

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

**The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.**

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.**

**In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.**

**Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.**

**Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.**

# **U·M·I**

University Microfilms International  
A Bell & Howell Information Company  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
313/761-4700 800/521-0600



**Order Number 9108155**

**Initiating an ecosystems model in school social work practice:  
The urban school setting**

**Nelson, Yvonne Ann, D.S.W.**

**City University of New York, 1990**

**U·M·I**  
300 N. Zeeb Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106



## **NOTE TO USERS**

**THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT RECEIVED BY U.M.I. CONTAINED PAGES  
WITH SLANTED PRINT. PAGES WERE FILMED AS RECEIVED.**

**THIS REPRODUCTION IS THE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.**



A

INITIATING AN ECOSYSTEMS MODEL IN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE:  
THE URBAN SCHOOL SETTING

by

Yvonne Ann Nelson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare, The City University of New York.

1990

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty  
in Social Welfare in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement  
for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare.

9/11/90  
Date

Harold S. Weissman  
Chair of Examining Committee

9/11/90  
Date

Harold S. Weissman  
Executive Officer

Harold Weissman

Elizabeth Dane

Rebecca Donovan  
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

## **Abstract**

### **INITIATING AN ECOSYSTEMS MODEL IN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: THE URBAN SCHOOL SETTING**

by

**Yvonne Ann Nelson**

**Adviser: Professor Harold Weissman**

This exploratory study examines the process of initiating an ecosystems approach to case planning for thirty cases in five New York City schools. The ecosystems approach, which considers the process of interaction between students' characteristics with school conditions, is viewed as a viable, pragmatic school social work practice model. It is proposed that schools which are made up of social structures, cultural norms and organizational procedures will have to change to be compatible with students' attitudes, cognition, motives and behavioral skills. Organizational innovation represented in the ecosystems school social work practice model exemplifies a change in problem definition for the New York City school system. The system will have to change its view of student behavior by taking into account the context in which it occurs. The project emphasized viewing student school-related difficulties from a holistic, dynamic perspective. Student needs are assessed within the context of family, school and community systems. Equal emphasis is placed on learning about the strengths and deficits of the student within all systems.

The study process involves conducting a social assessment of the referred student's school-related difficulties, followed by the formula-

tion of an intervention plan by the school social worker. The plan serves as a blueprint for discussion with student, parent, school personnel and community representatives at a case planning conference. The study focuses on the assessment and conference processes in order to identify and understand the factors that may facilitate or impede the initiation of the ecosystem approach.

Of the thirty sample cases, the ecosystems approach was initiated for twenty cases and not initiated for ten cases. Data analysis suggests that the effective initiation of an ecosystems approach may be facilitated by conference participants agreement to the problem definition and agreement to act on the intervention plan. Additional examination of the findings show that a high degree of school social worker skills along with client, school and community systems receptivity to the approach seems to influence agreement levels and the initiation of the approach.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since the credit for the successful completion of a study such as this cannot go to the author alone, I must recognize the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Harold Weissman, Dr. Rebecca Donovan, and Dr. Elizabeth Dane, and express to them the depth of my gratitude for their invaluable assistance, patience, and support.

I am indebted to Dr. Linda Anderson Smith, Dr. Mabel Jenkins Brown, Dolores Murray, Dr. Edna Beeman, Albertha Fraser, Dr. Dolores Morris, Dr. Wendy Glasgow Winters, Cheryl Ohanesian and Gloria Katz, all of whom so very generously and enthusiastically supported me during this phase of my endeavor.

Support for this project was provided equally by the New York City community school districts' Clinical Social Work Supervisors: Beverly Powers, Beth Bernstein, and Beverly Weinstein; the school social worker participants and school staff. A very special and sincere "thanks" go to the parents and students who so very graciously agreed to participate in the study.

For their assistance I extend my deep appreciation to Mary Ann Awad, who provided statistical expertise, and Linda Solomon for her constructive editorial comments regarding the document. I am most grateful to Dr. Emma Kearse for contributing her many technical skills in the preparation of the dissertation and for providing comprehensive and sustained support throughout the project.

A special place is reserved in these acknowledgements for my dear sister, Beverly Nelson Gray, who never stopped believing in me, and to my entire family for their unconditional love during all the years of my life.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Gwendolyn Martin Nelson, whose love and encouragement continue to sustain me, and to the memory of my father, John Herbert Nelson, from whom I first learned about social justice.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                 |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| APPROVAL PAGE . . . . .                                                         | ii  |
| ABSTRACT . . . . .                                                              | iii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .                                                      | v   |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .                                                     | vii |
| LISTS OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES . . . . .                                     | ix  |
| Chapter                                                                         |     |
| 1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .                                                       | 1   |
| Purpose of the Study . . . . .                                                  | 4   |
| Nature of the Problem . . . . .                                                 | 6   |
| Review of the Literature . . . . .                                              | 23  |
| Notes . . . . .                                                                 | 27  |
| 2. NEW APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE AS IT AFFECTS THE PROBLEM .                     | 32  |
| Introduction . . . . .                                                          | 32  |
| Theories . . . . .                                                              | 32  |
| New Application of Knowledge . . . . .                                          | 37  |
| Review of the Literature . . . . .                                              | 45  |
| Notes . . . . .                                                                 | 52  |
| 3. PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY . . . . .                                     | 55  |
| Introduction . . . . .                                                          | 55  |
| Design . . . . .                                                                | 57  |
| Methodology . . . . .                                                           | 58  |
| Notes . . . . .                                                                 | 73  |
| 4. DATA ANALYSIS . . . . .                                                      | 74  |
| Section 1: Findings . . . . .                                                   | 74  |
| Introduction . . . . .                                                          | 74  |
| Description of Ecosystems Practice . . . . .                                    | 75  |
| Assessment and Conference Process: Findings for<br>Routine Cases . . . . .      | 76  |
| Assessment and Conference Process: Findings for<br>Non-Routine Cases . . . . .  | 94  |
| Section 2: Factors Associated with Effective Ecosys-<br>tems Practice . . . . . | 124 |
| Introduction . . . . .                                                          | 124 |
| Social Work Skills Associated with Effective Ecosys-<br>tems Practice . . . . . | 131 |
| Summary of Study Findings . . . . .                                             | 136 |
| Notes . . . . .                                                                 | 141 |

|                                                                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter                                                                              |     |
| 5. CONCLUSIONS . . . . .                                                             | 142 |
| Project Effectiveness . . . . .                                                      | 142 |
| Complexities of Ecosystems Approach Initiation . . . .                               | 147 |
| Direction for Future Research . . . . .                                              | 153 |
| Implications for Social Work Education . . . . .                                     | 156 |
| Notes . . . . .                                                                      | 159 |
| APPENDICES . . . . .                                                                 | 160 |
| A. School Social Worker Participants Initial Handouts .                              | 160 |
| B. Draft of Letter to Superintendent . . . . .                                       | 166 |
| C. Copy of Queens Deputy Assistant Approval Letter . .                               | 167 |
| D. School Social Worker Participants Questionnaire . .                               | 168 |
| E. Summary of Ecosystems Assessment Process . . . . .                                | 169 |
| F. Diary of Ecosystems Conference . . . . .                                          | 170 |
| G. Copy of Letter of Request to New York City Board of<br>Education . . . . .        | 174 |
| H. Copy of Proposal Approval Letter to New York City<br>Board of Education . . . . . | 175 |
| I. Copy of Approval Letter from New York City Board of<br>Education . . . . .        | 176 |
| J. Copy of New York City Board of Education Research<br>Approval Form . . . . .      | 177 |
| K. Copy of Parental Consent Letter . . . . .                                         | 178 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                                                               | 180 |

## LISTS OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

### ILLUSTRATIONS

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1. The Student's Ecosystem . . . . .           | 34 |
| Chart 1. School Social Work Project Process . . . . . | 65 |

### TABLES

|                                                                                                                |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Type of Conference Procedure Recommendation for Ecosystems<br>Cases . . . . .                               | 76  |
| 2. Initiation Status of Ecosystems Conference Recommendations. .                                               | 76  |
| 3. Grade Level of Students: Routine Cases . . . . .                                                            | 77  |
| 4. Student Problem Area by School Level in Routine Cases . . . .                                               | 80  |
| 5. Level of Participation in the Assessment and Conference<br>Processes for Routine Cases . . . . .            | 80  |
| 6. Locus of the Problem Definition for Routine Cases . . . . .                                                 | 82  |
| 7. Intervention Plan Activities for Routine Cases . . . . .                                                    | 83  |
| 8. Level of Agreement about Problem Definition for Routine<br>Cases . . . . .                                  | 84  |
| 9. Level of Agreement about Intervention Plan for Routine<br>Cases . . . . .                                   | 84  |
| 10. Grade Level of Students: Non-Routine Cases . . . . .                                                       | 95  |
| 11. Student Problem Area by School Level: Non-Routine Cases. . .                                               | 96  |
| 12. Level of Participation in the Assessment and Conference<br>Processes for Non-Routine Cases . . . . .       | 98  |
| 13. Locus of the Problem Definition for Non-Routine Cases . . . .                                              | 101 |
| 14. Intervention Activities for Non-Routine Cases . . . . .                                                    | 102 |
| 15. Level of Agreement about Problem Definition for Non-<br>Routine Cases . . . . .                            | 103 |
| 16. Level of Agreement about Intervention Plan for Non-<br>Routine Cases . . . . .                             | 103 |
| 17. Type of Ecosystems Procedure Recommendation by Initiation<br>Status . . . . .                              | 124 |
| 18. Ecosystems Conference Procedure Recommendation by Level<br>of Agreement about Problem Definition . . . . . | 127 |
| 19. Ecosystems Conference Procedure Recommendation by Level<br>of Agreement about Intervention Plan . . . . .  | 127 |
| 20. Level of Agreement about Problem Definition by Initiation<br>Status . . . . .                              | 128 |
| 21. Level of Agreement about Intervention Plan by Initiation<br>Status . . . . .                               | 129 |
| 22. Professional Characteristics of Ecosystems School Social<br>Workers . . . . .                              | 130 |
| 23. Rating of Initiation of Ecosystems Approach Factors:<br>Routine Cases . . . . .                            | 134 |
| 24. Rating of Initiation of Ecosystems Approach Factors: Non-<br>Routine Cases . . . . .                       | 135 |
| 25. Factors Associated with Effective Ecosystems Practice:<br>Ratings for Routine Cases . . . . .              | 137 |
| 26. Factors Associated with Effective Ecosystems Practice:<br>Ratings for Non-Routine Cases . . . . .          | 138 |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Stimulus for this project comes from interest in the changes in the mission of the educational system which has always been contingent upon changes in the societal expectations. For some time the educational and social work professions have struggled with the expansion of social problems and the broader expectations such problems place on social institutions, such as the school system. In the past quarter century, schools have been expected to serve a more diverse population of students, recognizing and meeting their individual needs, both academic and social.

Students in our schools have varied abilities and needs. Some may be gifted, while others may have average abilities and still others may be at risk because of factors such as economic deprivation, a handicapping condition, an ethnic or language difference. However, all students are entitled to a quality learning environment which promotes their total development. Programs within our schools must assist all students to be prepared to assume various life roles, tasks and responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

School systems must be aware of both the strengths and needs each student brings in terms of intellectual, family, social and interpersonal realities.

Today, we see major changes occurring in society and in families. Consider the following life situations that can and do affect a child's ability to learn, succeed and participate in the learning process:

Growing evidence of teenage suicide--it is the third largest killer for adolescents between the ages of 15-24. Some authorities estimate that about half the 2.5 million

gifted children in the United States encounter emotional problems such as depression, destructive perfectionism, and underachievement.

74% of our students graduate from high school.

Teenagers represent 18% of sexually active women capable of becoming pregnant. Yet they account for 46% of all out-of-wedlock births and 31% of abortions. Growing numbers of immigrant children, speaking a host of foreign languages are attending schools in the United States.

In 1982, over 900 cases of child abuse and neglect were reported. Of these, 57% were school-age children. 33% were from 6-11 years old and 24% were between 12-17 years of age. Nationwide, the percentage of children living with only one parent has doubled from 11% in 1970 to 22% in 1982. It is estimated that one fourth of children in elementary schools are 'latch-key' children. School problems of absenteeism, undone homework and reduced concentration are often evidenced by these children.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 57% of all high school seniors have tried marijuana, 33% experimented with stimulants and 16% have used cocaine.

Gallup Poll conducted in 1984 found that 6 out of every 10 American teenagers report drinking some form of alcoholic beverage.<sup>2</sup>

Students who carry these burdens are distracted from the traditional business of schools. Consequently, the school's ability to meet the primary task of educating children, in view of these realities, has frequently been questioned. A recent national report by the Commission on Excellence in Education cited these serious problems in American education. It documented the value of education to the American society. It stated that the intellectual, moral and spiritual strengths of the American people are at risk because if "individuals in our society do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential.... they will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life."<sup>3</sup> The risk articulated in this statement refers to the belief that all children are entitled to a fair chance to succeed. It is the promise of the 14th Amendment and

it is the shared value of educators and social workers.

The National Association of Social Workers, in its response to this national report, documents the need for a more understanding educational institution that is committed not only to educating children for productive future lives but also preparing them to cope with their environment. They state that education can no longer be an isolated, self-contained process, empty of external influences. Without interdependent and collaborative relationships among adults, youth and communities, schools are nothing more than wood, concrete, plastic, and paper. It is the interpersonal factors that contribute to educational excellence, and it is "attention to these human and social factors in conjunction with the structural and organizational components of the school that will ultimately create excellence."<sup>4</sup>

In order to manage problems caused by personal and social factors, schools enlist support staff such as school social workers. Consequently, the organizational setting of the school has become the environment for the actualization of school social work practice. Social workers have had a difficult job in the schools performing social work tasks, partly as a result of the difficulty of gaining agreement about the role and function of social workers in the educational system. The issue, i.e., tasks assigned to the social worker, derives from the unresolved question of whether the social worker is to help the student adapt to the school environment or is expected to modify that environment to meet the needs of the student. However, this should not be an either-or situation. An understanding of the school social worker's role in the interface between student, parent, school and community is

required. School social workers recognize that the school as a social system influences students' wants, how they view themselves and how they behave as classroom participants. Therefore, school social workers have a responsibility to both the schools they service and their students who must learn to function within the system to achieve their individual maximum potential.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this project is to demonstrate how to initiate an ecosystems approach to school social work practice in the New York City school system. New York City is a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic city with many social problems that include poverty and a high drop-out rate from high school. Its school system continuously receives a large number of students from other states, cultures and countries. The families of these youngsters struggle to adapt to their new society and must also acclimate themselves to the largest public school system in the country.

The ecosystems perspective, which considers the process of interaction between students and school conditions, is viewed as a viable, pragmatic school social work practice model. Schools are teachers, administrators, students, communities and parents in social interactions. It is proposed that schools which are made up of social structures, cultural norms and organizational procedures will have to change to be compatible with students' attitudes, cognitions, motives and behavioral skills.

The project is based on the belief that schools and schooling have a significant effect on children's development. Students' learning and social behaviors vary directly with their school characteristics. Within

the ecosystem perspective, direct services to students and families must become a part of a more integrated systemic view of school social work practice. The school social worker has a responsibility to influence the school to be more responsive to the needs of student, family, and community, as well as changing school practices that undermine the student's emotional, social and intellectual growth.

Organizational innovation represented in the ecosystems school social work practice model exemplifies a change in problem definition for the New York City school system. The system will have to change its view of student behavior by taking into account the context in which it occurs. Organizational innovation refers to "any proposed idea or set of ideas about how the organizational behavior of members should be changed in order to improve its performance."<sup>5</sup>

Change in an organization is a process which occurs in three stages: "1) the period of the initiation of an organizational innovation; 2) the period of its attempted implementation; and 3) the period during which an innovation is incorporated into the organization."<sup>6</sup>

This project examines the first stage of the organizational change process, the introduction of the ecosystems school social work practice model to school personnel. As an exploratory-descriptive project, it provides an opportunity to introduce an ecosystems conceptual frame in urban schools. In addition, it generates information on the role of school social worker as leader in the planning and decision-making processes in schools' problem-solving efforts.

This study focuses on an analysis of a single organizational event, the ecosystems conference with school personnel. The analysis describes

patterns in the process of recommending ecosystems intervention to school personnel.

The project encourages school social workers to develop a collaborative relationship with other school personnel in order to interpret and advocate students' needs and have an impact on the school's decision-making process and communicate effectively with school personnel in order to clarify the role of the school social worker in using the ecosystems approach. It is expected that school social workers can more effectively serve both student and teacher within the school by following these principles. There must be a commitment to the school social worker's dual function which is to strengthen students' coping patterns and their growth potential and to improve the quality of the environment. According to Germain, this interface does not "negate the importance of the personality and its motivational, emotional, cognitive, and sensory-perceptual elements. But neither does it overlook the complexity of the environment and its interacting physical, social and cultural elements."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, social work's uniqueness lies in its position within this interface.

#### Nature of the Problem

Schools must respond positively to a rapidly changing society and develop educational programs which help students and their families contend effectively with contemporary areas of concern. Some of these areas include the technological revolution, changing sexual mores, changes in family structure, high mobility, economic deprivation, urbanization of our culture, the women's movement, rapidly changing values, and the effects of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society.

A school can be viewed as a microcosm of the local community within its walls, the student and staff are affected by the same forces and events

that impact upon the community. Members of the school staff are affected by personal needs, the needs of their students and the demands of their profession. They are constantly faced with professional challenges: the curriculum is changing, the power structure within the school system may be in flux, there are local and state expectations of student learning which translate into demands for effectiveness. To provide the learning environment for each student, school staff must combine motivation, stimulation, the appropriate level of instruction and interest. These must meet the needs of the school system, the community and students.

By pairing instructional and pupil service activities, the school can provide increments in achievement far beyond that which any one discipline can accomplish by itself. When indirect teacher/pupil service consultation, planning for individualized instruction, and reviewing of classroom management strategies are shared, the interactive effect strengthens the ability of the school to do its job.

The function of the school social worker and the mandate of public education are closely intertwined. The blending of social work with the mission of education creates a distinct practice. "School social work is an application of social work principles and methods to the major purpose of the school."<sup>8</sup> Because of their specialized training and experience, school social workers can effectively assist instructional staff and parents to respond to the unique needs of each student. It is important to recognize the contribution of this discipline to the planning and implementation of services for all children. As school-based professionals, they are committed to assist handicapped, gifted, and the neglected majority—those children who cause no problems, flow through school, but do not do as

well as they could in school and do not as adults contribute what they are capable of to the society at large: School social workers and educators share the conviction that all children are capable of learning and responding positively to schooling and the educational process. When problems surface, they generally reflect dissonance between pupil needs and school system delivery. School social workers believe that obstacles do not reflect any inherent defect within the student or the system, but rather suggest a need for analysis and restructuring of the interaction of the child with the educational community. They recognize that they have a responsibility to influence the school to be more responsive to the needs of the student and change school practices that undermine self-esteem, autonomy and social competence as well as assisting the student in coping with the educational milieu.

Traditionally, school social work practice focused on: the student/family, emphasizing the student's intrapsychic domain, i.e., the study and evaluation of the psycho-social factors that prevent a student from adjusting and achieving in school. The social worker relied on data that included personal characteristics, attitudes and behaviors of the referred student, interpersonal problems within the family, and reports by teachers and other school personnel. In the last two decades, societal changes have placed demands on social workers to modify or adapt their services and "develop new remedies and solutions to problems and test them through the use of stated objectives and measurable outcomes."<sup>9</sup> In the sixties, the school social work literature predicted a movement to new methods of practice. Recognition of the school as a social system and a holistic approach to problem solving emerged. Currently, it is suggested that the school

social worker's repertoire of intervention skills must consider organizational analysis as important as the traditional psychosocial construct.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, practice must reflect interventions that influence the school to be more responsive to student needs. To meet this responsibility, school social work practice must change and school social workers have to acquire and expand their skills to appropriately meet the needs of students, parents, school personnel and community. This is not a new mandate for school-based practice.

