Interviews tended not to continue in this open way, but quickly became narrowed down to focus on a particular topic. Some interviews contained a preliminary statement about the purpose of the meeting or the role of the worker but these were present in less than one-quarter of all cases.

A variety of means were used to signal the end of interviews. Some workers used a direct, terminating statement, others began the business of fixing another appointment. There were final reassurances and offers of help and the token question "Anything else?". It was rare to find a summary at the end of an interview. This omission was taken as further evidence of the disorganised way in which information was generally imparted to the

clients throughout the sample interviews.

The low number of statements of purpose at the beginning of interviews and the lack of summarising or organisation of data at the end, together with the curious omission of precise dates and times when fixing appointments, all point to the informal way in which most workers seem to regard the interview. Interviews gave the appearance of being unplanned, although not disorganised. Social workers seemed content to preserve the model of a friend dropping in for a chat rather than a pre-arranged, planned, purposeful meeting.

Chapter 11

The Organisation of Topics

Introduction

Interviews can be divided up in many ways for the purpose of analysis. They may be divided into thirds mathematically [beginnings, middles and ends], or time sequences may be taken such as 5 or 10 minute intervals within interviews. The method adopted in the current research was to divide each interview into its constituent topic areas. Topics were chosen because they seemed to form natural divisions. The raising of discrete topic areas, developing discussion around those areas and bringing the topic to a close seemed to define the form and rhythm of individual interviews.

Topics are distinct from the content of interviews [for a discussion of content see Chapter 8]. For example, the content of interview 7 concerns the client's housing problems, but within this framework different topics are discussed such as the client's present circumstances, the areas she would consider moving into and the need to be near her son's school.

Topic areas within interviews were first noted down and then plotted on to graph paper in order to make a visual reproduction of the shape of the interview. The tape counter was used to represent units of length on the

graph. Although this is not a totally accurate method as the tape takes a slightly different time to complete a circuit according to how fully wound it is, it was considered accurate enough to show the rough shape of the interview and to represent the course of topic development.

Appendices 9 to 11 show how interviews look when drawn out on graph paper. From these representations it is possible to see at a glance the number of topics, the content of topics, the order of topics, the approximate time spent on each topic and whether topics were returned to later in the interview. It is also possible to discern whether or not the interview progresses in an orderly fashion or whether its development is erratic, jumping from one topic to another and back again.

The Number of Topics

The number of topics per interview is set out in Appendix 27. It can be seen that the number of new topics ranged from three to fourteen topics with most interviews having six or more. The range was fairly evenly spread. Roughly half the interviews [21] contained between 3 and 8 topics and the remainder [19] contained between 9 and 14.

Returns to Previous Topics

In many interviews topics were discussed more than once. When topic returns are considered along with new topics,

the total number of topic areas per interview is, in many cases, much greater. The range extends from 5 to 23 changes of topic per interview when returns are included and represents a fairly even spread across the sample interviews.

Over a quarter of the sample [14 interviews] contained no topic returns or only one. At the other end of the scale, almost a quarter [9 interviews] contained 6 or more topic returns. The number of topic returns did not appear to relate to the number of new topics per interview [see Appendix 30].

A high number of topics which need to be discussed more than once suggests poor planning, muddled thinking or at worst, rambling and incoherent interviews. A closer examination of the sample suggests that there may be other reasons for a high number of topic returns:

i] An interview may contain one main theme running through the interview. Other peripheral themes may emerge to be briefly dealt with before returning to the main business of the interview. For example, in interviews 3 and 4, which are very similar, the main business of the interview is the client's foster child. Along the way, other issues emerge such as the client's relationship with the child's family of origin and the relationship of her own family to the child, but each time, the main topic, the welfare of the child herself, is returned to.

ii] In some cases, the subject which the worker wishes to discuss may not be the same as that which the client wishes to discuss. For example, in interview 11, the worker is trying to persuade the client to clean up his flat. The client is keen to discuss almost any issue except this and constantly seeks to divert the worker from the main business of the interview. On a number of occasions the worker has to reintroduce the idea of getting the cleaning done. Similarly in interview 22 involving a custody case, the client would rather discuss his wife instead of his children. At various points the worker has to bring the discussion back to a consideration of the children.