The historical development of school social work reflects a response to the emerging needs and problems of the social conditions at a specific time in history.<sup>11</sup> A historical analysis by Costin found three major periods of transition in social work practice:

- 1) the beginning of school social work in the 1900's as a home-community liaison in response to the new compulsory school attendance laws;
- 2) the impact of the mental hygiene movement encouraging a transition to the individualized casework approach in the 1940's period;
- 3) the change in the goals and methods of social work in the 1960's because of the significant social revolution occurring in society during that period which affected the schools.<sup>12</sup>

From a dynamic perspective, the function of the school social worker has emerged as a parallel to changing views of the educational process. The dominance of "classical" Freudian theory through the 1940's went well with theories of fixed intelligence, and a model of human learning as passive, reflective and predictably unfolding. A change in such thinking was offered by John Dewey's statement that "...education is not a preparation for life, but a part of life itself."<sup>13</sup> In keeping with this viewpoint, Biggs noted that human learning is pro-active, that is, ready for change through experience rather than reactive, that is, fixed to the level of past experience.<sup>14</sup>

A pioneer dynamicist in social work, Bertha Reynolds, proposed an "action-oriented" style of social work, affecting the milieu of social, industrial and educational institutions. She emphasized the need for school social workers to direct their attention to institutional as well as individual changes.<sup>15</sup> A number of studies in experimental education, social work practice and social psychology support the specific effectiveness of improving learning through the task orientations of the school social worker. Cloward, in a series of studies about delinquency and school failure, offers examples of the specific effectiveness of school social work interventions in improving motivation for learning and learning efficiency.<sup>16</sup> Rist, in an observational study of one class of inner city children during their kindergarten, first and second grade years, demonstrated how a kindergarten teacher, with no insight into her behavior, placed children in reading groups which reflected the social composition of the class. The children remained in these groups throughout the first and second grades; it was only through the intervention of a school social worker with the school administration and the teacher that this pattern was changed.<sup>17</sup> Ryans has established that there is a high positive correlation, particularly at the elementary school level, between "productive" pupil behavior and teacher behaviors and attitudes such as frankness and personal honesty. He has demonstrated that teacher attitudes emerge as a result of feelings of participation and knowledge about students' life styles, such as emerge from conferences with the school social worker as a bridge to the students' families.<sup>18</sup> Davis has documented the ways in which teacher insensitivity may negatively affect pupils' self-esteem and motivation for learning and specifically refers to school social work

as a possible bridge between teacher and student to reduce both teachers' and students' feelings of alienation.<sup>19</sup>

From a local agency's historical perspective, school social work services were developed to effect positive educational outcomes for students. In a position paper to the New York City Board of Education on the school social worker, the Bureau of Child Guidance (BCG), which was the clinical arm of the Board of Education having responsibility for the diagnosis, treatment and educational placement of students, indicated the following:

The practice of school social work in the New York City schools is geared to a level of action considerably beyond 'support'--it is focused on effecting substantial and specific changes in both school milieu, neighborhood environment, personal orientation and family group living, in order to facilitate maximum educational outcomes for children. The major thrusts of school social work are in areas which have been statistically proven to effect learning outcomes. These are:

- Improvement of children's and parents' self-concept
- Helping teachers understand the dynamics of classroom management and the needs and feelings of children
- Direct application of the social workers' findings about the effects of familial relationships and group interactive processes of learning
- Assurance of more than minimum standards of health and other community care for school children and their families
- Reduction of the effects of prejudice and distortions about the behavior and learning of ethnic and cultural minorities.

In this context, school social work services encompassed the principles and practices of a sound mental hygiene program. The Bureau viewed the school social worker as a mental hygiene specialist in the school setting. Indeed, the mission of the Bureau which was the basis for its administrative design and processes was based on the belief that the student's mental health could not be separated from education. All aspects of school life, particularly the relationship between teacher and pupil, pupils with each other, the atmosphere, culture and climate

of the school in which these encounters occur, had a great impact on the development of the healthy, social child. The Bureau's mission placed it in conflict with the Board of Education. In general, the primary aim of the education system is to educate. Mental health is viewed as an abstract by-product. Timberlake, Sabatino & Harper, in a study on the issues related to the interface between mental health services and public schools, point out that the planning and implementing of specialized services for students often function at cross purposes with the primary goals of the public school system.<sup>21</sup> Mental health services are secondary and relate to an area outside the primary focus of education. These secondary services are provided only for the resolution of problems that interfere with the learning process. Therefore, it can be assumed that schools want a clear, pragmatic clinical service, and specifically, school social work service for students that will enable them to do their job—educate. Programs and services that cannot meet that need may not last: the Bureau of Child Guidance, as a mental health clinic, did not survive.

Innovative services specifically designed for the school setting are needed. To develop such services, it is important to understand the philosophies, assumptions, values and practices that guide educational policy. These factors underpin the operation of public schools. Through its curriculum and procedures, public schools reflect the norms and values of society. It is the system's view of students, its expectations and goals for students that determine the school social work role and function specifically, and clinical services in general.

According to Steiner, the development of services in schools is dependent on a political process "in which persons with different perspec-

tives strive to have their views implemented."<sup>22</sup> He cites three political philosophies commonly found in schools, the traditionalist perspective, the illness perspective and the socioecological perspective. These perspectives have a direct influence on educational goals and the actions of support personnel, in this instance, the school social worker. Stein defines the traditionalist perspective as a "belief that the means to a good society is realized when the citizens are dedicated, knowledgeable, and physically fit. They see young persons in terms of their potential to become either public assets who strengthen society or public liabilities who weaken the social fabric."<sup>23</sup> The school is considered to be the place which ensures that all capable young persons develop into good citizens. The means to this goal may be based on the concept of reward and punishment or acceptance and rejection. The traditionalist's perspective generally supports the separation of the student who is sick, or has an intellectual, physical or emotional handicap. It is assumed that this is in the "best interest of the child," but equally important is the objective of protecting the normative structure of the school.

The illness perspective is based on a "belief that illness in some form, is the primary factor that prevents students from developing to their full capacity."<sup>24</sup> This perspective gives priority to the diagnosis and treatment of students, and schools are seen as the institution that can best insure that students are evaluated. It is important to note that this position generally views adjustment as the aim of treatment. "The object of adjustment may be called 'reality,' 'adulthood,' or 'socialization,' but its meaning regardless of the label is that the individual must learn to conform to the model public behavior of others

who occupy the same social station."<sup>25</sup> Advocates of this perspective contend that an effective way to increase the mental health of the nation is through the school system.

The socioecological perspective presumes that problem behavior cannot be resolved by removing students from their social environment. The focus is on the students within the social systems that affect their behavior. Advocates of this perspective value an alignment between needs, capacities and aspirations of students and the expectations, opportunities and resources of the school.

Each of these philosophical perspectives are supported by some school personnel, including social workers and discredited by others. "Many of them are political hybrids in that they support assumptions drawn from a variety of political philosophies."<sup>26</sup> Values, such as a belief in the importance of teaching students to read, write and do arithmetic are shared by advocates of all three philosophies.

The significance of being aware of these orientations is that each represents a pattern of beliefs regarding which students will be included or excluded from programs, which regular or special education services will be provided by the system, and under which conditions a school will provide specific services.

To provide further insight into the relationship of values to the development and delivery of educational services, it is helpful to examine key educational policies. Two major educational policies that have a profound effect on the operation of schools and the practice of school social work are the student's right to a free and appropriate education. These policies are linked to the dynamics of our society and reflect the state of society.<sup>27</sup> Society's mandate for equal educa-

tional opportunity is based on a belief that every human being has a right to the means to realize his or her individual potential. In a society in which individual achievement is valued, education is considered necessary to succeed in life. The depth of this charge to education by society is stated in the civil rights court case, Brown vs.

Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas:

Today education is perhaps the most important function of the state and local governments...(and) where states have undertaken to provide it, (it) is a right which must be available to all on equal terms...and...if education is a principal instrument in helping the child adjust normally to his environment, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed <sup>in</sup> life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.

The basis for these rights is founded upon the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Constitution does not establish the right of every child to an education, but it does specify the individual's right to equal protection under the law. The Fourteenth Amendment has become the instrument for educational reform. Society recognized that opportunities come only from policies. Equal educational opportunity for all children is accepted as a responsibility --government, whether it is federal, state, or local--must share with the family. Interest in the total quality of life of individuals has spurred national interest in developing educational and social programs to help individuals lead a more productive life.

The passage and implementation of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975<sup>29</sup> is an important example of the mandating of these rights. The law states that all children, regardless of the type and severity of their handicap, must be afforded the opportunity to benefit from public education without cost. The proposition in which

this policy statement rests is that without exception every child, every retarded child, every exceptional child is capable of benefiting from an education. It has been said that PL 94-142 is the single most important piece of federal education legislation enacted during the 1970's. It is a logical outgrowth of the civil rights legislation of the '60's. The concern laid the groundwork for handicapped rights legislation. This law would not only define the rights but also set down the mechanism for enforcement. The overall direction of the judicial decisions, federal, and state regulations was to broaden the traditional focus of the school in the process of providing and facilitating a free, appropriate, public education for handicapped children aged three to twenty-one (3 to 21) years. The intent of this law is to assure that handicapped children will no longer be ignored or underserved. In order to be eligible for federal funds, states must submit to the Federal Commissioner of Education plans which demonstrate compliance with the provisions of PL 94-142.

The major provisions include the following:

1. free and appropriate education for all handicapped children
2. individualized education programs
3. nondiscriminatory testing
4. education and support services
5. placement of children in the least restrictive environment
6. procedural due process protection for children and parents

The Act defines "handicapped children" as:

...those children evaluated...as being mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech-impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired or other health impaired, deaf-blind, multi-handicapped, or as having specific learning disabilities, who because of these impairments need special education and related services.

Related services means the provision of additional services that will assist a child to benefit from general and/or special education. The right to educational opportunity for every handicapped child is based on the belief that there is no such thing as an uneducable and untrainable child. The societal goal is that the handicapped child must be prepared to be a self-sufficient, productive citizen whenever possible.

The civil rights movement of the '60's and subsequent educational reform can also be viewed as flowing from changed expectations of the public regarding the purpose of public education. The country as a whole has been concerned about the failure of nearly one-fifth of its young people to learn what the schools are expected to teach them.

One assumption about schooling is that its purpose is to provide the pupil with basic and career skills which will enable him or her to be self-reliant in adulthood. Educational theory that underlies educational policies is based on assumptions about learning and human behavior, that is, the child who has a normal aptitude is pliable; teachers are pliable and will comply with regulations, court orders or scientific knowledge about education. Not all of these assumptions can be proven, yet policies based on them expect schools to achieve anticipated results. The objective for the handicapped child is to not only provide appropriate education, but also to assimilate him into the mainstream of the general education population. The education policy as expressed in PL 94-142 not only specifies this objective, but legislates the education process itself. For example, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) must be prepared for the handicapped child. This mandate specifies and narrows the educational goals within the Least Restrictive Environment, and in doing

so goes beyond statements or rhetoric regarding the provision of educational opportunity to acquire basic skills. It sets the ground work for state legislation, as well, which has specifically addressed the mainstreaming issue.

Policy statements such as the IEP for the handicapped child reflect a reorientation in the goals and priorities of the public school system. Is education a requirement which society imposes on the child? When the focus is preparing a child for life, education is a requirement. It becomes the treatment which society imposes on the individual to prepare him or her to become a member of society. This is the dominant view that underpins educational policy, such as PL 94-142.

The impact of federal legislation and/or judicial decisions regarding equal educational opportunity has stimulated critiques on current educational policies and programs. Coleman, in an article on educational equality, raises some interesting philosophical issues.<sup>31</sup> He cites two philosophical works: John Rawls' A Theory of Justice, and Robert Nozick's Anarchy, State and Utopia. He compares these differing philosophies as they relate to educational policy. Rawls' principle of distributive justice presupposes that resources and their products are collectively held. Nozick's theory is opposed to this principle and begins with an assumption that each person has a set of natural rights. Nozick believes that justice demands neither equality nor an inequality that must benefit the least advantaged. Rather, he states that each person is fully entitled to what he has justly acquired. The individual is entitled to what he has earned and to use it as he sees fit. This philosophy is the opposite of Rawls' central authority who is entitled to distribute the fruits of

everyone's labor.

Coleman contrasts these two philosophies against the past and current educational policies in this country. Public school in America has been locally financed and controlled and it had been egalitarian. An aberration, according to Coleman, was the issue of slavery and its residue, the dual school system of the South. The common schools of the 19th Century were typically one school for children from all walks of life. Social levels were mixed. In the more recent history of public education, after World War I, the development of urban areas altered the pattern of early schools. An erosion of the egalitarian principle that was the basis of the common school emerged. Residential patterns affected the school population, creating socially homogeneous schools. Choosing schools by choosing a residence remains the practice today.

Educational policy, if one accepts the Rawls' position, would create a full equalization of opportunity for each child. This option withdraws individual rights, placing them with a central authority which would assign children from different backgrounds in equal measure to all schools. This option places a total value on equality and is indifferent to any loss of liberty that may result.<sup>32</sup> An alternative would be Nozick's philosophy which retains the individual rights of families to choose their school by choice of residence. This option values individual liberty and is indifferent to whatever inequality that may result.

In reviewing PL 94-142, it is apparent that its underlying value is equal educational opportunity; however, the distribution of resources remains unchanged. Distribution continues to be influenced by Nozick's philosophy of individual choice based on the resources of the local com-

munities. Therefore, more affluent communities have more abundant resources, namely, better programs, services, teachers and materials. The local school district has the freedom to use its own resources for its own schools. A growing inequity based on the way schools are financed becomes the norm. Federal funds are distributed on a per-capita basis and, therefore, the gap between wealthy and poor school districts is not addressed. Inequities in school funding has been and remains a serious social issue. The traditional means of providing educational services has not radically changed.

Another issue which is related to equality as a theme in educational policy is socializing of students to various expectations. It is a school function that is not openly admitted, but does influence the process of education. As a social institution, public schools are expected to repair and reform "deviant" families and communities by resocializing the children. The public education system would be the means of recreating social solidarity. There is a connection between equality and community as themes in educational policy. Equality in education is seen as a way to achieve the cohesive community. From this perspective, educational opportunity is viewed as an equalizing force for a diverse American population. Equalitarian social policy discourages alienation and creates solidarity. The most recent federal educational policies and judicial decisions have been based on the value of equality, namely, desegregation of the schools, financing of schools and the education of the handicapped. In recreating social solidarity, schools perform a normative function, and in doing so protect the present social order.

American society views the public school as a means to upward mobility

and as an open environment of fair competition. Schools serve this function for some students but for a large number of students, opportunity is limited and they remain at the same social position as their parents. For example, few poor and working class children who attended school in the 19th Century were placed in vocational programs which were suitable to their interest and capacities.<sup>33</sup> Greer questions the validity of fair competition and equality for all. The public education system took the poor, ill-prepared ethnic minorities, educated and Americanized them. Greer declares this belief a myth. It is an established fact that schools in their traditional role choose and direct choices of students throughout their schooling.<sup>34</sup> The process is influenced by the "students' socio-economic status, race, or ethnic group, initial adjustment to school entrance, behavior in the classroom, their parents' relationship to the school and the reputation they acquire among school personnel and other pupils."<sup>35</sup>

In terms of school-based practice, no where is this "sorting and distributing" of students more evident than in the traditional assessment model. Assessments are used to determine educational services for students. The model is based on a medical paradigm that classifies students from an individual deviance analysis. Gliedman refers to this paradigm as a social pathology model which defines problems in terms of deviation from the established norms of behavior. These norms are set by the lifestyle, values and experiences of white middle class children who have grown up in a world that is very different from minority children.<sup>36</sup> The lack of sensitivity to racially and culturally diverse student populations has been severely criticized in the literature of the

related fields of psychology and education.<sup>37</sup>

Current practice rests on the assumption that when students experience academic and behavior problems in school, it is because there is something wrong with them. Standardized tests are administered to determine the "real" cause of the child's problem. The assessors search for pathology in the hope of anticipating the real cause of the child's learning or behavioral difficulties.<sup>38</sup> There is a need for changes in the nature of conceptualizations about children who are experiencing learning and/or behavior difficulties. As noted by Johnson, "formulations which likened the nature of schooling problems to disease, as in the medical sense, must be rejected."<sup>39</sup> Data suggests that many students fail to learn simply because they have not been provided opportunities. These authors suggest that the assessment question to be asked is the extent to which instruction is occurring at an appropriate level and of sufficient duration to ensure acquisition and retention. Traditional assessment procedures do not provide adequate information regarding the degree to which a student can profit from instruction, and such data is considered to be more significant in developing an educational plan for them. Indeed, research in education and school social work emphasizes that conditions existing in schools contribute to the low achievement of large groups of students.<sup>40</sup> Assessment of student difficulties should be expanded to incorporate conditions in the school which may affect the child's overall performance.<sup>41</sup> Conclusions that can be drawn from the review of the literature regarding psychological and educational testing is that, similar to school social work practice, there are no clear answers to questions regarding the validity and reliability of psychological tests.

There have not been any definitive answers as to whether tests can predict and measure school achievement. However, it is known that regardless of this lack of definitive information, psychological and educational tests have significantly influenced educational practice such as ability and homogeneous grouping of children and, in terms of educational policy, the classification and placement of students into special education programs.

In the final analysis, schools that continue to sort individual students for certain occupations and social positions are undermining the societal value of equal educational opportunity. Equal access to the school's resources for all children is a value that underpins school social work practice. Educators and social workers share a value base that reflects the standards of belief in the worth and dignity of the individual. We believe that education makes a difference in a person's life. We know and believe that children can profit from an education appropriate to their capabilities. The assessment process must be sensitive to the appropriateness of instructional tasis, interaction between student and teacher and the "culture" of the school. Ysseldyke and Mercer suggest that the clinician should adopt a functional assessment perspective. This is defined by the authors as an analysis of the learning experiences a student is being exposed to at the time of referral: "an analysis within the instructional ecology of the general education classroom."<sup>42</sup>

### Review of the Literature

A review of the literature concerning school social work practice suggests that there has been an expansion of the body of professional

knowledge and skills. In 1968, Costin surveyed a national sample of school social workers about their role, and their practice goals. The key finding of this research was that the traditional casework emphasis in school social work practice was outdated. Recommendations included a need to look at the whole school, at target groups of students and at the relationship among home, school and community. Costin suggested that school social workers should have a more active role with administrators. Advocacy for changing the goal of school social workers to focus on the school and to engage in a process of both system and institutional change was urged. She recommended that social work activities should include consultation with teachers on general classroom issues, group work with students, work with parents on students' rights issues and participation in resource development on the community level. Costin's research has been widely disseminated and has presented a major influence on school social work practice.<sup>43</sup>

Gottlieb and Gottlieb's analysis of the traditional school social work model also concluded that the traditional model was insufficient for today's practice of school social work.<sup>44</sup> The Gottliebs maintain that school social workers must become more knowledgeable in their ability to assess system-wide problems in the schools. They conclude that "the expanded role of the school social worker can be far more effective than the traditional role of caseworker with individuals."<sup>45</sup>

Alderson & Krisef analyzed school social workers' tasks in Florida. This study found that school social workers rated leadership and policy-making highest and casework with individual students lowest.<sup>46</sup>

Another relevant study regarding school social work tasks found

agreement between school social workers and principals about a variety of tasks.<sup>47</sup> Significant agreement was found on the need for school social workers to advise parents about community agencies, inform the principal regarding individual case progress, and investigate the neighborhood environment. This study is important because it addresses school social workers' and principals' attitudes toward these tasks.

Meares' study, using a national sample, found that there had been only a slight change from the traditional form of casework to a systems' approach. Many school-based social workers seemed to be in a transitional role between casework and the systems' approach.

Recent research in school social work practice has shown that although social workers continue to offer casework services to students, the focus of their service is becoming broader. Timberlake, Sabatino & Harper suggested that the mental health professional's traditional perspective has been committed to the psychodynamic tradition of theory and practice. They identify with the illness perspective and therefore use the medical model of assessment and treatment. "School-based mental health professionals must identify with a wider range of concerns and a variety of theory and practice traditions."<sup>49</sup> It is suggested that school social workers as school-based mental health professionals can develop an agreement in function between the school and mental health practice through the use of theories about internal dynamics of growth and development and theories about the impact of the external environment. The focus should be on students within social systems, namely, the family, school, community and its cultural, economic structure and the reciprocal influences of these systems as well as the possible impact of these in-

fluences on the student.<sup>50</sup> Timberlake, Sabatino, & Hooper found in their study that school social workers are involved more in the transactional domain, where the child and the learning environment come together, and less in the child's intrapsychic domain. They also note a movement toward an interprofessional model, diagnosing handicapping conditions, giving the system feedback about data collected in diagnoses. Three fourths of their respondents in a national survey were frequently engaged in consultation, short-term counseling and diagnostic assessment.<sup>51</sup>

Supporting these findings, a Canadian study on school social work tasks found that the focus of school social workers in Toronto has broadened their activities from dealing directly with the student to include tasks related to advocacy and system change.<sup>52</sup>

Over the last ten years, the literature has shown changes in the school social work practice themes. Similar to the research in school social work practice, articles have noted the transition to a broader conception of tasks and function. Indirect services, that is, liaison activities with school personnel, identifying target groups of students, changing adverse conditions in the schools rather than direct services to individual students were discussed.<sup>53</sup>

The appearance of these articles describing and recommending expanding school social work practice results from a recognition of the significant change in the social climate affecting the schools. As stated by Constable and Flynn, "the institution of education is not simply a backdrop for some type of standard practice. In the blending of social work with the mission of education, a distinct and different practice emerges."<sup>54</sup>

NOTES: Chapter 1

1. National Association of Social Workers, The Human Factor, A Key of Excellence in Education (Silver Springs, Md.: National Association of Social Workers, 1985), p. 1.
2. Ibid., p.2.
3. National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education, 1983), p. 4.
4. National Association of Social Workers, The Human Factor, p. 1.
5. Neil Gross, Joseph B. Giacquinta, and Marilyn Bernstein, Implementing Organizational Innovations: A Sociological Analysis of Planned Educational Change (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 17.
6. Ibid., p. 25.
7. Carel Germain, "An Ecological Perspective on Social Work in the Schools," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), p. 5.
8. Lela B. Costin, Social Work Services in Schools: Historical Perspectives and Current Directions (Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1977), p. 1.
9. Ibid.
10. John A. Brown, "The School as an Organization: An Approach to Problem-Solving in the School Setting," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), p. 289.
11. Paula Allen-Meares, and Bruce Lane, "A Content Analysis of School Social Work Literature, 1968-1978," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), p. 38.
12. Costin, Social Work Services in Schools, pp. 28-45.
13. Richard Stanley Peters, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education," in John Dewey Reconsidered, ed. Richard Stanley Peters (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 103.