iii] Some topics may be insufficiently aired when they first arise. Interview 2 begins with a discussion of the client's financial situation. Later in the interview the client reintroduces the topic and indicates that he is not satisfied with the arrangements. Possibly, he had lacked the courage to challenge the social worker earlier or he may have had time to contemplate the arrangements more fully during the course of the interview.

iv] Topics may be reintroduced in order to provide emphasis. In interview 7 in which housing problems are being discussed, the worker explains about the client's computer number which is held at the Housing Department as a file reference. Later in the interview, she returns to

this topic to emphasise how important the computer number is if she is to find out any information on behalf of the client.

v] Some clients are inherently difficult to interview. For example, the client in interview 8 is an elderly lady whose mind tends to wander from one subject to another. The client in interview 27 is mentally ill and finds it difficult to concentrate on any topic for very long.

These five factors may go some way towards explaining the high number of topic returns in individual cases. In other cases, the evidence could be viewed as simply suggesting a conversational interview style based on a relatively unstructured, spontaneous approach. Topics are dealt with as they crop up and the interview ebbs and flows around a number of interwoven themes which emerge and re-emerge at different points.

Some interviews contained a very low number of topic returns or none at all. Over the sample as a whole, a number of different patterns could be demonstrated. These are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Interview Patterns

Interviews in which there are many topic returns may be taken to represent a more informal, fluid pattern of interviewing. Interviews which proceed in strict order from one area of discussion to the next, in topics of

roughly equal length, represent a more rigidly controlled pattern. The sample contained a range of interviews between these two extremes. Three main patterns were identified.

a] Unbroken Steps

Appendix 9 demonstrates a regular structure. There are six topics of approximately equal length. Dividing the interview into thirds, two topics are raised in the first third, two in the second and two in the last. No topic is discussed more than once.

This was the least common type of interview. Only 6 of the 40 sample interviews showed this form of organisation. Although the unbroken steps of the interview give an impression of a controlled structure, this did not necessarily imply that the worker dominated the interview. The evidence revealed that clients were able to work well within a formal framework and to raise and develop topics on their own initiative. This is illustrated in Table 12 below:

Table 12 : Topics Raised by Workers and Clients
Respectively in Interviews Having Unbroken Step Structure

| <u>Int. No.</u> | <u>Topic Raised by Clients</u> | <u>Topic Raised by Workers</u> |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 12 | 4 | 8 |
| 15 | 0 | 8 |
| 16 | 0 | 6 |
| 21 | 2 | 4 |
| 39 | 4 | 2 |
| 40 | 5 | 3 |

Although in two cases [both by the same social worker] clients do not raise any topics, in the other interviews, clients are allowed space to raise their own concerns. The client in interview 40 actually raises more topics than the worker.

Interviews with an unbroken step structure tended to be shorter than average. None were over 25 minutes. This suggests that a more tightly controlled structure may be related to more efficient use of time.

b. Steps and Plateaux

Some interviews contained a major topic which was discussed at some length together with various peripheral topics. Appendix 10 illustrates this pattern. In this case, the main topic which forms the plateau, takes up approximately one third of interview time. It concerns the client's relationship with his mother. Other relevant

topics such as his girlfriend, his depressive illness and how to deal with it are ranged around this central theme.

Some interviews contained more than one plateau. For example, interview 37 has two main themes which are related; the first concerns the client's feelings about the need to cope with her teenage daughter's obsessional behaviour and the second concerns the client's feelings about her own childhood and how that relates to her image of herself as a mother.

Eighteen out of the 40 sample interviews exhibited a step and plateau structure. This group contained some of the longest interviews. Six were 50 minutes or more in length and only 4 lasted less than half-an-hour.

c. Broken Steps

Appendix 11 [interview 26] illustrates a broken step structure. This interview, lasting around 40 minutes, moves back and forth through a range of eight topics. It can be seen that the client's move to an elderly person's home constitutes the main theme which is introduced in the first third of the interview and is subsequently returned to on four occasions.

There is evidence in the graph of the social work agenda; a discussion of the client's feelings about a move to the home, contact with her son, her general interests and the state of her health. The client raises two concerns of

her own; worries over the payment of Housing Benefit and the problems raised by her agoraphobia. When diverted from a discussion about her agoraphobia by the worker who wishes to ask about her son, she is able to bring the interview back to a consideration of this condition on her own initiative.

In this respect, broken step structures seem to offer greater flexibility than either unbroken steps or step and plateau structures. The reasons connected with returns to previous topics has already been discussed [see above]. Very few interviews were rambling or incoherent. Topic returns could represent a conflict of interests within the interview, a need for emphasis or further clarification, or problems associated with interviewing certain categories of client.

Sixteen interviews exhibited a broken step structure. They could be of almost any length. The shortest was only 7 minutes [interview 18] and the longest lasted 65 minutes [interview 3].

Table 13 summarises the data pertaining to different types of interview structures together with related data on the length of interview. It shows how interviews with regular step structure tend to be shorter while those containing plateaux tend to be longer.

Table 13

Interview Exhibiting Different Structures
and Length of Interviews

| <u>Unbroken Step Structure</u> | | <u>Broken Step Structure</u> | | <u>Step and Plateau Structure</u> | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| <u>Int. No.</u> | <u>Time in Minutes</u> | <u>Int. No.</u> | <u>Time in Minutes</u> | <u>Int. No.</u> | <u>Time in Minutes</u> |
| 15 | 9 mins | 18 | 7 mins | 7 | 10 mins |
| 39 | 12 mins | 17 | 10 mins | 6 | 25 mins |
| 16 | 15 mins | 27 | 15 mins | 32 | 25 mins |
| 40 | 21 mins | 25 | 20 mins | 34 | 25 mins |
| 21 | 24 mins | 22 | 25 mins | 23 | 30 mins |
| 12 | 25 mins | 35 | 25 mins | 10 | 35 mins |
| ----- N = 6 | | 38 | 28 mins | 19 | 36 mins |
| | | 2 | 35 mins | 5 | 40 mins |
| | | 11 | 35 mins | 14 | 40 mins |
| | | 31 | 37 mins | 1 | 43 mins |
| | | 20 | 40 mins | 13 | 45 mins |
| | | 26 | 40 mins | 28 | 50 mins |
| | | 36 | 40 mins | 29 | 50 mins |
| | | 8 | 50 mins | 30 | 50 mins |
| | | 35 | 53 mins | 4 | 55 mins |
| | | 3 | 65 mins | 9 | 70 mins |
| | | ----- N = 16 | | 24 | 70 mins |
| | | | | 37 | 75 mins |
| | | | | ----- N = 18 | |

Chapter 12

Topic Development

Introduction

Kadushin [1972] suggests that the skill in topic development lies in engineering a transition without disturbing the relationship. Transitions that are poorly handled can restrict the spontaneity of the interview and may give an impression of over-control by the worker. Abrupt transitions may be confusing and upsetting.

"Too rapid or too frequent transitions may indicate that the interviewer has no clear idea of how to conduct the interview, does not know what is most relevant to discuss and is seeking some direction". [p.176].

To the listener, most of the social work interviews in the sample present a unified and continuous flow of conversation. There are few sharp breaks and themes tend to emerge and disappear without obvious twists and turns of direction.

Ivey and Arthur [1978, p.56-5] describe topics as "islands", suggesting that they arise out of the natural landscape of the interview while remaining part of it. The space between islands, they call a "hiatus", a pause rather than a break. During this pause, the matter of how the interview is to proceed must be resolved. The authors believe that it is at this point that differences in interviewing style become apparent. Social workers may choose to ask a precise closed question in order to open

up a new topic; they may ask an open-ended question to see how the client will respond; they may pick up on an earlier theme introduced by the client but not developed; they may choose to wait to see if the client initiates a new topic.

Topic Initiation by Clients

There were five interviews in the sample in which the clients did not raise any topics [we do not know whether they wished to or not]. There were no interviews in which the client was responsible for all the topics and only 5 cases in which they were responsible for a majority of topics. Taking the sample as a whole, clients were responsible for more than a third [39%] of all new topics. The evidence indicates that while workers dominated the general direction of the interview, they were also able to hand over control to the client when this appeared to them to be necessary.

The circumstances in which clients raised topics tended to fall into 5 main groups:-

i] Client Requests to Meet

In 3 out of the 40 interviews, clients had requested the meeting. In these cases, the workers did not necessarily know the nature of their concerns and it was left to the clients to raise the matters they wished to discuss.

For example, in interview 1, the client asks the worker about domiciliary services available for her elderly father who is shortly to be discharged from hospital. Later in the interview, she voices her anxiety about the danger caused by his smoking in bed.