14. Morris, L. Bigge, Learning Theories for Teachers. 4th ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), p. 170.
15. Social Casework, What Is It, What Is Its Place in the World Today?, cited by Wendy G. Winters, and Freda Easton, The Practice of Social Work in Schools: An Ecological Perspective, (New York: Free Press, 1983), p. 149.
16. Richard A. Cloward, and Lloyd Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs (New York: Free Press, 1960), pp. 77-107.
17. Bernard Rist, "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectation," Harvard Educational Review 40 (August, 1970), pp. 411-451.
18. David Ryans, "Some Relationships Between Teacher Characteristics and Pupil Behavior," in Readings and Learnings in Human Abilities, ed. Richard Ripple (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 243-245.
19. Allison Davis, Social Class Influence on Learning (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 125.
20. New York City Board of Education, Bureau of Child Guidance, "The School Social Worker in the New York City Schools: Impact on the Educational Process," (New York, 1973), (Type-written.)
21. Elizabeth Timberlake, Chris Sabatino, and Sally Hooper, "Issues Related to the Interface between Mental Health Services and the Public Schools," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), pp. 184-187.
22. Joseph R. Steiner, "Social Workers in School Politics," SWE 1 (October, 1979), p. 41.
23. Ibid., p. 42.
24. Ibid., p. 44.
25. Ibid., p. 45.
26. Ibid., p. 53.
27. Robert T. Constable, and John P. Flynn, "Legal Mandates and Social Services in Special Education," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), p. 95.
28. Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. 349 U. S. 294. 1954.

29. Education of All Handicapped Children Act. Public Law 94-142, Vol. 20 (1975).
30. David Moorman, Vaughn Morrison, and Marguerite Tiefenthal, "PL 94-142 and Its Regulations," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), p. 100.
31. James S. Coleman, "Rawls, Nozick, and Educational Equality," Public Interest 40 (Spring, 1976), pp. 121-128.
32. Ibid.
33. Colin Greer, The Great School Legend (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 80.
34. David K. Cohen, "Loss as a Theme in Social Policy," Harvard Educational Review 46 (November, 1976), pp. 553-571; Greer, The Great School Legend, pp. 105-129; Costin, "School Social Work Practice: A New Model," SW 20 (March, 1975), pp. 135-139; John Ogbu, Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 137-140.
35. Costin, Social Work Services in Schools, p. 2.
36. John Gliedman, and William Roth, The Unexpected Minority: Handicapped Children in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1980), p. 142.
37. Luis M. Laosa, "Nonbiased Assessment of Children's Abilities: Historical Antecedents and Current Issues," in Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children, ed. Thomas Oakland (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1977), pp. 1-20; James E. Savage, and Alvis V. Adair, "Testing Minorities: Developing More Culturally Relevant Assessment Systems," in Black Psychology, 2nd ed., ed. Reginald L. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 196-200.
38. Gliedman, and Roth, The Unexpected Minority, p. 143.
39. John L. Johnson, "Mainstreaming Black Children," in Black Psychology, 2nd ed., ed. Reginald L. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 258-262.
40. Benjamin S. Bloom, Human Characteristics and School Learning (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 213; Costin, Social Work Services in School, p. 39-42; Robert D. Vinter, and Rosemary C. Sarri, "Malperformance in the Public Schools: A Group Work Approach," SW 10 (January, 1965), pp. 11-13.

41. Carel Germain, and Alex Gitterman, The Life Model of Social Work Practice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 139; Wendy G. Winters, and Freda Easton, The Practice of Social Work in Schools: An Ecological Perspective (New York: Free Press, 1983), pp. 16-38.
42. James Ysseldyke, and Jane R. Mercer, "Designing Diagnostic-Intervention Programs," in Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children, ed. Thomas Oakland (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1977), p. 83.
43. Lela B. Costin, "An Analysis of the Tasks in School Social Work," Social Service Review 43 (September, 1969), pp. 274-285.
44. Benjamin H. Gottlieb, and Lois J. Gottlieb, "An Expanded Role for the School Social Worker," SW 16 (October, 1971), pp. 12-21.
45. Ibid., p. 21.
46. John J. Alderson, and Curtis H. Krishef, "Another Perspective on Tasks in School Social Work," Social Casework 59 (December, 1973), pp. 591-600.
47. Robert B. Williams, "School Compatibility and Social Work Role," Social Service Review 44 (June, 1970), pp. 169-176.
48. Paula Allen-Meares, "Integrating Systems Interaction and Treatment Approaches in Working with Handicapped Children and their Families," in School Social Work and PL 94-142: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, eds. Richard J. Anderson, Molly Freeman, and Richard L. Edwards (Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1977), pp. 82-83.
49. Timberlake, Sabatino, and Hooper, "Issues Related to the Interface between Mental Health Services and the Public Schools, p. 181.
50. Germain, and Gitterman, Life Model, pp. 2-21; Winters, and Easton, Practice of Social Work in Schools, pp. 14-15; Paula Allen-Meares, "Assessing Behavior Disorders in Children: An Eclectic Approach," SWE 7 (Winter, 1985), pp. 100-114.
51. Elizabeth Timberlake, Chris Sabatino, and Sally Hooper, "School Social Work Practice and PL 94-142," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), pp. 72-70.
52. Camille Lambert, and Robert Mullaly, "School Social Work: The Congruence of Task Importance and Level of Effort," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), pp. 72-92.

53. Winters and Easton, Practice of Social Work in Schools, pp. 1-157; Germain, "An Ecological Perspective," pp. 3-12; Allen-Meares, and Lane, "A Content Analysis," pp. 38-48; Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn, eds., School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), pp. 1-385; Edith Freeman, "Analyzing the Organizational Context of Schools," SWE 7 (Spring, 1985), pp. 141-159.
54. Robert T. Constable, and John P. Flynn, "Theory and Research in School Social Work," in School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, eds. Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982), p. 2.

## CHAPTER 2

### NEW APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE AS IT AFFECTS THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

Certain conditions and processes found in social welfare organizations, such as schools, impact on their performance and effectiveness with clients. School social workers are concerned with the promotion of services that are responsive to student needs and are effectively and humanely administered. In the process of delivering services, it becomes apparent that there are school conditions that contribute to students' problems. Modifying school policies and procedure, influencing climate and structure are initiated by practitioners in an effort to improve the organization's performance and relations with its student-client.

#### Theories

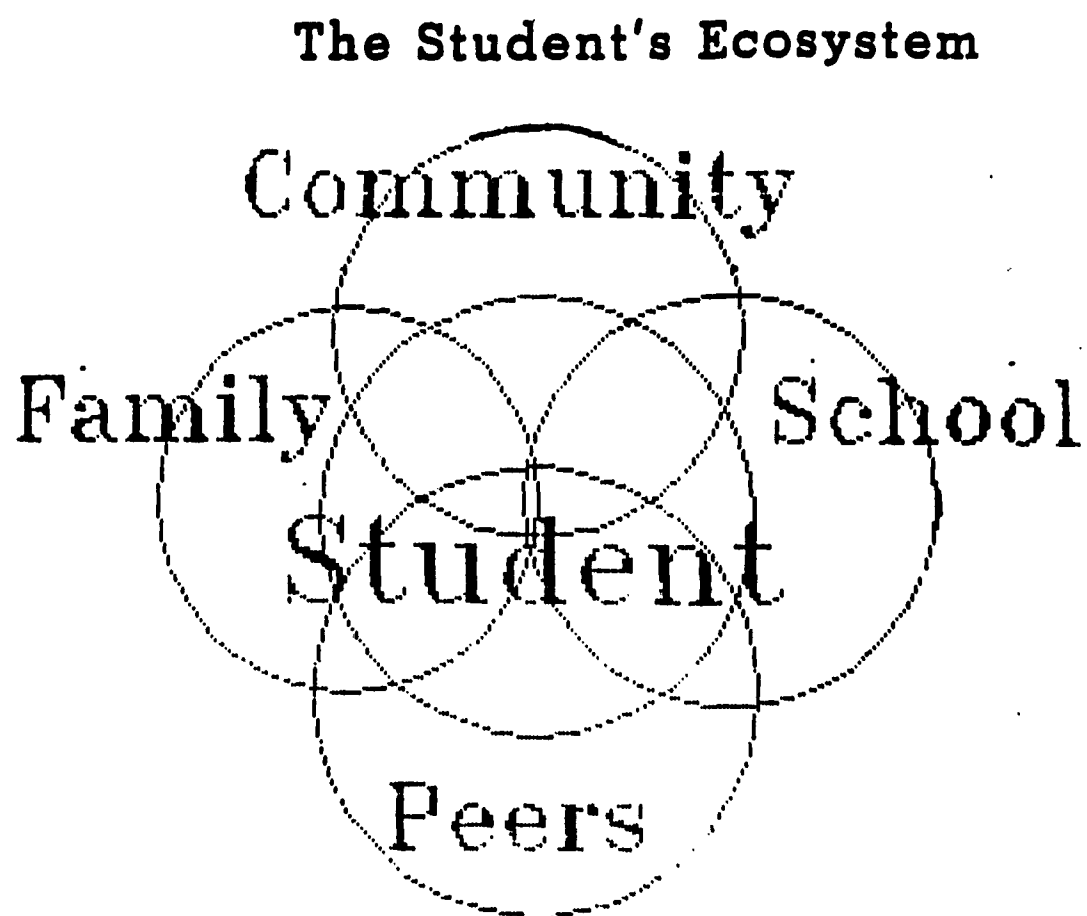
Intervention in problems in the school setting requires an expansion of the school social work practice model. In broadening their role and function, practitioners must consider the process of interaction between students and school conditions. Theories that will guide the formulation of the project will focus on ecological systems (ecosystems) and organizational change concepts. An ecosystem model of practice is an eclectic integrated perspective that addresses the reciprocal relations between the individual and his environment. It is based on the belief that individuals have needs, aspirations and capacities that in the ideal situation should be in harmony with the

expectations, opportunities, and resources of the social systems in which they function.<sup>1</sup> Advocates of this perspective believe that problem behavior, which is defined as dysfunctional social role performance, occurs when there is a misalignment between a student's needs and the social environment. According to ecosystems theory, the individual changes and is changed by his social and physical environment. The ecosystems perspective provides a useful guide for the assessment and intervention process. It is concerned with life situations and with the interface between the student and the important subsystems in which the student must take part. According to Meares, it provides a holistic and dynamic understanding of the student and the different environments in which the student functions.<sup>2</sup> (See Figure 1 which illustrates the student's ecosystem, p. 34, this study).

Ecology refers to the study of complex reciprocal and adaptive transactions among organisms and their environments. It focuses on the function or interface of the organism and the impinging environment....General Systems Theory was designed to specify the processes of transactions within and among systems. When used in association with ecological ideas can provide concepts for understanding the how's and why's of system's interaction with the environment.

In social work practice, the unit of attention is the person-in-situation. The situation is rooted in the person's total milieu/ecological environment. How the person and situation fit together has been conceptualized in practice as the social worker's role, which is to effect a better mutual adaptation between man and society, a better fit between need and service and a better ecological balance between personality and environment. To do this, the school social worker must understand how systems interact. The school social worker must assess

Figure 1



the facts of a case and find direct and indirect influences on the client-student. These influences may range from family relationships to the political atmosphere of the school. In assessing these factors, the school social worker hypothesizes about what needs to be strengthened or modified.

General Systems Theory helps to order the complex transacting ecological factors. The most salient concepts are those that define an open system, one that continuously gives up matter to the outer world and takes in matter from it. The open system maintains itself in this continuous exchange in a steady state or it approaches a steady state in its variations in time. The term "open system" is used relatively since no living system is ever completely open or closed. The system is viewed as transactional since it interacts not only with other systems, but also within the hierarchy of subsystems within itself. Therefore, there is a hierarchical relationship that exists within and among systems. The practitioner needs to specify the identity of the system being studied. The frame of reference concept tells whether the system being studied is a family, person, or institution. Finally, the concept of time tells us that a system exists within a past, present, and future which is dependent on the status or growth of the subsystem as it evolves interdependently with other systems. Each system has its own past, responds to the demands of time (in the present) in an idiosyncratic way which helps to determine its future course. The internal state of the system is determined by five principles as shown below:

1. Steady state which refers to energy used to maintain the system while helping it to adapt to any consistencies in the environment.

2. Homeostatisis, the term used to define the maintenance of a system at a recognizable level.
3. Differentiation which occurs because of the dynamic interaction of the system with the environment and results in greater heterogeneity and elaboration.
4. Nonsummativity asserts that data obtained from isolated parts of the system cannot be added up to represent the whole system.
5. Reciprocity, a change in one part of the system has repercussions for the whole system.<sup>4</sup>

The ecosystems perspective is not tied to any one treatment approach or intervention; it permits the school social worker to use several approaches that focus on changing any part of the ecosystem that may be contributing to learning and/or behavioral dysfunction.

Two definitions are important to the understanding of the process in an eco-systems perspective. Interaction refers to indirect effects of one individual upon another; for example, maternal effects on children without consideration of other facts. Transaction refers to bidirectional and reciprocal effects of individuals within a field, that is, the mother's reaction to her child is not independent from the child's own behavior and the mother's relationship to her husband as well as the mothering experiences she was subjected to in her childhood.<sup>5</sup> This perspective offers an adaptive, evolutionary view of individuals who are in constant reciprocal exchange with all elements of their environment.<sup>6</sup> Hansen and L'Abate note that when reciprocal adaptations go well, this supports growth and development of individuals. If individuals do not receive appropriate nutrients from the environment at the appropriate time, their biological, cognitive, emotional and social development is slowed and/or their functioning is weakened. Nutrients can be considered to be stimuli, information, energy, or resources. When there are upsets in the adaptive balance between people

and their environments, stress occurs. The ecosystems concept as articulated by Germain & Gitterman treats stress as a psychosocial condition originating by differences between needs and capacities on one hand, and environmental qualities on the other.<sup>7</sup>

Meyer advises that the ecosystems perspective does not tell the practitioner what to do but, rather, what is happening. It tells the social worker to consider whether a system is too closed to outside input or whether its boundaries are too rigid, and if so the consequences will be entropy.<sup>8</sup> Minuchin notes that the ecosystems model frees the therapist to utilize every school's insights and techniques. It broadens the approach to a model that is more in keeping with the realities of the human experience.<sup>9</sup>

#### New Application of Knowledge

Application of these concepts to school social work practice involves a shift in the view of linear causality to a transactional model of causality where all significant elements in a case act on each other--the interface where systems meet and transact. Emphasis is placed on holism; attention is placed on the person and the environment.

In this project, the school social worker's task is the analysis of the referred student's environment, i.e., school, classroom with individual and family analysis. It urges that practitioners look beyond the functioning of the individual student and seek to evaluate student, teacher, peers and school interactions and transactions. The school-based practitioner approaches the problem from the context of school, family, and community. Intervention goals and activities are based on the data collected during the assessment phase when the clinician learns

about the presenting problem, the relationships among the individuals that contributed to the problem and the ways in which these individuals can join in bringing about change. Intervention can range from focusing activities around the individual student to service to the school of a subsystem of the school. Intervention with school personnel can address management techniques for teachers, appreciation of cultural differences, understanding students with different developmental patterns and learning styles associated with race or ethnicity. It is an optimistic view of human potential, characterizing problems and challenges as growth opportunities. For the purposes of this project, the transaction between the student and school is emphasized. The project encourages consideration of the possibility that problems arise from discrepancies in the reciprocal process of adaptation and are not solely due to dysfunctional student and family patterns. It is directed at recommending changes in the school and/or classroom as ecosystems which impact on learning and/or behavioral difficulties. The school system is viewed as a unit of analysis and a target of intervention. School social work skills and techniques are directed toward negotiating the interaction of coping patterns (adaptive/maladaptive) and environmental properties (growth producing/socially polluting) to support identity foster self-esteem, competence and autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

The ecosystem approach can be regarded as a pragmatic general framework for conceptualizing school-based problems. Dowling states the aims of the approach as follows:

1. to clarify differences in perception of the problem by focusing on how it occurs rather than why;

2. to negotiate commonly agreed goals;
3. to begin to explore specific steps towards change.<sup>11</sup>

The school social worker would consider the transactions among all the school system's subsystems. In addition he or she must also consider how these interactions affect the student's learning and/or adjustment. The characteristics of the school's academic expectations, the quality of teacher interactions with students, the resourcefulness of teachers and the flexibility of the educational programs are all important factors in the assessment of a school system.<sup>12</sup>

Similar to the parent system, the school is organized as subsystems whose members' roles are determined by function. The school principal functions in a managerial and leadership capacity. They facilitate the interactions between parent, student, and teacher. They attempt to maintain a balance between teacher expectations and parent requests; and, therefore, the potential for role conflict does exist as they deal with the tensions that can occur between staff and parents. Conflict can also emerge between the formal and informal systems in the system, i.e., union demands, informal teacher groups, and so forth. If schools are to operate in an orderly, meaningful way, balance must be achieved so as not to foster dysfunction.

Teachers as a role group can operate individually or collectively. Their primary function is to interact with the learner in the instructional process. A teacher has the ultimate authority in the classroom, and this power is derived primarily from responsibility for curriculum; the power base is teacher expertise. Teachers' relationship with their students is a very important variable in the assessment process.<sup>13</sup>

Students as a group are the least powerful in the school despite being the largest group. They come from various ethnic, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds and lifestyles. Students' formal instruction is based on curriculum content; however, students can also learn informally from interactions with other groups in the system, i.e., peers, school aides and volunteers. The informal system can be a resource when the difference in cognitive style impedes upon the progress of students. The school analysis question is, will the teacher consider alternate instructional methods to accommodate the needs of the students and expand the instructional role group to include peers, aides, volunteers and parents? In terms of a systems perspective, the tensions and conflicts engendered by differences in learning styles, norms and expectations, do not rest with the student alone. The teacher is engaged in this transactional pattern and brings his biological, psychological, social and cultural forces with him; and this pattern impacts on curriculum, instruction, learning and performance. An additional assessment consideration is the adaptations students must make in the formal educational setting. They are assigned to a major subsystem, the classroom, which may or may not resemble the structure of their family system. The classroom is a transitory subsystem that develops and dissolves over the course of ten months. The children enter a new and totally different classroom subsystem, repeating the adaptation and classroom socialization process over and over again for twelve years. At the secondary level, children have to adapt to several different subsystems within the course of one day.<sup>14</sup>

Another factor to give thought to in the school system analysis

is the transactions and interactions between the role groups and parents. In this area, the school social worker should determine how willing the school system and its subsystems are to engage in mutual supports with parents. It is not uncommon for school personnel at all levels to describe parents, especially minority parents, as uncooperative, hostile, apathetic or disinterested. The social distance between parents and social groups are an indication of inadequate communication, which is a means of continuing the traditional authority and power that symbolizes schools in this country. From a system perspective, this transactional pattern between parents and school systems can be assessed as an historical and current maladaptive pattern. The structures and procedures within the school system maintain homeostasis at the expense of client interest, i.e., the students. The perception and description of parents as disinterested serves a purpose in keeping the school system in a precarious balance. These maladaptive patterns discourage initiative and innovations within the system's role groups, as well as in the design of programs and the setting of policies. These internal and external dynamics impact on school social work practice and challenge the practitioner's efforts to create change.<sup>15</sup>

In considering these dynamics, the school social worker should be familiar with the organizational context of schools. Brown notes that the school is an organization of coordinated activities of many individuals directed toward the achievement of its goal(s); the typical school system is bureaucratic with organizational characteristics similar to other bureaucracies. These characteristics are:

- a high degree of specialization
- a hierarchical authority structure

- . recruitment of administrators, teachers and other professional personnel on the basis of ability and technical knowledge
- . administration based on written documents, regulations and bylaws<sup>16</sup>

The size of the system influences the specialization of roles and tasks. Its centralized structure controls decision-making at high levels in the areas of budget, curriculum, instruction and ancillary services. Rules and procedures which govern staff's behavior are highly formalized.

The New York City Board of Education is an example of a highly formalized, centralized organization. As a formal organization (meaning an intentionally built social unit that has specific goals) the Board of Education has planned division of labor, communication system and the power to realize its goals. In this respect it is designed as any other formal organization. The basis of its authority is the State and City laws, regulations and administrative rules and procedures. To accomplish its mission, the Board has a specialization of labor based on function and expertise. It administers its special programs through regional offices and local district Committees on Special Education. The C.S.E.'s, as they are called, are responsible to help parents obtain an assessment of their children, conduct reviews certifying a handicapping condition when special education services are recommended. The Division of Special Education has a hierarchical structure consisting of a central administration composed of a chief administrator and deputy assistant superintendents. On the regional level, New York City is divided into six regions; there are deputy assistant superintendents for special education who administer the local programs. Each superintendency has assistants who are clinical and educational administrators.

Other middle management level personnel are the district Committee on Special Education chairperson and district supervisor of professional staff--social workers, teachers and psychologists.

The Bureaucratic structure of the Division of Special Education fits Handy's description of a role culture.<sup>17</sup> Its centralized administration is at the top and coordinates its operation; the teachers, psychologist and social workers are the functionaries. Rules and procedures are established to provide control, job descriptions and communications. Communications is formalized by circulars from the Central Board of Education and memoranda from the Division. Similarities with other bureaucratic structures are seen in the Division of Special Education's desire for a stable, status quo state. It is slow to recognize or to act on the need for change. When the external environment changes, the total structure is placed in jeopardy. Viteritti suggests that organizational survival and adaptability are a function of the ability to learn and perform according to changes in the environment. Organizational change is increasingly becoming externally induced, and organizations are constantly subject to the uncertain influences of a changing environment.<sup>18</sup> A study investigating the relationship between public bureaucratic institutions and their environments verified a four-point hypothesis. The study of finance departments across the United States found:

- 1) The structure and behavior of public bureaus are largely shaped by external forces.
- 2) This pattern is not necessarily dysfunctional because it may mean that government agencies are properly more open to external pressures than popular beliefs suggest.

- 3) Environmental effects may be mediated by a variety of mechanisms, such as the stability and nature of organizational leadership.
- 4) Many ongoing organizations<sup>19</sup> do not change fast enough, and are replaced.

These findings support the view that external forces influence organizations; public institutions are "open" to the external political environment. Strategies and characteristics of organizations help them to deal with complex environments; and adaptation is necessary for survival.

Given that adapting and modifying is part of the nature of organizational life, it is suggested in the literature that the rationale for organizational change grows out of the organization's need to survive. Survival becomes the ultimate test of the organization and its goal.<sup>20</sup>

Currently, the New York City Board of Education is facing a challenge to its authority, influence and control over special education programs and services. Through court action and political action<sup>21</sup>, the external environment is shaping the system's structure and processes. The former has mandated certain procedures and clinical practices that impact on service delivery, and the latter has suggested a re-evaluation of the system's objectives for all students, and special education students in particular.

No social institution except education has ever been subjected to such pressure to change, made so many attempts to do so, and yet has remained the same. Of the "puzzlement and frustration about the failure of efforts to improve schools," Sarason writes, "we conclude that something is wrong somewhere when, instead of getting better, schools appear to be impervious to improvement and may, in fact, be worse than they were."<sup>22</sup>

Institutional change comes slowly. Yet, to be more responsive to such demands for change, for more effective in-service delivery and service, organizations must answer to the realities of the internal and external environments. The New York City Board of Education's current concerns regarding the design and delivery of services to students provides an opportunity to consider changes in school social work practice. Of particular interest to this project is the emphasis on shifts in the function of school social work services to include a focus on prevention and re-assignment of practitioners to general education support services. The role and expectations of the New York City school social worker as defined by the organization is changing. The practitioner's expanded specialization can be interpreted as focused on improving the learning environment, and planning and coordinating programs that benefit all students.

#### Review of the Literature

Current data from national samples reveals that the role of the school social worker is wide ranging, and it is affected by practice situations and expectations.<sup>23</sup> While studies note a movement from individual change to systems change, there have been few studies of organizational attitudes and how they influence the expansion of the school social work role and tasks. Barriers to implementing an ecosystems model was examined by Zielinski and Coolidge. The study was conducted in a ten-school rural special education cooperative. The researchers were concerned with the role of the traditional approach versus a systems approach as viewed by school administrators.

They hypothesized that the level of resistance would be expressed by the administrators' attitudes towards both approaches. The primary question was whether school administrators would find a systems approach to school social work practice acceptable.

The results of their survey was that the administrators recognized the preventive value of the systems' model. However, they were concerned that in using this model, the social worker would not have the time to work on individual cases. The researchers concluded that administrators saw the traditional model as effective and, therefore, would be resistive to any changes. The traditional model met their needs. It is important to note that in the opinion of these authors, both models, traditional and systems, could not be implemented at the same time, given staff time constraints.<sup>24</sup> This is contrary to current thinking which encourages the use of both models. The question would be the meaning of "at the same time." Presently, it is suggested that there should be an assessment process that focuses on individual student, family and school variables. Intervention would be with the system that is most appropriate to attain desired goals.<sup>25</sup>

In a Michigan University School of Social Work study which examined the systems model of school social work practice, it was found that school social workers favored the system's intervention model. However, principals and teachers did not agree on the task of changing systems in which the principal or teacher was the focus of change. This study in Grand Rapids, Michigan, gives the first insights into role expectation problems in implementing a systems intervention model.<sup>26</sup>

In analyzing school personnel's expectations regarding clinical

interventions, Dowling notes that their outlook can range from expecting miracle cures, placing responsibility for change with the family, to removal of students from general education to special education. Indeed, the literature suggests that it is difficult for teachers and school administrators to acknowledge a need for help except in terms of helping the student.<sup>27</sup>

In introducing the ecosystems approach to the school system's way of thinking and viewing school problems, the school social worker is involved in planned efforts to change the behavior of teachers, administrators and students. Therefore, conflict may be unavoidable between the different role groups; tensions may arise from different perspectives toward operationalizing school policy as well as differences in the philosophies of working with people, and views of the consumers of educational services.<sup>28</sup>

Another view on organization members' response to suggested change efforts is cited in a study of a New England Elementary school which found that when organization members are faced with annoying problems and needless strain, innovations that offer remediation of their difficulties are welcomed. These researchers' view of the widely held assumption that most organizational members are resistant to change is far more rhetorical than demonstrable. It is their position that more research evidence is needed to support this proposition. Rather, they state that "deliberate efforts to introduce innovative changes into the organization, that is modifying specific patterns of organizational behavior"<sup>29</sup> is a process. They differentiate three basic stages:

1. period of initiation of an organizational innovation

2. period of its attempted implementation
3. period during which an innovation is incorporated into the organization

The first stage of the organizational change process, and the focus of this project, is initiation. It "covers the period of time in which a particular innovation is selected and introduced into the organization. More specifically, it is the stage in which an organization defines a problem, decides on an innovation to resolve it and presents the innovation to organizational members."<sup>30</sup>

Applying the ecosystems perspective in school social work practice represents an innovative change in the pattern of the school system's organizational behavior. It is not viewed as an end, but rather a means of improving the effectiveness of schools.

Brager indicates that change occurs in incremental steps and success in modifying some school or classroom practice to the benefit of a single student is a creditable outcome.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, to initially effect organizational change may mean trading major changes in school policies and practices for the smaller changes at the local school building level in classroom practices. "Being aware of the organizational constraints, the practitioner aims the change process at that level of the organization from which the greater gains can be achieved."<sup>32</sup>

The degree of freedom the practitioner has in suggesting modification in teacher-student practices and ultimately on agreed upon goals will meet the organizations's and students' needs will depend on the following:

- . familiarity with organizational change process
- . identification of key decision makers and pro change forces
- . identification of those resistive to recommended changes
- . understanding of power and political processes in schools.<sup>33</sup>

Power is defined as the ability to get things done, to mobilize resources, to get and use whatever it is that a person needs to meet his goals.<sup>34</sup>

To be an effective strategist, however, there must be a conscious use of self by the school social worker in the daily political processes of the school system. As a minority profession in the system, in comparison to teaching, the practitioner's greatest source of power is his colleagues. Brager indicates that practitioners must identify and mobilize their own and other's sources of power within the system as resources for intra-organizational change.<sup>35</sup>

Dowling suggests "getting a feel of the school, its approach to education, where the power structure lies, sorting out educational priorities and obtaining some idea of the tone of the school, both from its appearance and from observation of teacher-teacher, teacher-pupil, pupil-pupil interactions" is critical to understanding the school and successful intervention.<sup>36</sup>

School social workers must begin to view their job as political and identify the sources of power in their school systems. These sources of power in the school system can be external or internal to the system. Planning ahead, the school social worker builds and nurtures positive relationships with school-based colleagues as well as constituencies outside the school system; that is, parents and community groups. At the time such support is needed, it will be available.

Acknowledging that the school system is a political organization helps the school social worker to assess pros and cons of the work environment realistically. This orientation helps the practitioner assess the factors that influence problem-solving. Indeed, the reality is

that power influences decisions about which students are referred for service and what type of services are to be provided. Responding to this reality, the practitioner should become familiar with a range of appropriate responses to use in situations involving power.<sup>37</sup> One response which is based on the social work practice of assessment and is useful for this project is as follows: assuming a problem-solving stance, the following questions are asked by the practitioner in sorting out the dynamics of a situation: "What are the vested interests?" "Who are the key actors?" "What are the costs and benefits for constituents?" "How can the outcome be beneficial to students, parents, the system and me?"<sup>38</sup>

An outcome of such an assessment would be the selection of a strategy that offers the most advantages in influencing change. A collaborative strategy is suggested as being the least threatening method of influencing change. Participation by significant organization members is considered necessary throughout the total change process. Using this strategy, the practitioner's activities include:

1. providing information about the nature of the problem
2. presenting alternative procedures and programs
3. requesting support for new ways of delivering service
4. persuading by logical argument
5. selecting information for presentation
6. pointing out the negative consequences of continuing a specific policy or procedure.

This strategy is based on the assumption that the school system is rational, open to new ideas and acts in good faith.

The participation of those who have the greatest stake in the results of the change process should have a considerable effect on the degree to which the change efforts will be successful. To support this view, the literature cites the following:

1. participation leads to higher staff morale and high staff morale is necessary for successful implementation;
2. participation leads to greater commitment and a high degree of commitment is required for effecting change;
3. participation will reduce initial resistance and thereby facilitate successful implementation.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, the use of a collaborative strategy is believed to be a strategic factor in successfully influencing change.

It is apparent that the practitioner must develop power through collaboration and become familiar with a range of appropriate activities to influence the organization. The school social worker and the school—through its teachers, administrators and students--become partners in change. The school social worker accepts the social change focus of social work, utilizing the ecosystems approach as a bridge for connecting student needs with organizational structure and process.

NOTES: Chapter 2

1. Steiner, "Social Workers in School Politics," p. 46.
2. Allen-Meares, "Assessing Behavior Disorders in Children," pp. 105-107.
3. Geoffrey L. Grief, and Arthur A. Lynch, "The Ecosystems Perspective, ed. Carol H. Meyer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 36.
4. Ibid., p. 46-48.
5. James C. Hansen and Luciano L'Abate, Approaches to Family Therapy (New York: MacMillan, 1982), pp. 18-19.
6. Germain, and Gitterman, Life Model, p. 209.
7. Ibid., pp. 138-151.
8. Carol H. Meyer, "The Search for Coherence," pp. 27-32.
9. Salvador Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 63.
10. Edith Freeman, "Analyzing the Organizational Context of Schools," pp. 141-159; Winters, and Easton, Practice of Social Work in Schools, pp. 1-15.
11. Emilia Dowling, "Theoretical Framework: A Joint Systems Approach to Educational Problems with Children," in The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children, eds. Emilia Dowling, and Elsie Osborne (London: Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 17.
12. Allen-Meares, "Assessing Behavior Disorders in Children," p. 108.
13. Winters, and Easton, Practice of Social Work in Schools, pp. 4-6.
14. Barbara F. Okun, "Family Therapy and the Schools," in Family Therapy with School Related Problems, eds. James C. Hansen, and Barbara F. Okun (Rockville, Md.: Aspen Systems, 1984), pp. 3-4.
15. Germain, and Gitterman, Life Model, p. 139; James Comer, School Power: Implications of an Intervention Project (New York: Free Press, 1980), p. 145.
16. Brown, "The School as an Organization," pp. 284-285.

17. Charles B. Handy, Understanding Organizations, 2nd ed. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 179-181.
18. Joseph P. Viteritti, Across the River: Politics and Education in the City (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), pp. 337-338.
19. Change in Public Bureaucracies, cited by Joseph P. Viteritti, Across the River, p. 339.
20. Brown, "The School as an Organization," pp. 284-285; Richard H. Hall, Organizations: Structure and Process, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 208.
21. Lora vs. Board of Education, 74 FRD 565, (E.D.N.Y. 1977).; "Report of the Commission on Special Education: A Call for Quality to Mayor Edward I. Koch" by Richard I. Beattie, Chairperson, (New York: NY, June, 1985), (Typewritten).
22. David S. Seeley, "Seymour Sarason and the Problem of School Change," Harvard Educational Review 55 (August, 1985), 343.
23. Robert T. Constable, and Eldon Montgomery, "Perceptions of the School Social Worker's Role," SWE 4 (Summer, 1985), pp. 244-258.
24. Terry Zielinski, and Julie Coolidge, "Systems Model of School Social Work: Barriers to Implementation," in Professional Issues for Social Workers in Schools: Conference Proceedings (Silver Springs, Md.: National Association of Social Workers 1981), pp. 123-137.
25. Costin, "School Social Work Practice," pp. 135-139; Dowling, "Theoretical Framework," pp. 17-28; Germain, "An Ecological Perspective," pp. 5-7.
26. "Social Service Delivery for Multi-Problem Families in the Grand Rapids Public Schools," cited by Terry Zielinski, and Julie Coolidge, "Systems Model of School Social Work," p. 125.
27. Dowling, "Theoretical Framework," in The Family and the School, pp. 18-27; Denise Taylor, "School as a Target for Change: Intervening in the School Ssytem," in The Family and the School, p. 154.
28. Laura J. Lee, "The Social Worker in the Political Environment of a School System," SW 28 (July-August 1983): 302-306.
29. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, Implementing Organizational Innovations, pp. 16-17.
30. Ibid.

31. George, Brager, "Helping vs. Influencing: Some Political Elements of Organizational Change," in Social Administration: The Management of the Social Services, ed. Simon Slavin (New York: Haworth Press and Council on Social Work Education, 1978), pp. 558.
32. Brown, "The School as an Organization," in School Social Work, pp. 288-289.
33. Freeman, "Analyzing the Organizational Context of Schools," pp. 141-159; Gottlieb, and Gottlieb, "An Expanded Role," pp. 12-21; Lee, "Political Environment of a School System," pp. 302-306; Rino J. Patti, and Herman Resnick, "Changing the Agency from Within," in Changing from Within: Humanizing Social Welfare Organizations, eds. Herman Resnick, and Rino J. Patti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), p. 224.
34. Lee, "Political Environment of a School System," p. 302.
35. Brager, "Helping vs Influencing," in Social Administration, pp. 562-563.
36. Dowling, "Theoretical Framework," in The Family and the School p. 23.
37. Lee, "Political Environment of a School System," pp. 303-304.
38. Ibid., p. 306.
39. Patti, and Resnick, "Changing the Agency from Within," in Changing from Within, p. 224.
40. Brager, "Helping vs. Influencing," in Social Administration, pp. 559-560; Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, Implementing Organizational Innovations, pp. 25-26.

## CHAPTER 3

### PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

An opportunity to consider changes in school social work practice has emerged in response to concerns about the delivery of educational services to children. The design of effective education and social work programs presents a challenge of collaboration between these dynamic processes.

In New York City the educational system has begun a critical re-evaluation of goals and objectives for students in general education and special education stimulated by the Mayoral Committee on Special Education. Of particular interest to this project is the emphasis on shifts in the function of school social work services to include a focus on prevention and reassignment of practitioners to general education support services.

The Board of Education has reorganized the assessment team model to provide additional service to general education students. Since October, 1986, the school social worker has provided short-term intervention to general education students, under the New York State Educationally Related Support Services Act (ERSSA). These services may include individual counseling, group counseling, consultation with family and school staff, parent and teacher workshops. This reorganization of New York City social work tasks provided an opportunity to

study the initiation of an ecosystems model in school social work practice.

The project is based on the belief that schools and schooling have a significant effect on children's development. Students' learning and behavior(s) vary in response to the school environment. The school social worker has a responsibility to influence the school to be more responsive to the needs of students and their families. This will require identification of school practices that undermine students' emotional, social and intellectual growth, and the development of appropriate intervention strategies. There must be recognition of the interrelationship between student, parent, school and community. Within the ecosystem perspective, direct services to students and families must become a part of a more integrated systemic view of school social work practice.<sup>1</sup>

The project will encourage school social workers to:

1. develop a collaborative relationship with school personnel in order to interpret and advocate students needs and have an impact on the school's decision-making process.
2. communicate effectively with school personnel to clarify the role of the school social worker in using the ecosystems approach.

It is expected that school social workers can more effectively serve the student-client system within the school using an ecosystems approach.

As stated in the introduction, the overall goals of the project are as follows:

1. to promote the development and use of the ecosystems model of school social work practice.
2. to provide descriptive data on the process of initiating an ecosystems plan.
3. to describe the response of students, parents and school

personnel in a large urban school setting to an ecosystems approach, and

4. to assist school social workers in assuming a significant role in the problem-solving, decision-making process in the school setting.

### Design

This qualitative exploratory study is focused on the first stage of the initiation of an ecosystems school social work practice model. The study utilizes the school case planning conference as a critical event for analysis. The evaluation design is a formative one which leads to the development of a model facilitating replication. The objective of the study is to examine what happens during the conference, when the school social worker initiates an ecosystems case planning approach with other school personnel, parent and student to define the case problem and determine an intervention plan of action. The study is concerned with the identification of salient factors contributing to successful initiation of an ecosystems approach in the New York City school system.

The project examines the first stage of the organizational change process, which is the initiation of the ecosystems school social work practice model. Initiation is defined as the first stage in the process of influencing change in an organization and covers the period of time in which a particular innovation is introduced into an organization. More specifically, it is the stage in which an organization defines a problem, decides on an innovation to resolve an organizational problem and presents the innovation to its members.<sup>2</sup> "The definition of the problem consists of activities undertaken to specify the dis-

crepancy between what does exist and what should exist, if possible." <sup>3</sup>

The problem may involve a student, a group of students, a family, a classroom, a school, or some other institution. "Innovation refers to any proposed idea or set of ideas about how the organizational behavior of members should change in order to resolve problems of the organization and improve its performance." The ecosystems model of school social work practice is viewed as a set of ideas about how school social worker, teacher(s), school administrator, parent and student should perceive student difficulties within the context of the school, family, and community and decide on ways of resolving these difficulties in order to improve student school performance.

As noted in the literature, the effective initiation of an innovation is influenced by the following factors:

- . use collaborative strategy: encourages participation of each member concerned with the problem,
- . agreement on the problem definition: provides clarity on each member's perception of the student's school-related difficulty and the appropriate target(s) for the change effort,
- . agreement on intervention goal and related activities: provides clarity regarding specific goal(s) to be achieved and action(s) to be taken to accomplish the goals,
- . agreement on tasks to be performed by each member: mobilizes necessary resources and gains commitment to the intervention efforts.

### Methodology

#### Scope

This school social work project was conducted in five New York City public schools. Individual school social workers were instrumental in initiating the ecosystem approach and were responsible for collecting all the data, which includes reporting the case assessment and conference

processes.

An educational component was included as part of the project's process and an orientation session was designed for the school social workers participating in the project. The content focused on elements of the ecosystems process to insure that participants would have a similar frame of reference. The importance of conceptualizing a multicausal base for student, family and school problems insuring a focus on interpersonal and systemic etiologies was emphasized. Discussion during the session focused on understanding and analyzing the transactional patterns that characterize the relationship among the different role groups in the school system. All of these factors had importance in developing an intervention plan for the student. In addition to the above, participants were informed of the importance of engaging school personnel in the problem solving process. The use of a collaborative strategy that utilized the participants' expertise, information and conscious use of their relationships with school personnel was emphasized. (See Appendix A for initial session handouts). This is in keeping with observations in the literature that decision-making regarding educational services must include organizational members. It is emphasized that a failure to deal openly with problem definition and engage in cooperative planning around services to be delivered--when and by whom--will result in an ineffectual plan.