In interview 25, the client who is a psychiatric outpatient raises the possibility of her moving back into a Group Home if she should leave her husband.

In interview 26, the client arrives at the interview in a state of considerable anxiety over a pile of unpaid bills and immediately raises these matters with the social worker.

In interviews which are more tightly controlled by the social worker, the client may have to await an opportunity to bring up a particular problem. For example, in interview 12 which is about the client's move from an Alcohol Treatment Unit to a Dry House in the community, he has to wait until the main business of the interview is finished before mentioning the fact that his Supplementary Benefit payment has not arrived that week.

ii] Disagreements

Clients may want to bring up topics on their own initiative if they feel in conflict with the way a worker-directed interview is developing.

For example, in interview 22 the worker is trying to find

out about the client's feelings towards his children in order to prepare a custody report for the court. The client on the other hand wants to discuss his wife's behaviour towards him and constantly brings up the subject despite the worker's endeavours to divert him.

In interview 11, the client who is a middle aged recluse, tries to move the interview more his own way by bringing up new topics every time the worker attempts to persuade him of the need to clean up his flat!

In interview 2, the client is evidently not satisfied with the outcome of a discussion early in the interview on the best way to manage his finances. Towards the end of the interview, he brings up the topic again in order to offer an alternative plan.

iii] Catharsis

Some clients show a strong need to talk in order to unburden themselves of their grief or anxiety. In these interviews, social workers may elect to take a less active role and allow the clients' concerns to surface as they talk.

In interview 8, the elderly client has been recently bereaved and is finding it difficult to cope with the practicalities of living alone. New topics arise as she describes problems over the rent and the broken light in the bathroom, alongside her feelings of loneliness and

loss.

In interview 13, the social worker has been called into school after her thirteen year old client has assaulted a teacher. The first third of this interview is taken up with the boy's emotional account of this incident in which he tries to get the worker to understand the situation from his point of view.

iv] Client-centred Counselling

No social worker in the sample adopted this model in its entirety but many interviews contained sections in which clients were given space to bring up their own concerns in their own way.

For example, interview 4 begins with a worker-directed section concerning the client's taxation returns, but the remainder of the interview is left free for the client to talk about any problems she may have with her mentally handicapped foster child.

Similarly, in interview 37, the client is encouraged to talk at some length and in a free-ranging way about her relationship with her daughter who is severely obsessional.

In this model, topics are dealt with as they arise with the social worker intervening only to encourage the client to expand on key issues.

v] Anything Else?

As noted earlier in Chapter 10, many social workers asked this question, usually towards the end of the interview. Generally, it stopped the clients in their tracks but occasionally it produced a new topic of some importance.

The Workers' Responses to Topic Initiation by Clients

Appendix 35 refers to the ways in which workers in the sample responded to topic initiation by clients.

Clients were responsible for initiating more than one-third [39%] of all topics over the interviews as a whole. Almost without exception, they begin a new theme by imparting some piece of information about themselves or their circumstances. This could be taken up in a number of ways by the worker.

i] Closed Questions

Social workers were most likely to respond to a new topic by asking a question about it. Closed questions accounted for 29% of all worker responses following client initiation of a new topic. They were mostly requests for further clarification. For example in interview 19, the client starts to tell the worker about her financial problems:

Worker: "Yes, and you are back on Supplementary Benefit, are you?"

Later, the same client begins to tell the social worker about the high cost of laundering her son's sheets:

Worker: "He still bedwets does he?"

The client moves on to a discussion of the problem of living with her three sons:

Worker: "Is there still a lot of tension between them?"

These questions not only add to the worker's store of knowledge, they also indicate interest in the client's problems and encourage her to continue with her theme. At the same time, they allow the worker to regain the initiative and remain in control of the interview.

ii] Open Questions

Workers responded with an open question to only 11 of the 158 topics initiated by clients. Less than a quarter of all interviews [9] contained this response. Where it was used, it tended to open out discussion and to encourage the client to continue with his/her theme. For example in interview 12, the client is an alcoholic who is about to enter a hostel. He starts to talk about the difficulties he experiences in mixing with other people. The worker's open-ended question encourages him to pursue this topic:

Worker: Can I ask you about that? What makes you think there is going to be a problem there?