Finally, the school social workers were given sources in the literature to broaden their understanding of an ecosystems approach. The expectation was that they would each read the following sources: Carol Meyer, Clinical Social Work in the Ecosystems Perspective, and Wendy Glasgow Winters and Freida Easton, Practice of Social Work in Schools.

Sample**School Social Worker Participant Selection**

The project's plan was to include a total of ten school social workers assigned to elementary schools in the New York City system. School social workers are assigned to schools through the regional special education offices which are headed by a Deputy Assistant Superintendent for Special Education. Managerial responsibility for clinical staff, which includes school social workers, is given to a clinical administrator assigned to the regional office. To gain access to school social workers, the approval of the regional administrator was required. There are six regional offices: one each in Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island and two in Brooklyn. The Queens regional office was selected because of the clinical administrator's familiarity with the ecosystems approach and willingness to facilitate the approval process. A letter was sent to the Queens Deputy Assistant Superintendent on January 13, 1987, and approval was given on January 21, 1987. (See Appendices B and C, drafts of letters).

**Case Selection:**

The case selection process required each of the ten participating school social workers to randomly select six cases over a three-month period: March through June, 1987, for a total number of sixty cases. The assigned schools would represent one or two community school districts. The targeted grades were kindergarten through grade three. The rationale for collecting data from the early grades was the value and assumption that prevention efforts are most successful when initiated

as early in the child's educational career as possible. In addition, there was the anticipation that school personnel would be more receptive to a new intervention approach during these early grades. The potential of achieving educational goals is considered to be high at this stage in the educational process.

#### Project Evaluation Instruments

A questionnaire was used to obtain demographic data on the participants. It focused on the following: the year the school social worker obtained their Masters in Social Work; the number of years employed as a New York City school social worker; the number of years assigned to the project school; familiarity with the ecosystems approach, and use of the ecosystems approach prior to their participation in the project. (See Appendix D, Questionnaire.)

The school social worker participants were asked to complete an instrument that briefly summarized their analysis of the dynamics of the referred student's case situation. The summary covered statements on the referral problem assessment facts and planned intervention goal(s) and related activities.

A diary was used to report the events at the ecosystems conference with school personnel, parent(s), student, and school social worker. The school social worker recorded responses to the recommended problem definition, intervention plan and reported their views and feelings regarding the interaction that had taken place during the conference.

These instruments were piloted in January and February, 1987. Three Queens school social workers agreed to use two elementary school

cases each to test the instruments. As as a result, it was found that the diary as designed did not adequately record the salient factors that influence the initiation of the ecosystem innovation in the school organization. The diary was revised to include such factors as agreement on problem definition, intervention goal and related activities and what happened ten (10) weeks after the conference. (See Appendices E and F, Summary of Ecosystems Assessment Process and Diary of the Ecosystems Conference).

### Data Collection

The project began in October, 1986 with a letter to the New York City Board of Education Proposal Review Committee requesting their approval to conduct the study with New York City public school social workers, school personnel and students.

The conditions for conducting the study in New York City schools included obtaining approval from the school principal, students, and their families. A Board of Education research approval form was forwarded to the project evaluator by the proposal review committee. The parent consent was developed by the project evaluator and approved by the same committee.

On December 29, 1986, approval was granted by this central Board of Education committee. (See Appendices G and H, drafts of letters of request and proposal approval; I for approval from Proposal Review Committee; and J and K for Board of Education Research Approval form and Parental Consent letter).

In January, 1987, after approval for conducting the study with

Queens school social workers was obtained, contact was made with the clinical administrator. It was suggested that Community Districts (CSD) A and B be approached to conduct the project, and clinical social work supervisors for these districts be contacted for introductions to the school social workers and the schools.

In CSD B, it was decided that a letter explaining the project would be prepared by the project evaluator. The social work supervisor would meet with the community superintendent to gain project approval. A letter was sent in February, 1987, and verbal approval was given in early March. A meeting with school social work participants was scheduled for late March, 1987 and held with three participants and the social work supervisor.

In CSD A, the school social work supervisor agreed to discuss the project with the assistant to the community superintendent. Additionally, an initial meeting with school social work participants was scheduled for late February, 1987.

In both community school districts, the social work supervisors recommended that the selection of participants should be contingent upon their assignment to a school with a principal who would be receptive to a study being conducted in the school. For CSD B, six school social workers assigned to elementary and junior high schools were suggested as project participants. This created a modification in the targeted school level and grades. Case selection instead of covering kindergarten through grade 3 was expanded to kindergarten to grade 9. The five participants from CSD B met with the project evaluator; the sixth participant meeting was scheduled for early March, 1987.

The agenda for each community school district meeting included:

- a) completion and return of the school social worker questionnaire, and
- b) presentation of the project's procedures and processes by the project evaluator.

The project's procedures included obtaining the principal's and parent's consent for the project to be conducted. The project's process was described as follows:

Referred student's needs are addressed within the context of the school environment. Equal emphasis is placed on learning about the strengths and deficits of the student and the school environment.

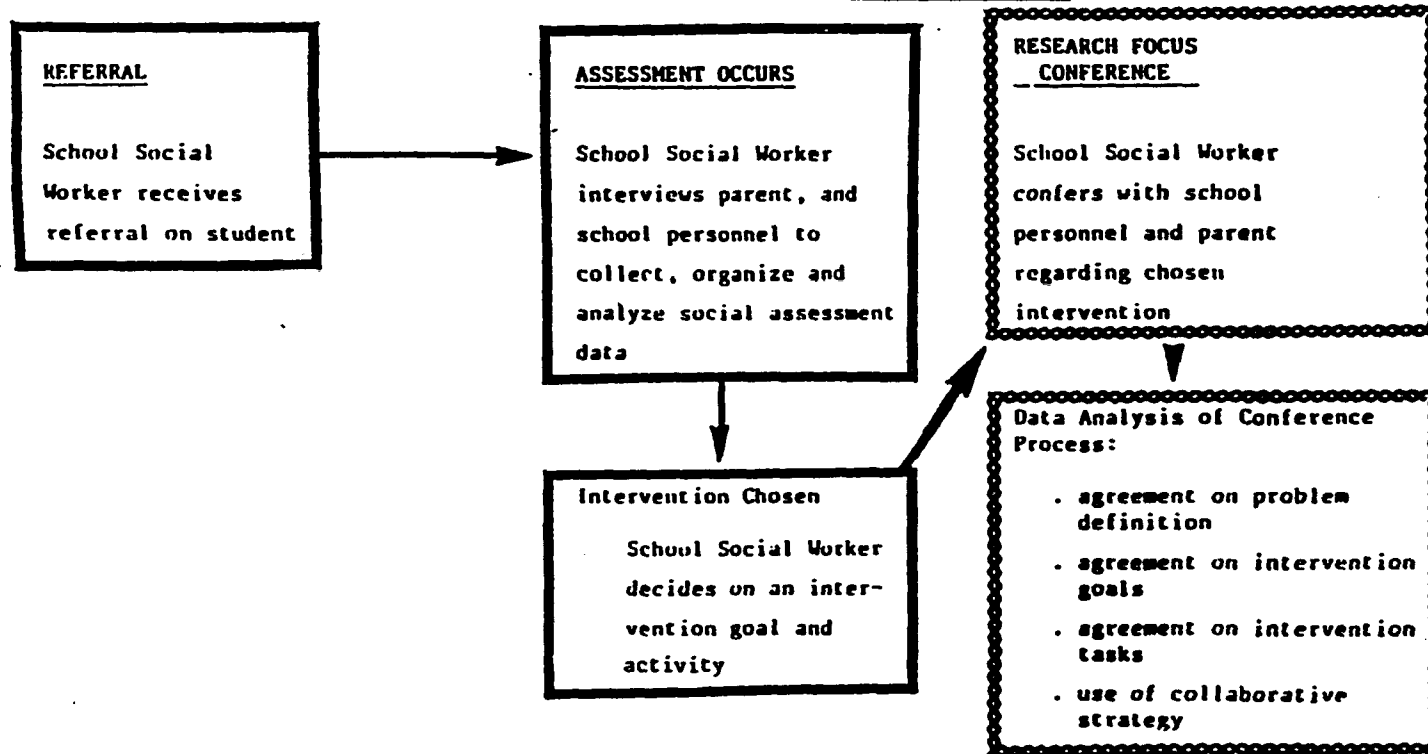
Phase 1: Assessment includes a review of the referral meeting with student, parent, and school personnel in order to identify the needs of the student, and/or learning environment and to determine the interaction of family and school. The analysis of case data by the school social worker participant leads to the formulation of a hypothesis regarding the problem definition and possible intervention plan. This hypothesis serves as a blueprint for discussion at the school conference with student, parent, and school personnel.

Phase 2: Planning involves using a collaborative strategy to initiate change in the school-based case problem-solving and decision-making processes. The school social worker participant presents the case hypothesis at the school planning conference with student, parent, and school personnel. Chart 1 outlines the interface of the project's process and research focus. (See p.65, this study).

During the initial sessions, school social worker participants' discussion centered on the following: time management of mandated

Chart 1

## School Social Work Project Process



responsibilities and the project tasks, and school principal's objection to the project because of school social workers' mandated duties.

To facilitate school principal support, school social worker participants made the following suggestions:

- . identify project assessment tasks that are compatible with participants' ongoing job function,
- . clarify how project's data could benefit school by improving communication and educational decision-making among clinical staff, school personnel, students and families; and
- . recognize formally that there would be some costs in terms of time expended to complete ecosystems summary and diary for each case situation.

School social worker participants agreed that six cases was acceptable and time involved would not be intrusive. These facts would be shared with school principals when they presented the project.

Two days following the CSD B meeting, four school social work participants advised that their principals required the approval of the superintendent. The social work supervisor agreed to write the community superintendent.

Three weeks after the session in CSD B, two participants withdrew from the project because of the volume of mandated responsibilities in their respective schools. In one instance, the principal did not approve of the project because of these responsibilities. A third school social work participant advised the project evaluator that the elementary school principal did not want students involved in a study. However, the participant thought there was a possibility of operationalizing the study in her/his assigned junior high school.

CSD A school social work participants withdrew from the project two weeks after the initial session. Each cited mandated responsibilities as the reason for withdrawal. As of April, 1987, there were no participants in CSD A. In view of these difficulties and the lack of success in finding additional participants in these community school districts, the scope of the project was expanded to include high school partici-

pants. The rationale for this change was based on the fact that school social workers assigned to high schools are not involved in reevaluations of special education students. It would seem that the major cause of elementary and junior high school principals' reluctance to permit school social worker participation in the project related to the high number of special education reevaluations that fall due. Although school social workers are not mandated to perform these tasks, the informal system reveals that principals are requiring school social work input in these reevaluations.

In late March, 1987, the Division of High Schools was approached to gain approval to conduct the project with three school social workers assigned to high schools. In March, 1987, the clinical administrator for the Division of High Schools gave verbal approval. Arrangements were made to present the project to three Manhattan high school social workers, their clinical coordinator and district manager. These latter positions reflect the Division of High Schools' administrative structure for clinical staff. The coordinator provides supervision and the manager attends to managerial responsibilities such as staffing and administrative interface with the Borough superintendency.

On April 10, 1987, a meeting was held with the above-mentioned participants. One school social worker participant decided to withdraw after the presentation because the project's formal conferencing with school personnel was difficult to arrange and may cause interprofessional friction. The concern was that this friction could impact on future work with school personnel. By June, 1987, two high school social worker participants submitted data collected between April and

June, 1987. One participant was unable to complete six cases because of personal difficulties.

During this period, three Community School District (CSD) B school social workers were unable to operationalize the project because of pressing school duties. Each agreed that the early Fall would be a better time to implement the project in their respective schools. In September, 1987, these participants withdrew from the project because of changes in assignments and/or lack of interest in the project. The one remaining CSD B participant completed two cases and advised that she could not continue with the project because of mandated school responsibilities. By September, 1987, data had been collected on eleven cases.

In an effort to reach additional school social workers, exploratory discussions were held with social work supervisors in CSD C, Manhattan and CSD D, Queens. Both supervisors had expressed a willingness to actively encourage school social worker participation. Letters were prepared for CSD D superintendent and CSD C Supervisor of Special Education. It is to be noted that in a model program for decentralizing special education, CSD C community superintendent is administratively responsible for clinical staff. The superintendent designates a district supervisor to manage all aspects of the day-to-day special education operation. Each social work supervisor informed project evaluator that they would negotiate the approval with their respective administrators. Approval was received verbally for CSD C in September, 1987, and CSD D in November, 1987. An initial session was held with six CSD C school social workers on September 21, 1987, and one agreed

to participate in the project. Four CSD D school social workers were oriented to the project in November, 1987 and one agreed to participate. By the end of November, 1987, these participants were collecting data on six cases from September, 1987 to February, 1988; the CSD D participant collected data on thirteen cases from November, 1987 to March, 1988.

Ultimately, a total of five school social workers participated in the project and thirty cases were completed. This represented a reduction of five school social work participants and thirty cases. Grade levels ranged from kindergarten to fourth grade on the elementary level and ninth to eleventh grade on the secondary level. The difficulties encountered in obtaining school social worker participants seemed to be reflective of school social workers viewing the project as too time consuming and incompatible with their usual case planning procedures and other responsibilities. It would seem that some school social workers were not supportive of the study. For example, when some school administrators communicated reservations regarding the possible time involved in the study and the impact this would have on mandated duties, there did not appear to be any effort to convey to these administrators that the ecosystems case planning model was compatible with ongoing school social worker tasks. School social workers withdrew from the project when they encountered such concerns. It may be that these school social workers viewed themselves as having little influence with their school administrators. For the most part, school administrators were receptive to the study, with the exception of one principal, cited previously, who did not

want the school involved in a study.

### Data Analysis

This exploratory study involved content analysis of a single event which is the conference with school personnel, student, parent, and school social worker participant. Data collected on the case assessment and conference process are analyzed to determine the following:

1. profile of referred students (reason for referral, school and grade)
2. locus of problem definition (i.e., student, family, school and/or community systems)
3. profile of intervention plan (targeted area(s) or system focus and proposed activities)
4. level of conference participants (student, parent, school personnel, and community agency) agreement with problem definition and intervention plan
  - . agreement is defined as all conference participants openly communicating acceptance of the presented problem definitions and/or intervention plan;
  - . agreement by acquiescence is defined as one or more participant consenting to the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan as presented without communicating a different view or objection;
  - . agreement with compromise is defined as one or more participant negotiating changes in the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan; and
  - . no agreement is defined as one or more participant rejecting the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan.
5. conference recommendations which describe the type of case intervention recommendation from two levels:
  - a) routine case procedures which is defined as intervention actions that target change in the student and/or community systems. These activities are considered to be traditional case planning actions and do not require a disruption to the family and/or school systems; and
  - b) non-routine case procedures which is defined as intervention actions that target change to the family and/or school systems. These actions are considered invasive and disruptive to these systems and go beyond standard, and/or expected case planning action.
6. implementation of the intervention plan by conference participants.

The tabulation of frequencies and percentages and a series of Chi Square Tests of Independence are conducted for these data. These are performed to see if there are significant relationships between variables related to:

- a. type of recommended case procedure i.e., routine of non-routine case procedure and conference participants' level of agreement to problem definition and intervention plan;
- b. the type of recommended case procedure, i.e., routine or non-routine case procedure, and the degree of initiation;
- c. conference participants' level of agreement to problem definition and the degree of initiation;
- d. conference participants' level of agreement to the intervention plan and the degree of initiation.

In addition to this analysis, the ecosystems assessment summary and conference diary are reviewed in order to rate the following:

- a. The school social worker participants' clinical skills, political/negotiating abilities, organization influence, and ability to expedite.

The ratings of school social worker participants' skills and abilities are based on: (1) their encouraging conference participants (parent, student, school personnel) to identify and elaborate their concerns and expectations; (2) their responding to explicit and implicit communication by these conference participants regarding presented problem definition, and intervention plan.

The degrees of skill and abilities are rated on a three-point scale:

- 1---represents a minimum degree of skill and ability;
- 2---represents a moderate degree of skill and ability; and
- 3---represents a high degree of school social work skill and ability

- b. Conference participants, representing the client, school, and community systems receptivity to the ecosystems approach to case planning is rated. Receptivity to the approach is based on the conference participants level of agreement to the problem definition and intervention plan. A three-point

scale was used:

1---represented a minimum level of receptivity by one or more participant;

2---represented a moderate level of receptivity by one or more participant; and

3---represented a high level of receptivity by one or more participant.

c. The case disposition, which is based on the school social worker participants and conference participants (parent, student, school personnel, community referral agencies) levels of agreement to the problem definition, levels of agreement to act on the intervention plan and the implementation of the intervention plan, is rated:

1---indicated one or more participants had a minimum level of agreement;

2---indicated one or more participants had a moderate level of agreement; and

3---indicated one or more participants had a high level of agreement.

Underlying themes and issues are also identified and discussed.

On the basis of this project analysis, findings are reported that deepen our understanding of the process of initiating an ecosystems school social work practice model in the New York City school system.

**NOTES: Chapter 3**

1. Germain, "An Ecological Perspective," pp. 5-8.
2. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, p. 16.
3. Steiner, "Social Workers in School Politics," p. 51.
4. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, p. 16.
5. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, p. 25-26; Patti, and Resnick, "Changing the Agency from Within," p. 224.
6. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, p. 25; Steiner, "Social Workers in School Politics," pp. 41-57.
7. Carol H. Meyer, ed., Clinical Social Work in the Ecosystems Perspective (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 3-256; Winters and Easton, Practice of Social Work in Schools, pp. 1-157.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### FINDINGS: SECTION 1

##### Introduction

This section reports the initiation of a school social work ecosystems approach in six (6) New York City public schools. The case assessment and planning phases were analyzed to determine factors that facilitate or impede the initiation of an innovation in an urban school.

As noted in Chapter 3, initiation is defined as the first stage in the process of influencing change in an organization and covers the period of time in which a particular innovation is introduced into an organization.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, it is the stage in which an organization defines a problem, decides on an innovation to resolve an organizational problem and presents the innovation to its members. "The definition of the problem consists of activities undertaken to specify the discrepancy between what does exist and what should exist, if possible."<sup>2</sup> The problem may involve a student, a group of students, a family, a classroom, a school, or some other institution. For example, the discrepancy may relate to: ineffective school programs and/or services; non existent social programs and/or services; maladaptive student and/or family functioning. "Innovation

refers to any proposed idea or set of ideas about how the organizational behavior of members should change in order to resolve problems of the organization and improve its performance."<sup>3</sup> The ecosystems approach of school social work practice is viewed as a set of ideas about how the school social worker, teacher(s), school administrator, parent and student should perceive student difficulties within the context of the school, and decide on ways of resolving these difficulties in order to improve student school performance. The case conference was the vehicle for introducing the ecosystems approach.

#### Description of Ecosystems Practice

Analysis of the thirty (30) case assessment reports and the conference diaries showed that fourteen (14) cases had recommended routine procedures and sixteen (16) cases had recommended non-routine case procedures. Cases were assigned a routine case procedure based on intervention actions that targeted change in the student and/or community systems. These activities were considered to be traditional case planning actions and did not require a disruption to the family and/or school systems. Cases were assigned a non-routine case procedure based on intervention actions that targeted change in the family and/or school systems. These actions were considered invasive and disruptive to these systems and went beyond standard, and/or expected case planning actions. Table 1, page 76, depicts these results.

Further analysis revealed that in 67% of the cases the proposed ecosystems approach was initiated. (See Table 2, page 76).

The cases in which the ecosystems approach was initiated included routine and non-routine cases.

Table 1  
Type of Conference Procedure Recommendation for Ecosystems Cases  
 (N = 30)

| <u>Procedure</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Routine          | 14               | 47.7           |
| Non-routine      | 16               | 53.3           |
| Total            | 30               | 100.0          |

Table 2  
Initiation Status of Ecosystems Conference Recommendations  
 (N = 30)

| <u>Level of Initiation</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Initiated                  | 20               | 66.7           |
| Not initiated              | 10               | 33.3           |
| Total                      | 30               | 100.0          |

Assessment and Conference Process: Findings for Routine Cases

Assessment Report - Profile of Referred Students

For the fourteen (14) cases in the sample, eleven (11) were elementary school level cases and three (3) were high school level. The majority of referred cases for elementary school level students five (5) were in grades one and four. There were no referrals for kindergarten or grades three and five at this school level. On the high school level, there were two (2) students referred for grade nine and one (1) student for grade ten. No students were referred for grades eleven and twelve. Table 3, page 77, shows the frequency

of referred students by grade for the routine cases.

Table 3  
Grade Level of Students: Routine Cases  
(N = 14)

| <u>Grade</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--------------|----------|----------|
| K            | 0        | 0        |
| 1            | 5        | 36       |
| 2            | 1        | 7        |
| 3            | 0        | 0        |
| 4            | 5        | 36       |
| 5            | 0        | 0        |
| <hr/>        |          |          |
| 9            | 2        | 14       |
| 10           | 1        | 7        |
| 11           | 0        | 0        |
| 12           | 0        | 0        |
| Total        | 14       | 100      |

Referral problems for both levels were based on observed behavior by school personnel and/or parents which resulted in educational, social, medical or personality difficulties in the school setting. Educationally Related Support Services criteria were used to define referral difficulties. Educational difficulties were defined as behavior that evidenced one or more of the following:

- . lack of interest in academic tasks
- . inconsistent or failing academic performance
- . unwillingness or inability to finish academic work

There were six (6) cases based on educational difficulties: five (5) at the elementary school level and one (1) at the high school level.

Social difficulties were defined as behavior that evidenced one or

more of the following:

- . poor peer relationships
- . conflict with school and/or home authorities
- . increased physical aggressiveness
- . increased verbal aggressiveness
- . disruption in class, lunchroom, hallways, or playground

The majority of referral problems, nine (9), were based on these behaviors. There were seven (7) cases from the elementary schools and two (2) cases from the high schools.

Medical difficulties were defined as behavior that evidenced one or more of the following:

- . low energy level or sleeping class
- . frequent physical complaints
- . low physical development
- . medically diagnosed illness

Two (2) cases were within this category: one (1) elementary school level and one (1) high school level.

Personality difficulties were defined as behavior that evidenced one or more of the following:

- . depression
- . persistent psychosomatic complaints
- . fear of attending school

Two (2) case referrals were based on personality difficulties: one (1) elementary and one (1) high school.

Table 4, page 80, reports the frequency of referral difficulties by school level.

School social work participants defined problems and formulated intervention plans based on information obtained from interviews with

parents and students, consultations with school personnel, review of school records and classroom observation. On completion of the assessment process, formal conferences were conducted to initiate dialogue with school personnel and, if in attendance, parents and students. Conference participants discussed the case problem definition and intervention plan which included intervention tasks and commitment to tasks.

#### Participation in the Assessment and Conference Processes

Representation during the ecosystems assessment process conference is reported in Table 5, page 80, and is described in the following section.

Parents were interviewed and participated in conferences for all routine cases. Students were interviewed for all routine cases, but did not formally participate in six (6) conferences. These were seen privately by the school social worker participant to discuss recommendations for these cases.

School personnel were involved in the assessment and conference process for all routine cases. School positions included principal, assistant principal, school nurse, guidance counselor, and special education resource teacher. The community system represented by foster care agencies participated in two (2) cases.

School social worker participants conducted an assessment and participated in the conference for all cases.

#### Locus of Problem

For the fourteen (14) routine case procedures, problems were defined as located in the following systems:

Table 4  
Student Problem Area by School Level in Routine Cases  
 (N = 21)

| <u>Referred Difficulty</u> | <u>School Level</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>Z</u> |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------|----------|
| Educational                | Elementary          | 5        | 25       |
|                            | High School         | 1        | 5        |
| Social                     | Elementary          | 7        | 30       |
|                            | High School         | 2        | 10       |
| Medical                    | Elementary          | 2        | 10       |
|                            | High School         | 1        | 5        |
| Personality                | Elementary          | 1        | 5        |
|                            | High School         | 2        | 10       |
| Total                      |                     | 21       | 100      |

\*N larger than 14 reflects more than one difficulty cited for referred student(s)

Table 5  
Levels of Participation in the Assessment and Conference Processes for Routine Cases  
 (N = 14)

| <u>Participant</u>   | <u>Participation in Assessment</u> |          | <u>Participation in Conference</u> |          |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|----------|
|                      | <u>N</u>                           | <u>Z</u> | <u>N</u>                           | <u>Z</u> |
| Student              | 14                                 | 100      | 8                                  | 57       |
| Parent               | 14                                 | 100      | 14                                 | 100      |
| School Administrator | 6                                  | 43       | 6                                  | 43       |
| Classroom Teacher    | 9                                  | 64       | 9                                  | 64       |
| Other school staff   | 6                                  | 43       | 6                                  | 43       |
| Community            | 2                                  | 14       | 2                                  | 14       |
| School Social Worker | 14                                 | 100      | 14                                 | 100      |

student system--six (6) cases

family system --six (6) cases

community system--two (2) cases

Student system problem definitions were found to vary from learning disability (two (2) elementary school cases and one (1) high school case); adjustment to class (two (2) elementary school cases) to coping with adolescent life tasks (one (1) high school case).

Family system difficulties ranged from parent divorce (three (3) elementary school cases), separation from biological parents (one (1) elementary school case) to maladaptive patterns of family relationships (two (2) elementary school cases).

Problems in the community system were identified as access to adequate housing (one (1) elementary school case), foster care services (one (1) high school case). Table 6, page 82, presents the problem definition frequencies.

### Intervention Plan

As part of the ecosystems process, school social work participants were asked to recommend an intervention plan at the conference with the parents, students, and school personnel. As noted in an earlier section, assessment and planning are ongoing processes which lead to the goals and tasks involved in the case situation. The school social worker participant analyzed the data regarding the reciprocal relation between the referred student and the impinging environment. Operating out of an ecosystems approach, the school social worker formulated an intervention plan that could bring about change in the referred student's coping behavior, the quality of the impinging environment or both. The plan

Table 6  
Locus of the Problem Definition for Routine Cases  
 (N = 14)

| <u>Locus of Problem</u>           | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|
| <u>Student</u>                    |          |          |
| Learning Disability               | 3        | 21       |
| Adolescence Life Tasks            | 1        | 7        |
| Adjustment to Regular Class       | 2        | 15       |
| <u>Family</u>                     |          |          |
| Divorce                           | 3        | 21       |
| Family Interpersonal Relations    | 2        | 15       |
| Separation from Biological Parent | 1        | 7        |
| <u>Community</u>                  |          |          |
| Access to Adequate Housing        | 1        | 7        |
| Accessing Foster Care Services    | 1        | 7        |
| TOTAL                             | 14       | 100.0    |

included strategies to change the target system and activities to be performed by various case participants.

Frequently, more than one intervention activity was recommended for a case, and the intervention action targeted a system other than the identified problem system. Analysis of intervention plans showed the following results:

**Student System**

- . school-based individual and/or group counseling for eight (8) cases
- . medical evaluation for two (2) cases

### Community System

- . community after-school programs for two (2) cases
- . foster care services for two (2) cases
- . access to housing for one (1) case

Table 7 depicts intervention plan frequencies.

Table 7  
Intervention Plan Activities for Routine Cases  
(N = 16)

| <u>Student Intervention</u>           | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Student counseling in school          | 8        | 50       |
| Medical evaluation                    | 2        | 12.50    |
| Special education evaluation          | 1        | 6.25     |
| <u>Community Intervention</u>         |          |          |
| Access to housing                     | 1        | 6.50     |
| Foster Care Services                  | 2        | 12.50    |
| Community-based After-school Programs | 2        | 12.50    |
| Total                                 | 16       | 100.0    |

\*Total is more than fourteen because more than one intervention was recommended for some cases.

### Conference Process

There were varying levels of agreement about the problem definition and intervention plan during the conference. Agreement level for problem definition and intervention plan was defined as follows:

- . agreement meant all conference participants openly communicated acceptance of the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan;
- . agreement by acquiescence meant one or more conference participant appeared to consent to the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan and did not communi-

- cate a different view or objection;
- agreement with compromise meant one or more conference participant negotiated changes in the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan;
- no agreement meant one or more conference participant rejected the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan.

On the whole, the majority of routine cases demonstrated a high degree of problem definition and intervention plan agreement.

Tables 8 and 9 show frequency levels of agreement.

Table 8

Level of Agreement about Problem Definition for Routine Cases  
(N = 14)

| <u>Type of Agreement</u>  | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Agreement                 | 9                | 64.4           |
| Agreement by Acquiescence | 4                | 28.5           |
| Agreement with Compromise | 1                | 7.1            |
| No Agreement              | 0                | 0              |
| Total                     | 14               | 100.0          |

Table 9

Level of Agreement about Intervention Plan for Routine Cases  
(N = 14)

| <u>Type of Agreement</u>  | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Agreement                 | 8                | 57.3           |
| Agreement by Acquiescence | 4                | 28.5           |
| Agreement with Compromise | 2                | 14.2           |
| No Agreement              | 0                | 0              |
| Total                     | 14               | 100.0          |

All of the routine cases initiated the ecosystems approach.

For these cases, intervention activities were directed to the student and/or community systems. Intervention activities focused on:

|                                        |   |
|----------------------------------------|---|
| . school-based student counseling      | 8 |
| . student medical evaluation           | 2 |
| . student special education evaluation | 2 |
| . accessing adequate housing           | 1 |
| . accessing social services            | 3 |

Further analysis of the initiation of the ecosystems approach and the agreement levels are presented in the following section.

#### Conference Participants Agreement with Problem Definition and Intervention Plan

There were nine (9) cases in which there was agreement by all conference participants to the problem definition. Six (6) cases were on the elementary school level and three (3) cases were on the high school level. The systems identified were:

|                    |         |
|--------------------|---------|
| . student system   | 4 cases |
| . family system    | 3 cases |
| . community system | 2 cases |

Intervention plan agreement by all conference participants was found for eight (8) cases. The activities targeted the student system for six (6) cases, and the community system for two (2) cases. One case that reported agreement for the problem definition indicated agreement with compromise for the intervention plan. This case will be highlighted in the agreement with compromise report.

#### **Discussion**

Further analysis of the agreement to problem definition and intervention plan category led to some impressions regarding case process

dynamics. These dynamics may provide insights into possible factors that facilitated the problem definition and intervention plan agreement for these project cases. For example, when the school social worker participants used their clinical skills to encourage conference participants to express their opinions and feelings and take part in the decision-making process, it seemed to lead to problem definition and intervention plan agreement by all conference participants.

Another dynamic found in this conference reports analysis was the use of informational expertise by the school social worker participants. Expediting skills, which includes knowledge and use of community resources, was a recurring theme for routine cases in agreement to problem definition and intervention plan category. School social worker participants indicated that their knowledge and ability to access resources, such as foster care services, health services, community mental health services and housing programs was a key contribution to the decision-making process. The school social worker participants' function as brokers--linking available community resources to students' and families' needs--facilitated successful initiation.

Political/negotiating skills facilitated the school system's receptivity and understanding of the ecosystems approach. In general, the school administrators' influence was a significant variable in the process of initiating the ecosystems approach. Their support and participation legitimized the assessment and planning phases as formal school decision-making processes.

As a key member of the client system, the parents, through their

cooperation and support, provided the resources, energy and information necessary for student social and emotional growth. Their influence was a pivotal factor in formulating and reaching agreement.

Community referral agencies' willingness to be a part of the ecosystems case process also facilitated initiation efforts. For these routine cases, there was a reciprocal transaction between the school social worker participant's brokering for community resources and the community agencies' readiness to deliver these services.

The following case illustrates agreement and the impact of capable school social worker participant skills, client, school and community support for the approach.

### Case Example

#### Referral Problem

A six-year-old first grade student was referred to the school social worker by his father because of learning problems.

#### Assessment

The father had been granted custody of the child because of drug involvement and neglect by the mother. The child had been born drug-addicted and has always performed below expectations. The father was concerned about his slow development and poor school performance.

Consultation with the teacher affirmed the father's educational concerns.

#### Conference

The father, school nurse and school social worker participant attended the conference. The problem was identified as within the

student system and the need for a thorough physical and neurological examination was presented by the school social worker participant. A referral to the Jamaica Hospital school health program was suggested. The parent expressed relief that there was a health service available that could begin a definitive diagnosis process. He was particularly concerned that all possible physical factors be understood before psychological and educational testing would be performed. The school nurse supported the Jamaica Hospital referral and assured the parent that the results of the physical examinations should be obtained before any further testing was considered. The school social worker participant agreed to act as the liaison between the school, parent and community agency.

#### Outcome

The parent followed through with appointments arranged by the school social worker participant. The school health program was available to provide initial physical examination by a physician at the school. Follow-up visits for additional examinations would be at the appropriate hospital clinics.

#### Conference Participants Agreement by Acquiescence to Problem Definition and Intervention Plan

There were four (4) cases in which the student agreed to the problem definition and intervention plan by acquiescence. All of these cases were at the elementary school level and were initiated. Students agreed to the problem definition without expressing objections and/or negotiating changes during conferences. Further analysis showed

that students acquiesced for problems defined within the student and/or family system and activities directed to student change. The following routine case illustrates student acquiescence and initiation of the approach.

### Case Example

#### Referral Problem

A nine-year-old fourth grader was referred to the school social worker by his teacher and parent. The student had a school and home history of behavior problems. A number of school suspensions had occurred since kindergarten. School anecdotal reports described incidents of throwing chairs and breaking windows. At home, he had threatened family members, including his mother.

#### Assessment

The student is the eldest and only boy in a family of three children. His mother is a single parent who has the assistance of her two brothers in meeting parenting responsibilities. Family described threats to all family members, including the threat of murdering his sisters. Three PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) petitions had been filed by the family without any resolution of the problem.

Fresh Air Fund placement was obtained two years before this referral. The Fund family agreed to keep the child for a year in an effort to provide him with a new start. While in this setting, similar behavior was reported and the plan was ended after a year.

#### Conference

The conference was attended by the student, parent, relatives

and teacher. The school social work participant recommended a Committee on Special Education evaluation to determine an appropriate educational program that would include a therapeutic residential placement. The problem was viewed as a family system difficulty, and the intervention activity targeted the student. The parent and relatives stated they always wanted a residential placement and had used the PINS petitions without success towards that end. The school social worker stated that an exploratory discussion with Children's Village could be arranged. This plan was supported by the family and teacher.

The student did not express any opinions or feelings during these discussions. The school social work participant commented on the student's silence and suggested private meetings with him to further discuss the plan. There was no indication of a response by the student. The parent verbalized support for these meetings.

#### Outcome

Ten weeks after the conference, the school social worker arranged an admissions interview for parent and student at Children's Village. The student did keep appointments with the school social worker and understood that the residential center was interested in accepting him for placement.

By the end of the school year, the school social worker reported that the student was placed at the Children's Village.

#### Discussion

The initiation of the ecosystems approach was facilitated for the agreement by acquiescence category because of client systems repre-

sented by the parents and/or relatives, and the school and community systems' support. This interpretation is based on the examination of the assessment and conference reports. Similar to the agreement to problem definition and intervention plan findings, the school social worker participants' clinical skill which encouraged open communication was another important factor. However, it would seem that the participants openly taking part in the conference process was related to another set of conditions: who attended the conference, and support for recommended problem definition and intervention plan by key conference members. The parents' and school members' influence and sanction of the approach facilitated the initiation process for these cases, as illustrated in the case sample.

It was striking that regardless of problem definition, such as family, recommended and agreed-on interventions were frequently directed to the student. This relates to the Meares study which found school social workers preferred providing direct services to students. According to this study, school social workers viewed these services effective in meeting the school's and the student's needs. The study also found that school social workers are slowly bridging the gap between the provision of direct and indirect services.<sup>4</sup> In follow-up discussions with school social work participants, they noted that direct service to students was based on their belief that students needed an opportunity to be a part of a supportive neutral school-based relationship.

Another interpretation is that activities, such as school-based counseling, is a strategy to gain entry into other systems, such as

the family. Osborne & Barrett support this strategy and indicate that when the child is the focus for intervention activity, it can be used as an attempt to gain entry into systems such as family and school.<sup>5</sup> This strategy is also evidenced in the case illustration for the agreement with compromise category case, which follows in the next section.

#### Conference Participants Agreement with Compromise to the Problem Definition and Intervention Plan

Agreement with compromise was found for problem definition and intervention plan for one (1) elementary school case. The second elementary school case involved agreement to the problem definition, but agreement with compromise to the intervention activity.

For the first case, no working hypothesis regarding the problem definition or intervention was presented by the school social work participant. During the conference, school social worker, parent and school personnel (school nurse and classroom teacher) agreed to obtain additional evaluative data. Referral to the Committee on Special Education was agreed on as the next step. The second case defined the problem within the family system and targeted the student for change. School-based student counseling and referral to a community agency for after-school activities was suggested. The student negotiated to include his father in the proposed intervention actions. The student's need to have his father formally included in the intervention strategy was recognized by conference participants and agreed to by the father. The student was agreeable to the intervention strategies that included planned visits with the father. This case is presented in the following section.

## Case Example

### Referral Problem

A fourth-grade youngster was referred by his teacher because of poor academic performance and a lack of motivation. He is described as bright.

### Assessment

Interviews with parents, teacher, student and school administrators indicated a recent divorce which has been upsetting to the student.

The school social work participant identified the problem within the family system and targeted intervention actions to the student:

- . individual and group counseling
- . referral to the Big Brother's Organization

### Conference

At the conference, which was attended by school social worker participant, parents, student and principal, there was open discussion regarding the impact of the recent divorce on the student's school behavior and worsening academic performance. All parties agreed that there was a need to improve the communication between family members, especially between the father and the son. Discussion regarding intervention activities provided an opportunity for the student to verbalize his desire for more contacts with his father. The school social worker reported that at the beginning of this discussion, the student was withdrawn, unlike his behavior during the problem definition discussion. Parents were willing to set rewards (i.e., guitar

lessons) if his grades improved, but there had been no commitment by the parents to actively involve themselves in change efforts with the student. The school social worker opened discussion in this area and all agreed there was a need for a plan that included parental activities. The father agreed to a plan that provided more contact with his son, and the student became more willing to participate in the intervention activities targeted for him.

#### Outcome

Ten weeks after the conference, the school social work participant reported that the student's grades had improved, his fighting had subsided and there appeared to be significant change in the family communication.

For these cases, the initiation process was facilitated by the school social worker's capable clinical skills that allowed conference participants to share views and to communicate alternative options. In addition, client, school and community systems' understanding, support and sanction provided the impetus for the conference members to work together toward a common goal.

#### Assessment and Conference Process: Findings for Non-Routine Cases Assessment Report--Profile of Referred Students

There were sixteen (16) non-routine cases in the sample. Six (6) were high school cases and ten (10) were elementary school cases.

On the elementary school level there were three (3) student referrals for kindergarten, three (3) referrals each for grades one and two and one (1) referral for grade four. There were no referrals

for grades three and five. On the high school level, there was one (1) student referral for grade nine, three (3) referrals for grade ten and two (2) referrals for grade eleven. There were no referrals for grade twelve. Table 10 reports the frequency of referred students by grade.

Table 10  
Grade Level of Student: Non-Routine Cases  
 (N = 16)

| <u>Grade</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--------------|----------|----------|
| K            | 3        | 19       |
| 1            | 3        | 19       |
| 2            | 3        | 19       |
| 3            | 0        | 0        |
| 4            | 1        | 6        |
| 5            | 0        | 0        |
| 9            | 1        | 6        |
| 10           | 3        | 19       |
| 11           | 2        | 12       |
| 12           | 0        | 0        |
| Total        | 16       | 100      |

Review of the referral problems, as defined in the routine cases section, indicated the following difficulties which are presented in Table 11, page 96 . There were five (5) cases on the elementary school level and five (5) cases on the high school level in which referral difficulties were educational; five (5) elementary school cases and three (3) high school difficulties were reported as social; three (3) elementary school cases were for medical difficulties; (no cases on the high school level); and six (6) high school cases were for personality difficulties; (no cases reported for the elementary school level).

As noted in the routine case section, school social work partici-

Table 11  
Student Problem Area by School Level: Non Routine Cases  
(N = 27)

| <u>Referred Difficulty</u> | <u>School Level</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------|----------|
| Educational                | Elementary          | 5        | 18.5     |
|                            | High School         | 5        | 18.5     |
| Social                     | Elementary          | 5        | 18.5     |
|                            | High School         | 3        | 11.1     |
| Medical                    | Elementary          | 3        | 11.1     |
|                            | High School         | 0        | 0        |
| Personality                | Elementary          | 0        | 0        |
|                            | High School         | 6        | 22.2     |
| Total                      |                     | 27       | 100.0    |

\*N larger than 16 reflects more than one difficulty for cited referred student(s).  
Percentages sum to 100 due to rounding.

pants interviewed parents and students, consulted with school staff, reviewed records and made classroom observations during the assessment phase. On completion of these tasks, a conference was held with appropriate case members to discuss the problem and agree on a plan.

#### Participation in the Assessment and Conference Process

Parents were interviewed and participated in twelve (12) cases. For one (1) high school case, the school social work participant telephoned the recommendation to the parent. For the remaining four (4) cases, parents did not participate in the assessment and conference processes for the following reasons: for one (1) case, the parents had returned to their native country and were not available. For three (3) cases, the school social worker participants reported they did not invite the parents to participate because the cases involved curriculum and instruction issues. For fourteen (14) of the sixteen (16) cases, students were interviewed during the assessment process. They did not participate in two (2) elementary school cases because the case situations indicated a pattern of parent or teacher difficulties. Assessment and intervention targeted those groups.