In interview 24, the client tells the worker that he has recently been the victim of a street attack. The use of a simple open question - "What was that about?" - offers the client the opportunity to say more about it if he wishes.

iii] Information

In 35 of the 158 cases in which clients initiated topics, the worker responded with a piece of information. This type of response tended to occur in interviews in which there was generally a high level of information-giving. For example, in interview 22, the worker gives the client a great deal of information about the forthcoming court hearing to decide the custody of his children. When the client brings up the matter of a previous hearing, the worker contributes to the development of the topic by giving a piece of information:

Worker: "Right. The court will have the reports from that court hearing as well but what the court wants to know....."

Later, the client tells the worker that he wishes to have the children living with him. The worker informs him:

"Well, you have the right to ask the court to make that decision and I understand that you are going to do that".

iv] Direct Guidance

Giving information is one way of carrying the conversation

forward; giving advice or making a suggestion is another. Workers responded with direct guidance in 11 of the 40 interviews, accounting for 17 responses, in cases in which clients had initiated topics.

The worker in interview 24 responds with direct guidance in 3 out of the 11 topics which are initiated by the client. When the client describes his housing problems he suggests:

"You could write to your MP".

Later when the client describes the difficulties the children might have in settling down in their new home, he advises him:

"I think it's really important that all the girls are involved in building the new home".

In offering guidance, the worker takes back control of the interview process. Any initiative the client may have gained through raising his own topic is immediately lost.

v] Reflection

Reflective comments represented 16% of all worker responses to topics initiated by clients. They were present in 15 of the 40 sample interviews and the frequency varied between 1 and 4 instances per interview.

Reflective comments stay within the client's frame of

reference. They indicate that the worker is listening and attending; they demonstrate to the client that the worker has understood their concerns and that he/she wishes to hear more. For example, in interview 40 the client begins to tell the worker about his daughter who has finally moved into a flat of her own:

Worker: "Has she. And you said this was quite a nice one".

Later in the interview, the client tells her about his visit to his GP's surgery. He was very gratified by the doctor's attentions:

Worker: "He's obviously a very careful doctor".

Both these comments leave the initiative with the client and allow him to continue with his theme if he so wishes.

vi] Other Responses

Other responses may be divided into supportive comments [11], challenging comments [6] and simple listening/following responses [7]. In one case the worker responded with an offer of practical help and in 2 cases with a self-revelation.

Listening and supportive responses reinforce the client's ideas and encourage him/her to continue. Challenging comments suggest the worker wishes to enter into debate with the client. All three behaviours serve to reinforce

the client's initiative in bringing forward a new topic.

Worker-directed versus Client-directed Responses

Table 14 below divides worker responses to client initiated topics into worker-directed and client-directed groups. Those responses which were held to close off the client's discourse and allow the worker to regain the initiative are in the first group. Those responses which were held to remain within the clients frame of reference and encourage the client to continue with his/her theme are in the second group.

Table 14 - Worker-Directed and Client-Directed Responses to Topics Initiated by Clients

| <u>Client-Directed Responses</u> | | <u>Worker-Directed Responses</u> | |
|----------------------------------|----|----------------------------------|-----|
| Open Questions | 11 | Closed Questions | 43 |
| Reflective Comments | 25 | Giving Information | 35 |
| Supportive Comments | 11 | Direct Guidance | 17 |
| Simple, Listening Response | 7 | Other | 9 |
| | — | | — |
| Total | 54 | Total | 104 |

It can be seen that worker-directed responses out-numbered client-directed responses in this context by almost two to one.

Topic Initiation by Workers

Appendix 34 refers to the verbal behaviours used to introduce new topics [excluding topics at the beginning of interviews]. It can be seen that asking a question was the usual method, closed questions being more common than open-ended ones. Giving a piece of information or advice served to open up new areas of discussion in just under one-third [31%] of all cases.

The use of individual behaviours is discussed below:

i] Closed Questions

This was the most frequently used method of introducing new topics. It was used at least once in 29 of the 40 interviews and it was the most frequently used method in 14 interviews.

The use of closed questions did not necessarily imply an abrupt change of direction. For example, in interview 2 the worker uses a closed question to introduce 7 out of 8 topics. Three of these initiate new themes while the other 4 questions refer back to themes discussed earlier in the interview or link up directly with the preceding theme.