Students formally participated in six (6) conferences and were seen privately by the school social work participant to discuss recommendations for seven (7) cases. They did not participate in the conference for the two (2) cases cited in the preceding paragraph. In addition,

there was one (1) high school case in which the difficulty was school scheduling. Only school personnel participated in the case conference.

School personnel were involved in the assessment and conference process for the sixteen (16) cases. At the elementary school level, school personnel were represented by the following positions: principal, assistant principal, school nurse, guidance counselor, and special education resource teacher. High school level positions were: assistant principal of guidance, department chairs, program coordinator, dean, records secretary, program advisor and guidance counselor. The community referral agencies did not participate in assessment and conference proceedings. School social work participants conducted an assessment and participated in conferences for the sixteen (16) cases. Table 12 depicts these findings for these sample cases.

Table 12  
Level of Participation in the Assessment and Conference  
Processes for Non-Routine Cases  
(N = 16)

| <u>Participant</u>   | <u>Participated in<br/>Assessment</u> |          | <u>Participated in<br/>Conference</u> |          |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|----------|
|                      | <u>N</u>                              | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u>                              | <u>%</u> |
| Student              | 14                                    | 87.5     | 6                                     | 37.5     |
| Parent               | 12                                    | 75.0     | 12                                    | 75.0     |
| School Administrator | 6                                     | 37.5     | 6                                     | 37.5     |
| Classroom Teacher    | 9                                     | 56.2     | 9                                     | 56.2     |
| Other school Staff   | 7                                     | 43.7     | 7                                     | 43.7     |
| Community            | 0                                     | 0        | 0                                     | 0        |
| School Social Worker | 16                                    | 100.0    | 16                                    | 100.0    |

### Locus of Problem

For the sixteen (16) non-routine case procedures, problems were defined with the following systems:

student system - three (3) cases  
family system - five (5) cases  
school system - four (4) cases  
dual systems - four (4) cases

Student system problems were defined as a learning disability for three (3) elementary school cases. There were five (5) family system problems. Three of these cases were at the high school level , and two (2) were at the elementary school level. The problems were identified as family interpersonal relationships difficulties, especially in the area of communication, and ineffective parenting skills.

School system problems were indicated for four (4) cases. At the high school level, difficulties were needed for flexibility in school policies and procedures for two (2) cases, and at the elementary school level, problems in interpersonal relationships with students two (2) cases were cited. There were four (4) cases in which system problems were defined in more than one system. Dual systems problems were found in the following categories:

- . student/school systems problems for one (1) elementary level case reflected difficulties in the area of learning problems and a need for change in classroom procedures
- . community/school systems problems were found for one (1) high school case in which social services and flexibility in school policies and procedures were needed

- . family/school systems problems were indicated for two (2) cases in the areas of:
  - ineffective parenting skills and the need for flexibility in classroom procedures (elementary school cases)
  - need to understand the cultures of the family and school (high school case)

Table 13, page 101, presents the frequency rate for problem definitions.

### Intervention Plan

Intervention plans were targeted for the family system for six (6) cases, school system for eight (8) cases, family/school systems for one (1) case, and school/community systems for one (1) case. Dual systems intervention activities were curriculum change and accessing housing, and community agency family counseling and class procedural change.

Intervention activities that targeted the family system included: student/school-based counseling for five (5) cases; parent counseling by community-based agency for three (3) cases; family counseling in school for two (2) cases; and parent education workshop by school social worker for one (1) case.

School system intervention activities were:

- . change in school/and or class procedures for two (2) cases and recommendation for:
  - flexibility in school/classroom schedules and routines
  - provision of school-based health services
  - effective classroom management
- . change in curriculum was suggested for six (6) cases, and recommendation to:

Table 13

**Locus of the Problem Definition for Non-Routine Cases**

(N = 16)

| <b><u>Locus of Problem</u></b>                                  | <b><u>N</u></b> | <b><u>Z</u></b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Student</b>                                                  |                 |                 |
| Learning Disability                                             | 3               | 18.75           |
| <b>Family</b>                                                   |                 |                 |
| Family Interpersonal Relations                                  | 4               | 25.0            |
| Ineffective Parenting Skills                                    | 1               | 6.25            |
| <b>School</b>                                                   |                 |                 |
| School Policies and Procedures                                  | 2               | 12.50           |
| Interpersonal Relations                                         | 2               | 12.50           |
| <b>Dual Systems</b>                                             |                 |                 |
| Ineffective Parenting Skills/Class Procedures                   | 1               | 6.25            |
| <b>Need to Understand School/Family Cultures</b>                | 1               | 6.25            |
| <b>Access to Social Services/School Policies and Procedures</b> | 1               | 6.25            |
| <b>Learning Problem/Classroom Procedures</b>                    | 1               | 6.25            |
| <b>Total</b>                                                    | <u>16</u>       | <u>100.0</u>    |

- provide bilingual programming
- provide compensatory (remedial) programming
- . change in teacher attitude for three (3) cases and suggested activities such as:
  - ongoing consultation with school social worker
  - teacher workshops

A community system intervention was accessing housing for one (1) case.

Intervention activities total more than sixteen (16) because more than one activity was recommended for some cases. Table 14 presents these findings.

Table 14  
Intervention Activities for Non-routine Cases  
 (N = 23)

| <u>Student Intervention</u>   | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Student Counseling in School  | 5        | 22       |
| <u>Family Intervention</u>    |          |          |
| Parent Counseling in School   | 2        | 9        |
| Community-based Counseling    | 3        | 13       |
| Parent Education Workshop     | 1        | 4        |
| <u>School Intervention</u>    |          |          |
| Procedure Change              | 2        | 9        |
| Curriculum Change             | 6        | 26       |
| Teacher Attitude Change       | 3        | 13       |
| <u>Community Intervention</u> |          |          |
| Accessing Housing             | 1        | 4        |
| Total                         | 23       | 100      |

Note: More than one intervention activity was recommended for each case.

#### Conference Process

A review of the conference process showed that there were varied

levels of agreement which probably effected the ecosystems initiation process. There were six (6) non-routine cases that initiated the ecosystems approach and ten (10) cases that did not initiate the approach. Tables 15 and 16 present the findings on agreement levels. The conference process and agreement levels for these cases are described after the tables.

Table 15  
Level of Agreement about Problem Definition  
for Non-Routine Cases

(N = 16)

| <u>Type of Agreement</u>  | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Agreement                 | 8                | 50.0           |
| Agreement by Acquiescence | 4                | 25.0           |
| Agreement with Compromise | 1                | 6.25           |
| No Agreement              | 3                | 18.75          |
| Total                     | 16               | 100.0          |

Table 16  
Level of Agreement about Intervention Plan  
for Non-Routine Cases

(N = 16)

| <u>Type of Agreement</u>  | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Agreement                 | 7                | 43.75          |
| Agreement by Acquiescence | 5                | 31.25          |
| Agreement with Compromise | 1                | 6.25           |
| No Agreement              | 3                | 18.75          |
| Total                     | 16               | 100.0          |

### Conference Participants' Agreement with Problem Definition and Intervention Plan

For the eight (8) cases in which there was a finding of agreement for problem definition, the systems identified were:

- . student system - 3 cases
- . family system - 2 cases
- . dual systems - 3 cases

Five (5) of these cases were on the high school level and three (3) were on the elementary school level. One (1) case in this category reported problem definition agreement, but agreement by acquiescence to the intervention plan. This case will be reported in the agreement by acquiescence section.

The number of cases in which there was agreement to the intervention activity was seven (7). These actions included: a family systems activity that proposed a parent education program for kindergarten parents and school system procedural changes. Other actions in this category targeted dual systems such as:

- . school and student: procedural changes and student counseling at a community agency
- . student and family: school-based student counseling and family counseling at a community agency

### Discussion

The ecosystems approach was initiated for five (5) cases in the agreement to problem definition and intervention plan category. Further examination of the assessment and conference reports led to an impression that clinical and negotiating skills as well as organizational influence abilities were used by the school social worker par-

ticipants. It would seem that these skills facilitated agreement by all conference participants to the problem definition and intervention plan. In addition, the school social worker participants reported that the conference participants seemed receptive to an ecosystems case planning approach.

As cited in the Agreement to Problem Definition and Intervention Plan Routine Cases discussion section, school social worker participants' knowledge of community resources was used as in informational expertise to expedite the plan. In addition, encouraging the participation of key school representatives also facilitated agreement and initiation. The client systems agreed to activities which required family counseling at a community agency. The parents' and students' readiness to openly discuss their situations and reach a mutually acceptable decision regarding the intervention assisted the initiation process.

The school system had no difficulty agreeing to the problem definition and implementing the recommended plans. As interpretation of these results is that recognized clinical and educational options, such as home instruction, student and family counseling and linking medical services to an existing school health program, were traditional practices in these project schools. These interventions did not pose a threat to the targeted systems.

Community referral system's receptivity to the plan was also required to achieve the initiation of the approach. Again, school social worker skills in the area of brokering for services assisted in the initiation process. The referral services had the necessary

resources and were willing to deliver services to the students and families.

The following is an example of conference participant's agreement to the problem definition and intervention plan for an initiated non-routine case procedure.

### Case Example

#### Referral Problem

The student referred himself to the school social worker. He is a tenth grader attending a specialized high school. He was experiencing difficulties in maintaining an average academic performance.

#### Assessment

Interviews were conducted with the student, parent, guidance counselor and grade advisor. Analysis of academic records indicated a pattern of poor grades in high school. He is the eldest of three children and lives with one parent. The student works after school to help the family financially and school personnel noted that he had a low energy level to attend to school work after meeting his employment responsibilities. Problems were defined within the family system. Counseling and in-school tutoring were recommended, along with referral to a community agency for family counseling.

#### Conference

The conference was attended by the school social worker, teacher, parent and student. The report indicated a tone of interest and caring by all adult participants. Supports were offered, i.e., homeroom teacher agreed to be available to the student to discuss and monitor

attendance, homework assignments and class participation. The social worker would see the student for counseling and the parent was interested in a referral to a community agency. In addition, the parent agreed with the student that the after-school employment would end. Parent indicated that the student's financial contribution was welcomed but not absolutely necessary. The importance of achieving a high school diploma was expressed as important by both parent and student. Open communication between student and parent was seen as a benefit of the conference process.

#### Outcome

Ten weeks after the conference, the school social worker reported an improvement in attendance and homework assignments. The family had made contact with a community agency.

There were two (2) non-routine cases in which agreement to the problem definition and intervention plan was reported, but the ecosystems approach was not initiated. Examination of these cases presented the following findings.

The first case, which was on the high school level, targeted the family system for change. The parents, who were divorced, did not attend the conference. The school social worker noted that the father had requested school assistance because of a deteriorating relationship between the student and the mother. The mother did not participate in the assessment, although efforts had been made to encourage her involvement. The student and father did participate in the assessment process, but neither attended the conference.

At the conference attended by school personnel and the school

social worker, family counseling was the recommended intervention activity. It was expected by the school social worker that the family would agree to the plan. Intensive follow-up contacts were planned.

After the conference, there were discussions with the referring parent; however, efforts to include the mother were not successful. Clearly, no agreement to the problem or intervention by the client system had occurred. Therefore, initiation of the approach could not take place. School social worker participant's clinical skills were not satisfactory for this case situation and impeded the initiation process.

The follow-up conversations with the school social work participant revealed the following: the school social worker for this high school case recognized that resistance should have been identified, assessed and responded to so that the relationship necessary to effect parental participation could be developed.

The second case was an elementary school situation that focused on kindergarten parents. The problem was defined within the family system, and a parent education activity was suggested. The kindergarten parents or representative(s) of kindergarten parents did not attend the conference. Agreement as to the problem definition and intervention was reached by the school social worker, teachers and school principal. This case offered a different set of dynamics.

The ecosystems approach could not be initiated because the school social worker did not include the client system in the decision-making process. According to the school social worker, conference participants viewed the conference process as consistent with the school's usual decision-making procedures. The school system unilaterally makes

decisions regarding case planning. It was assumed by conference participants that the client system would not oppose the intervention activity. Ten weeks after the conference, initiation had not taken place.

Conference Participants' Agreement by Acquiescence to Problem Definition and Intervention Plan

There were four (4) non-routine cases in which there was a finding of problem definition agreement by acquiescence. Difficulties were indicated for the following systems:

- . family system - 1 case
- . school system - 2 cases
- . dual system - 1 case

All of these cases were on the elementary school level.

The intervention activities were student and family school-based counseling, school procedural and curriculum change, change in teacher attitude and accessing housing for an emancipated minor. The latter activity was directed to the high school case in which there was agreement to the problem definition, but agreement by acquiescence to the intervention plan. This increased the total for agreement by acquiescence to the intervention plan to five (5) non-routine cases. The ecosystems approach was not initiated for these cases.

**Discussion**

To determine what factors may have led to an agreement by acquiescence level and hindered the initiation of the ecosystems approach, the assessment and conference data were further analyzed. Possible interpretations for this agreement level findings are:

- . client system's lack of support for the approach
- . school social work participants' limited clinical skills

The following case examples depict these findings. The first case example targeted teachers for change. The teachers attended the conference but did not express differences or objections to the problem definition or intervention plan. The school system was also represented by the school principal, whose influence legitimized the plan, but also may have constrained the teacher's participation during the conference. The following case example presents this case.

### Case Example

#### Referral Problem

A male, five year-old kindergarten student was referred to the school social worker by his teacher. He was described as a classroom management problem: unruly, aggressive and hyperactive. The school social worker observed that there had been similar presenting problems reported by another kindergarten teacher and first grade teachers.

#### Assessment

The school social worker met with the school principal. The principal indicated a perceived need to sensitize and inform teachers regarding the culture of their African American students. The school social worker noted that teachers communicate their attitude concerning racial and ethnic diversity to their students and viewed the presenting problem as negative teacher attitude toward the children they serve. The problem was defined within the school system and a change in teacher attitude among kindergarten and first grade teachers was targeted as the change action. A series of teacher workshops was to be developed to address these issues and concerns.

### Conference

The participants at the conference were the principal, two teachers representing each grade and the school social worker. According to the report, the teachers were encouraged to express their concerns after the school social worker indicated that some of the discipline problems they experienced may be caused by classroom behavioral expectations and norms that are not reflective of the culture and experience of the children. The teachers indicated feelings of frustration, especially in the area of discipline. According to the school social worker, they seemed to have little understanding for the need to be familiar with the cultural and experiential characteristics of their students. In addition, they did not share the view that parents are partners in the educational process.

The plan to develop teacher workshops was advanced by the principal and supported by the school social worker. The teachers were not certain about the need for the workshops, but did not express any strong objections to the plan. The school social worker offered to develop the workshops with teacher participation. The teachers indicated that they would discuss this activity with their colleagues.

### Outcome

Ten weeks after the conference, the workshops had not been developed. Negotiations were continuing with the teachers, and the school social worker expected that the workshops would be implemented because of the principal's concern and commitment to the issues.

In follow-up discussions, the school social worker commented that

the principal's vision regarding educational programming and services was a powerful influence on school personnel. It was also indicated that the school social worker and principal shared this vision, which was to develop multiethnic educational practices in the school. The key aim of multiethnic education is to help people gain greater self-awareness by viewing themselves from the perspective of other cultures.

The second case is an example of parent agreement by acquiescence to a family system intervention.

### Case Example

#### Referral Problem

A first grader was referred to the school social worker because of adjustment problems. Her behavior was described by the referring teacher as disruptive. She had taken things belonging to her teacher and classmates from time to time.

#### Assessment

The student is the third child in a family of four in a single-parent household. She was the youngest child until two years ago and verbalized missing her mother's attention. She described her mother as "very busy now." The oldest sibling became her primary care-taker. The parent is described as overwhelmed with her family responsibilities as well as her own health care needs.

School social worker identified the problem as within the family system and had targeted interventions to include:

- . parental counseling with school social worker
- . referral to community agency for family counseling

- . group counseling for the student

### Conference

The conference was attended by the school social worker, teacher, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and parent. According to the school social worker's report, all conference participants were sensitive to the needs of the student. The report states that "in general, school personnel felt that the student behaved in a disruptive manner because she is seeking attention." Each school participant verbalized that it was right that the parent should receive guidance from counseling services. The parent said she would see the school social worker concerning a referral to a community agency and agreed that the student could begin group counseling.

### Outcome

The student was seen and benefited from the group instruction. The parent did not keep scheduled appointments with the school social worker or follow through on a referral to a community agency.

During the conference, the parent did not openly express her views or feelings. Subsequent conversations with the school social work participant revealed that there was no awareness that there had not been total agreement or commitment to the ecosystems approach. This illustrates a weakness in the school social worker's clinical skills.

The importance of open communication during the conference and client system support for the approach was also demonstrated in a high school non-routine case situation. The student acquiesced to the

intervention activity, although he had openly agreed to the problem being defined within the school and community systems. As an emancipated minor, he recognized and agreed to the need for a community service that would provide suitable, affordable housing. However, he did not openly express how he saw or felt about the presented school plan. This plan involved a General Education Development Program (GED). This program would have allowed him to complete his secondary schooling in a year. The student did not follow through with needed information. Ten weeks after the conference, it appeared that the student would continue in the high school local diploma program. The school social worker's follow-up discussions with the student revealed that he did not want a GED. In retrospect, the school social worker commented that the importance of high school relationships in this student's life had not been fully understood or appreciated by the conference participants.

Participation by students and parents in the conference process emphasized their value and contribution to the program planning process and the establishment of meaningful linkages between the various systems. Their active participation seemed to convey a sense of mutual trust and partnership. This developing partnership facilitated the conference process.

#### Conference Participants Agreement with Compromise to the Problem Definition and Intervention Plan

There was one elementary school level case in which there was agreement with compromise. The problem was defined within the school system and the classroom teacher's attitude toward the student was targeted for change. This intervention activity was not a traditional

school system option. Negotiations during the conference involved broadening the problem locus and intervention to include other school programs, specifically, the remedial class. This resulted in the teacher supporting the ecosystems approach, and the intervention procedure was initiated. This case is presented below.

### Referral Problem

A second grade youngster was referred to the school social worker by his classroom teacher because of a lack of motivation to complete academic tasks, namely, classroom activities and homework.

### Assessment

Student, parent, and teacher were interviewed, school records were reviewed and classroom observations were made. The review of the school records showed the student's performance in grade 1 to be satisfactory. The interview with the classroom teacher revealed that she did not think the student had the skills to function in grade 2 and could be a hold-over. After observing in the classroom, the school social worker indicated a need to include other school staff in the process. The remedial math teacher was approached because of her positive relationship she had with the student and the classroom teacher. The remedial teacher advised that the student functioned well in her class and his work was satisfactory. She believed that he could be successful in grade 2.

The student interview revealed that he was upset with the classroom teacher. He described classroom experiences in which he felt embarrassed; for example, the teacher referring to him as the only

student who did not and could not complete the class assignment. When the parent was interviewed, she strongly believed that her son could do second grade work. In addition, she saw a noticeable change in his attitude toward school this year. She thought most of the problem centered around the teacher's classroom style, which she described as negative.

The referral problem was hypothesized as located within the school system and the proposed intervention plan targeted change in teacher attitude. The strategy would emphasize student self-management approach. Using positive reinforcement techniques, the teacher would share responsibility with the student for developing and achieving desired goals such as completing school tasks and homework.

#### Conference

The conference was attended by the parent, student, classroom and remedial teachers, and school social worker. Initially there was a great deal of reluctance by the classroom teacher to agree to the problem as a school system issue, or to consider the intervention plan presented by the school social worker. A part of this reluctance seemed to be related to a concern that the focus was on her. The remedial teacher response to the suggestions were positive and she was open in her willingness to frame the difficulty as one in which the school could benefit from helping students learn ways of accepting responsibility for their behavior. She saw the plan as a challenge and a learning experience. She offered to try working with the student using this approach in her program. The school social worker and the

remedial teacher negotiated with the classroom teacher, suggesting the teachers could work together. The strategy could be viewed as a school effort to improve student's decision-making skills and, at the same time, possibly benefit the referred student. The school social worker noted that the approach was one used by special education teachers and it had been effective. She thought it would be useful in other classroom settings. The classroom teacher expressed a willingness to work with the remedial teacher. According to the report, the parent and student were also agreeable to the plan. The school social worker agreed to see the student as a means of reenforcing classroom and remedial program efforts.

#### Outcome

Ten weeks after the conference, the school social worker reported that follow-up consultations with the teachers indicated that there was some improvement in the student's behavior. The school social worker noted that the student seemed more comfortable in the classroom and there seemed to be less tension between the student and the teacher.