Where closed questions signify a complete change of direction, these are sometimes part of a list of topics on the worker's agenda which are tackled in sequence. In

interview 2, the worker is interested in finding out how his client, a mentally handicapped adult is settling down in his new home. Topic 2 relates to the client's involvement with other people in the house. Having satisfied himself that relationships are not too bad, he moves straight on to topic 3:

"Are you playing a lot of Pool?"

After a brief discussion in which the client reveals he has been playing every day, losing badly but not betting any money on it, the worker moves on:

"Any contact with your family recently? Your dad?".

The worker listens to the latest news about the client's family after which he returns to the main theme, the client's placement in a group home:

"But anyway, it sounds as if things at the house are reasonable at the moment. Do you see yourself staying there?".

[The use of "but anyway" and similar phrases are often used to signal changes of direction].

Elsewhere in interview 2, the worker's quotations relate more closely to previous themes. For example, at the end of topic 1, which concerns financial matters, the worker asks:

"So you're not asking people in the house for money?".

Satisfied that the client is not doing this, he moves directly on to topic 3:

"Are you getting on with the lads alright?".

Similarly, topic 5 which concerns the client's attendance at a day centre leads straight on to topic 6 which is about the client's arrangements for Christmas. The link is a closed question which relates both to the centre and to Christmas:

"And I suppose fairly soon they'll be stopping for Christmas anyway. Do they close for Christmas?".

ii] Open Questions

Approximately one-fifth of all topics were introduced using an open question, but these were spread over only 24 out of the 40 sample interviews. Of these, 19 interviews contained only one or two examples.

Because of their exploratory nature, open questions tend to be used to initiate completely new themes. For example, in interview 4, the worker is asking about the progress of the client's foster child in some detail. When the topic seems temporarily exhausted she asks:

"How's your nursing going?".

After a lengthy discussion leading on from this, the

worker again tries an exploratory tactic:

"How's your own family?".

Some questions are completely general and leave the clients free to pursue any themes they choose:

"Right, so are there any problems then?".

[Interview 4].

There were usually only one or two such general questions per interview. They are more likely to occur at the beginning or near the end of interviews.

iii] Information

Information was used by workers to initiate topics about as often as open questions. It occurred in 23 out of the 40 sample interviews and accounted for approximately one-fifth of all cases. It was the preferred method in 8 out of the 23 interviews.

Some interviews are mainly concerned with imparting information to the clients and this is reflected on the way that topics are introduced. For example, in interview 6 the worker from a fostering and adoptions unit is explaining to the client how to go about tracing his natural parents. She begins the interview by asking him a few questions and then brings out some papers:

"Well, what I have here is a small amount of information but also a source of possible further information. This

form here is an application form for a birth certificate which you may choose to apply for.....".

Information may also be used at the beginning of a topic to stimulate discussion. In interview 14, the worker presents the mother of a teenage girl with a piece of information which is designed to open up discussion of the client's relationship with her daughter:

"The other thing which we talked about earlier too, is a sort of general insecurity. A feeling I think, that she is perhaps not certain enough as she could be that you and Tony care as much about her as she sometimes feels she needs".

iv] Direct Guidance

Direct guidance was used to initiate topics in only half the sample interviews [20] and the frequency did not rise above twice in an interview. It was most commonly expressed as a suggestion by the social workers as to a new course of action. For example, in interview 13, the thirteen year old client has been discussing his feelings of guilt and depression over what has been happening at school. The worker broaches the subject of his relationship with his mother by offering a suggestion:

"Why don't you begin to talk a little bit to your mum about the feelings that you are not sure that you are managing as well as you were".

v] Reflection

Reflections of feeling and reflections of content were used even less than direct guidance to initiate topics. Seventeen of the 40 interviews contained this behaviour. The incidence per interview did not rise above two occasions except in interview 12 [4 topics].

Reflections tended to be used in conjunction with subsequent questions either to set the scene, or by way of introduction, or to provide links with work in progress. For example, in interview 12 the worker uses a reflective statement to initiate a discussion of group work with his client. He refers back to an earlier comment by the client:

"You said that you quite enjoyed the groups held at the unit even though they have been few and far between and a bit chaotic because of the way things are at the moment with staff shortages and so on. [Reflection]. How are you feeling about doing a lot more of those?".
[Question].

Later in the interview, the worker encourages the client to discuss his feelings about going to live in a hostel. Again, he uses a reflective comment to summarise the client's feelings before going on to ask a direct question:

"You said your anxiety was a problem. I get the impression that things are going a little better than when I saw you last week [reflection of feelings]. Is that because someone was interviewing you from the hostel and you were worried about whether you would be accepted or not?". [Question].

Used in this way, reflective comments can serve to create a sense of order in the interview. They help to make connections between themes and show the client that the worker has followed and understood the nature of previous exchanges.

vi] Other Behaviours

In 9 interviews, other forms of verbal behaviour such as offers of practical help, interpretations and worker self-revelation were used to initiate topics but these tended to be isolated occurrences and did not form any particular pattern. There were only 11 examples of behaviours other than questions, reflective comments, information or advice, in the sample as a whole.

vii] Verbal Directions

In addition to the types of verbal behaviours described above, workers occasionally used phrases which related to the process of the interview such as:

"Could we turn to the question of.....".

"Now the next question is.....".

"I've only got a couple more questions.....".

[All from interview 17].

Only 24 out of the 40 sample interviews contained verbal instructions. Although the incidence per interview varied between 1 and 7 cases, 13 of the 24 interviews contained only 1 or 2 instances. As noted in Chapter 10, social workers in the sample seemed reluctant to be explicit about the form and content of interviews, preferring to adopt a more spontaneous, conversational approach.

Verbal directions were not scored as separate interview behaviours as they invariably formed part of phrases containing other behaviours such as questions, information or direct guidance. However, for analytical purposes they were extrapolated from the data and the incidence per interview is contained in Appendix 29.

Topic Initiations : Summary and Conclusion

Workers were responsible for raising the majority of topics in the sample interview [61%]. The initiation of topics by clients appeared to be based on need rather than on form or protocol. As long as topics raised by workers related to their concerns, they seemed content to let the workers direct the interview. Where they had a need either to unburden themselves emotionally, to voice disagreement or to raise an issue that had been overlooked by the social worker, in most cases, social workers were able to allow for this.

Over one-third of all topics were initiated by clients but they rarely managed to keep the initiative. There was a wide variety of responses to topics raised by clients but the majority tended to be worker-directed, with closed questions predominating.

Asking closed questions was also the main method used by workers to raise new topics. This did not necessarily imply abrupt changes of direction within the interview as many questions were found to link up with previous topics or themes.

Although there was little evidence of formal or explicit direction, workers in general remained firmly in control of the interview process largely through the use of questioning techniques which allowed them to hold the initiative.

Chapter 13

The Structure of Interviews

An Overview

The interviews in the sample gave the impression that they were unplanned but they were not disorganised. Social workers typically adopted the model of a friend dropping in for a chat rather than that of a formal exchange. There was no fixed length to the interviews and interruptions were common.

The form and rhythm of individual interviews were defined by a succession of topics being raised, discussed and brought to a close. The number of separate topics per interview ranged from three to fourteen but many topics were discussed more than once. The number of discrete topic areas including topic returns, could be as high as twenty-three.

The order and arrangement of topics could be analysed into three typical patterns of interviewing. A minority of interviews exhibited a regular step structure as the worker moved from topic in a precise and ordered way. Some interviews were organised around one main topic which could be represented as a plateau; other topics lead up to and away from the plateau in small steps. Many interviews consisted of a broken step structure which represented the fact that topics were raised and then returned to later in the interview, possibly more than once.

In most cases, social workers took the initiative for beginning and ending the interviews. The majority of interviews began with an open question. Statements as to the purpose of the interview accounted for just under a quarter of all beginnings. Any other behaviours were rare. Tactics for ending interviews including making a brief announcement that the interview was over, fixing another appointment, summing up the main points and asking the client if there was "anything else?".

Within interviews, there were few sharp breaks. Workers employed a continuous style in which topics seemed to emerge naturally out of the flow of conversation. The majority of topics [61%] were initiated by social workers, usually by asking a question. Over one-third of all topics were initiated by clients, usually by offering a piece of information about themselves. Workers tended to respond to topic initiation by clients by asking another question, thus quickly regaining control of the interview process.

The evidence suggests that workers aimed to retain control of the interview process. Within this framework, clients were given opportunities to raise and pursue matters on their own initiative to a greater or lesser degree.