#### Discussion

It would seem that the school social work participant's organizational influence abilities and political/negotiating skills facilitated the initiation process for this case definition and intervention plan. In follow-up discussions, the school social worker indicated that the involvement of the remedial math teacher allowed the participants (especially the classroom teacher) to view the problem and intervention as systemic rather than individual. It would seem that for

this case the school social worker's awareness and involvement of an educational colleague as an ally was an important factor in reaching an agreement.

Utilizing the expertise of ancillary school staff to influence decisions is a project case-conference theme. Involvement of school nurse, remedial, guidance and other school personnel in the assessment and conference process was a standard set by school social work participants. According to these participants, ancillary staff participation enriched the discussion and, for many cases, such staff acted as catalysts in reaching consensus on problem.

#### No Agreement to the Problem Definition and Intervention Plan by Conference Participants

No agreement to problem definition and intervention plan as presented by the school social worker was found for three (3) high school level cases. For one case, the parent rejected the problem being defined within the family system and school-based and community agency counseling intervention activities. The second case involved school administrator's disagreement with the school as the target problem system. Efforts to address the structure and scheduling of a school program requested for low-achieving students were rejected by school participants. The third case also concerned the definition of a case problem within the school system. School personnel (guidance counselor) rejected the school system as the defined problem area and a change in curriculum as the intervention activity.

#### **Discussion**

Additional review of the assessment and conference data for the

for the no agreement to problem definition and intervention plan case category led to the following impressions regarding the factors that may have led to this agreement level and the subsequent inability to initiate the ecosystems approach for these cases:

- . poor political and negotiating skills by the school social work participants
- . poor organizational influence abilities by the school social work participants
- . lack of parent, student, school administrator and/or school personnel receptivity for the ecosystems approach

The case conference for the one of the cases in this category indicated that the parents were not receptive to the presented problem definition or intervention plan. According to the conference report, the parents openly discussed their different view of the problem. They suggested a student system problem, while the school, student, and school social worker articulated a family systems problem and urged the development of a plan that included all systems (student, family, school and community). The refusal by the parents to agree was a serious obstacle to initiation efforts. The school social worker, school and student attempted to move ahead with their plan without parental support. The effort to engage the family in counseling and, ultimately emancipate the student, failed. For this case, the school social worker's limited clinical skills and the lack of client system (parents) support were impediments to implementation and initiation of the approach. The ecosystems approach is a holistic one in which the interactions and the reciprocal nature of relationships between systems is an important clinical concept. In this case, for the student to grow

socially and emotionally, there had to be information, energy and resources--which represent support--from the parents. It would seem that this principle was forgotten or ignored in an effort to implement the plan. Therefore, the ecosystems initiation effort was weakened and, ultimately, not successful.

The second case is an example of no agreement to proposed efforts to schedule a school program.

### Case Example

#### Referral Problem

A seventeen year-old student was referred to the school social worker because of failing grades in December, 1986. The student had earned 10½ credits in four years. The referring teacher suggested the Educational Related Support Services remedial resource program. There was a full register in this program. The student was placed in a COOP program in January, 1987. This program offered academic remedial help and work experience for students. In April, 1987, at the time of the ecosystems project, the student approached the school social work participant to report that the COOP program was being phased out. The student was passing all subjects and learning a job skill.

#### Assessment

School social worker interviewed the COOP coordinator, attended guidance staff meetings at which the following school year's programs were discussed. Consultation with the assistance principal of guidance and a review of referred student's records also occurred.

### Conference

The school social worker, the COOP program coordinator and the assistant principal of guidance attended the conference. The school social worker defined the problem within the school system and articulated the need for the program continuance. The coordinator expressed anger at the school's eliminating the program and, according to the school social worker, was seeking some direct action and commitment to reinstate the program from the assistant principal. This support was not offered by the assistant principal, who suggested that the COOP program coordinator conduct a study regarding the effectiveness of the program for low-achieving students. This study could be presented to the school Principal's Cabinet. The coordinator indicated an inability to conduct the study and write the report because of time constraints. The school social worker suggested that she and students assist the coordinator in conducting the study and writing the report.

No agreement was reached regarding continuation of the program or a study to evaluate the program.

### Outcome

The school social worker continued the program's advocacy with student support. A coalition of students and the school social worker carried out the study which was presented to the Principal's Cabinet. The Cabinet members indicated that academic standards of the COOP program were too low and noted a preference for placing resources with the Executive Internship Program serving a higher functioning student group. The principal decided that a COOP program that offered a GED

would be developed.

The following school year, the COOP program was not offered. This case illustrated poor political/negotiating skills, poor organizational influence abilities by the school social work participant and a lack of support and receptivity to the ecosystems approach by the school system. It would seem that for this case situation the school social worker did not take into consideration the informal system. This system valued programs for high-achieving students. Student programs that aimed to meet the needs of under-achieving students had a low priority. In addition, there was a poor relationship between the administrators attending the conference. According to the school social worker, rivalries regarding position and decision-making authority were evident during the conference but were not addressed. The initiation efforts were attempted, but they were not successful. The way the school administration responded after the cabinet meeting was thought-provoking. Six months after that meeting, the program was not reinstated.

Politics influences decisions in organizations, and school are not exceptions to this caveat. Recognizing the school system as a political organization did not happen for this case. The questions that needed to be asked during the assessment phase were: "What are the vested interests?" and "What are the costs and benefits for constituents?" In follow-up discussions with the school social worker, it was noted that, in general, the school was moving towards establishing specialized programs for high-achieving students. It was important to the school administration that the school be viewed by parents and the Board of Education officials as a specialized high school for average

and above-average students. According to the school social worker, the goal to turn around the reputation of the school was a very critical influence on the school administrator's response to the recommended intervention plan. It would seem that for these school administrators there were no apparent benefits in supporting a program for low-achieving students.

The third case presented another example of the influence of the school system and the sub-system relationships in an effort to initiate an ecosystems plan. The competition between programs for resources was a factor in the inability to initiate change within the school. Turf issues were acted out by school personnel who sabotaged the intervention plan. The school staff member (guidance counselor) who attended the conference did not agree to the problem definition (school system) and intervention (school procedural change: curriculum change in the bilingual program). The parent became the vehicle to abort the plan with the assistance of the guidance counselor, who had meetings with the parent after the conference. The parent, a recent immigrant, did not understand the nuances of school politics, but did expect his son to make immediate academic gains with the curriculum change. When this did not happen within the ten-week follow-up period after the conference, the parent was willing to end the plan. In hindsight, the school social worker indicated that Asian-American and family-school cultural differences, as well as the competition among staff for limited resources, created a complex case situation. These dynamics required careful analysis during the assessment and conference processes and required competent clinical and organizational analysis skills.

## SECTION 2

## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EFFECTIVE ECOSYSTEMS PRACTICE

This section presents data from the further analysis of study findings. Recommended case procedures (routine and non-routine procedures), social work skills and client, school, and community systems reported response to the ecosystems case planning approach were reviewed. This analysis offers possible insights regarding the factors associated with effective ecosystems practice.

The examination of findings data revealed interesting patterns regarding recommended case procedures and the initiation of the ecosystems approach. When a routine type of change was recommended, the approach appeared to be initiated. However, when a non-routine type of change was recommended, there was a dramatic decrease in the initiation of the approach. There were fourteen (14) routine case procedures and six (6) non-routine case procedures in which the ecosystems approach was initiated. For ten (10) non-routine case procedures the ecosystems approach was not initiated. These findings are presented in Table 17.

Table 17

| <u>Type of Ecosystems Procedure Recommendation by Initiation Status</u><br>(N = 30) |                          |                              |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| <u>Type of Procedure</u>                                                            | <u>Initiation Status</u> |                              |              |
|                                                                                     | <u>Initiated</u>         | <u>Not Initiated</u>         | <u>Total</u> |
| Non-routine                                                                         | 6                        | 10                           | 16           |
| Routine                                                                             | 14                       | 0                            | 14           |
| Total                                                                               | 20(66.7%)                | 10(33.3%)                    | 30(100%)     |
| <u>Chi Square</u>                                                                   | <u>D.F.</u>              | <u>Level of Significance</u> |              |
| 10.46317                                                                            | 1                        | .0012                        |              |

Based on these data, there is a strong correlation between type of conference procedure recommendation and level of initiation. In order to determine what factors facilitated or impeded initiation efforts for routine and non-routine cases, the thirty (30) cases required additional study.

Bearing in mind that to initiate an innovation effectively, all participants must be in agreement with the initiation effort. The agreement levels for the routine and non-routine cases were examined as well as the possibility of a correlation between a type of recommended procedure (routine and non-routine) and level of agreement about the problem definition and intervention plan. As noted in Section 1, the agreement level for problem definition and intervention plan was defined as follows:

- . agreement meant all conference participants openly communicated acceptance of the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan;
- . agreement by acquiescence meant one or more conference participant appeared to consent to the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan and did not openly communicate a different view or objection;
- . agreement with compromise meant one or more conference participant negotiated changes in the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan; and
- . no agreement meant one or more conference participant rejected the presented problem definition and/or intervention plan.

For the sixteen (16) non-routine case procedures there were eight (8) cases in which there was agreement to the problem definition.

four (4) cases in which there was agreement by acquiescence, one (1) case in which there was agreement with compromise and three (3) cases in which there was no agreement. The results for the fourteen (14) routine case procedures showed that there was agreement for the problem definition for nine (9) cases, agreement by acquiescence for four (4) cases, agreement with compromise for one (1) case and no cases had no agreement. The relationship between the Type of Case Procedure Recommendation and Level of Problem Definition agreement was not statistically significant.

Regarding intervention plan agreement, it was found that for the sixteen (16) non-routine case procedures there was agreement for seven (7) cases, agreement by acquiescence for five (5) cases, agreement with compromise for one (1) case, and no agreement for three (3) cases. For the fourteen (14) routine case procedures there was intervention plan agreement for eight (8) cases, agreement by acquiescence for four (4) cases, agreement with compromise for two (2) cases, and none of the cases had no agreement. The relationship Type of Case Procedure Recommendation and Level of Intervention Plan Agreement was not statistically significant. Tables 18 and 19, page 127, present these findings.

Examination of the routine and non-routine case procedures indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between level of problem definition agreement and initiation and the level of intervention plan agreement and initiation. There were seventeen (17) cases in which there was agreement to the problem definition, fourteen (14) cases initiated the ecosystems approach and three (3) cases did not. For the two (2) cases in which there was agreement with compromise,

Table 18

**Ecosystems Conference Procedure Recommendation by Level  
of Agreement about Problem Definition**

(N = 30)

| Level of Problem Agreement |                  |                                  |                                  |                     |                  |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| <u>Type of Procedure</u>   | <u>Agreement</u> | <u>Agreement by Acquiescence</u> | <u>Agreement with Compromise</u> | <u>No Agreement</u> | <u>Raw Total</u> |
| Non-Routine                | 8                | 4                                | 1                                | 3                   | 16 (53.3%)       |
| Routine                    | 9                | 4                                | 1                                |                     | 14 (46.7%)       |
| Total                      | 17 (56.7%)       | 8 (26.6%)                        | 2 (6.6%)                         | 3 (10%)             | 30 (100.0%)      |
| <hr/>                      |                  |                                  |                                  |                     |                  |
| <u>Chi Square</u>          |                  | <u>D.F.</u>                      | <u>Level of Significance</u>     |                     |                  |
| 2.93855                    |                  | 3                                | .4012                            |                     |                  |

Table 19

**Ecosystems Conference Procedure Recommendation by Level  
of Agreement about Intervention Plan**

(N = 30)

| Level of Intervention Agreement |                  |                                  |                                  |                     |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| <u>Type of Procedure</u>        | <u>Agreement</u> | <u>Agreement by Acquiescence</u> | <u>Agreement with Compromise</u> | <u>No Agreement</u> | <u>Raw Total</u> |
| Non-Routine                     | 7                | 5                                | 1                                | 3                   | 16 (53.3%)       |
| Routine                         | 8                | 4                                | 2                                |                     | 14 (46.7%)       |
| Total                           | 15 (50.0%)       | 9 (30.0%)                        | 3 (10.0%)                        | 3 (10.0%)           | 30 (100.0%)      |
| <hr/>                           |                  |                                  |                                  |                     |                  |
| <u>Chi Square</u>               |                  | <u>D.F.</u>                      | <u>Level of Significance</u>     |                     |                  |
| 3.39286                         |                  | 3                                | .3349                            |                     |                  |

both cases initiated the approach, while the three (3) cases in which there was no agreement to the problem definition, there was no initiation of the approach. There was a .0196 level of statistical significance found for the relationship between level of Problem Definition Agreement and Initiation.

Examination of the intervention plan agreement and initiation revealed that for the fifteen (15) cases in which there was agreement, thirteen (13) initiated the approach and two (2) did not. There was agreement by acquiescence for nine (9) cases and four (4) initiated the approach and five (5) did not. For the three (3) cases in which there was agreement with compromise, all of the cases were initiated. The three (3) cases in which there was no agreement, the approach was not initiated. There was a .0067 level of significance between level of intervention plan agreement and initiation of the ecosystems approach. Tables 20 and 21, pages 128 and 129, present these findings.

Table 20

Level of Agreement about Problem Definition by Initiation Status

(N = 30)

| <u>Level of Problem Agreement</u> | <u>Initiation Status</u> |                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
|                                   | <u>Initiated</u>         | <u>Not Initiated</u> |
| Agreement                         | 14                       | 3                    |
| Agreement by Acquiescence         | 4                        | 4                    |
| Agreement with Compromise         | 2                        | 0                    |
| No Agreement                      | 0                        | 3                    |
| Total                             | 20 (66.7%)               | 10 (33.3%)           |

| <u>Chi Square</u> | <u>D.F.</u> | <u>Level of Significance</u> |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| 9.88235           | 3           | .0196                        |

Table 21

Level of Agreement about Intervention Plan by Initiation Status  
(N = 30)

| <u>Level of Agreement</u> | <u>Initiation Status</u> |                              |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
|                           | <u>Initiated</u>         | <u>Not Initiated</u>         |
| Agreement                 | 13                       | 2                            |
| Agreement by Acquiescence | 4                        | 5                            |
| Agreement with Compromise | 3                        | 0                            |
| No Agreement              | 0                        | 3                            |
| Total                     | 20 (66.7%)               | 10 (33.3%)                   |
| <u>Chi Square</u>         | <u>D.F.</u>              | <u>Level of Significance</u> |
| 12.20000                  | 3                        | .0067                        |

Ecosystems School Social Workers: Professional Characteristics

Additional review of the routine and non-routine case assessment, conference content and process determined that other conditions were necessary to achieve the agreement levels that would facilitate the initiation of the ecosystems approach. The school social worker participants who brought their personal style of interacting, knowledge, skills and values were an integral part of the initiation process. The five school social workers who participated in the Ecosystems Project were asked to complete a questionnaire which reported the professional characteristics of these participants. Table 22, page 130, presents these findings.

For the five (5) school social workers, three (3) obtained their Masters in Social Work (MSW) prior to 1970; one (1) between 1971-1980 and one (1) between 1981-1985. One (1) school social worker had been employed as a New York City school social worker for more than 10 years; two (2) for four to seven years; one (1) for one to four years; and

one (1) for less than a year. Regarding their assignment to the school used in the project, one (1) had been assigned for more than six years; two (2) for four to six years; one (1) for one to four years, and one (1) for less than a year.

Table 22

Professional Characteristics of Ecosystems  
School Social Workers

(N = 5)

General Characteristics

1. Year in which MSW was granted

| <u>Year</u>     | <u>N</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Prior to 1970   | 3        | 60.0     |
| Between 1971-80 | 1        | 20.0     |
| Between 1981-85 | 1        | 20.0     |

2. Number of years employed as a School Social Worker by New York City Board of Education

Number of years

|              |   |      |
|--------------|---|------|
| Less than 1  | 1 | 20.0 |
| 1-4          | 1 | 20.0 |
| 4-7          | 2 | 40.0 |
| 8-10         | 0 | 0.0  |
| More than 10 | 1 | 20.0 |

3. Number of years assigned to school used in this project

Number of years

|             |   |      |
|-------------|---|------|
| Less than 1 | 1 | 20.0 |
| 1-4         | 1 | 20.0 |
| 4-6         | 2 | 40.0 |
| More than 6 | 1 | 20.0 |

In addition, it was considered important to know how familiar the school social worker participants were with the ecosystems approach and if they used the approach in their practice. It was found that three (3) participants were somewhat familiar and two (2) were very

familiar with the concept. Four (4) school social worker participants indicated that they used the approach often in their school-based practice, and one (1) indicated occasional use.

#### Social Work Skills Associated with Effective Ecosystems Practice

In examining what social work skills facilitated the successful initiation of the ecosystems approach, the study showed clinical skills, organizational analysis and an understanding of the collaborative process were critical. These factors influenced the engagement and negotiation activities during the assessment and conference stages and, ultimately, the initiation of the approach.

Engagement included the initial and ongoing contact with the student, parent, and school personnel and other significant participants in the case situation. In addition, it involved deciding who the critical decision-makers were and influencing them to attend the conference. This activity suggests that in order to initiate the approach, school social workers must ally themselves with politically active school individuals and recognize relevant parent, school, community issues and concerns.

During the conference, negotiation was a central activity. It required encouraging open communication. To successfully initiate an ecosystems approach, the participants must be free to express their opinions, and feelings; ask questions, and clarify answers regarding presented information. It was through open communication that participants stated their desire and ability to join in the initiation effort, and effectively participate in the decision-making process.

The routine and non-routine case procedures were rated on a three-point scale according to school social work participants' skills and abilities, client, school systems, referral agencies' receptivity to the ecosystems case planning approach and case disposition. After reviewing the ecosystems assessment summary and conference diary, the project evaluator rated the following:

School social work participants' clinical skills, political/negotiating abilities, organizational influence and the ability to expedite. The ratings of these participants' skills and abilities are based on (1) their encouraging conference participants (parent, student, school personnel) to identify and elaborate their concerns and expectations; (2) their responding to explicit and implicit communication by these conference participants regarding presented problem definition and intervention plan. The degrees of skill and ability ratings indicated the following:

- 1---represented a minimum degree of skill and ability;
- 2---represented a moderate degree of skill and ability; and
- 3---represented a high degree of school social work skill and ability.

Conference participants representing the client, school and community systems, receptivity to the ecosystems approach to case planning. Receptivity to the approach is based on the conference participants' level of agreement to the problem definition and intervention plan; the ratings indicated the following:

- 1---represented a minimum level of receptivity by one or more participant;

- 2---represented a moderate level of receptivity by one or more participant; and
- 3---represented a high level of receptivity by one or more participant.

Case disposition which is based on school social work participants and conference participants (parent, student, school personnel, community referral agencies) levels of agreement to the problem definition, levels of agreement to act on the intervention plan and the implementation of the intervention plan. The ratings indicated the following:

- 1---one or more participant had a minimum level of agreement;
- 2---one or more participant had a moderate level of agreement;
- 3---one or more participant had a high level of agreement.

The ratings are depicted in Tables 23 and 24, pages 134, and 135.

The analysis of social work skills is described in the following section.

In regard to routine cases, worker skill levels were rated high for over 90% of the cases. In general, the client, school and referral systems also rated high, with over 90% of the case participants supporting the ecosystems approach. It is to be noted that students' support was mixed. Fifty (50) percent of these participants were rated high for support and 50% were in the middle. Case disposition results showed that 85% of the routine case outcomes had a high rating for problem definition, and 78% of the cases rated high on agreement to act. One hundred (100) percent of the cases rated high on initiation.

Table 23  
RATING OF INITIATION OF BOOSYSTEMS APPROACH FACTORS:  
Routine Cases \*

\* 1 = Minimum  
2 = Moderate  
3 = High

| Routine<br>Case # | Worker's Skills |             |             |     | School System |       |                | Client System |     |     |         | Referral System | Dignitarian |             |     |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----|---------------|-------|----------------|---------------|-----|-----|---------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----|
|                   | CL              | POL/<br>NEG | ORG/<br>INF | EXP | PRIN          | TCHRS | OTHER<br>STAFF | CLI           | FAM | REL | FRIENDS | Agency          | PRO/<br>DEF | AGR/<br>ACT | IMP |
| 1                 | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | 3             | 3     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 2                 | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | 3             | —     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 8                 | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | 3             | —     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 9                 | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | 3     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 10                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | 3             | —     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 13                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | 3             | —     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 14                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | 3     | —              | 3             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 16                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | —     | 3              | —             | 3   | —   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 19                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | 3     | —              | —             | —   | 3   | —       | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 21                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | 3     | —              | 2             | 2   | 2   | —       | 3               | 2           | 2           | 3   |
| 24                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | —     | 3              | —             | —   | 3   | —       | —               | 2           | 2           | 3   |
| 26                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | 3     | 3              | 2             | 2   | —   | —       | —               | 2           | 2           | 3   |
| 27                | 3               | 3           | 3           | 3   | —             | 3     | 3              | —             | 3   | —   | —       | —               | 3           | 3           | 3   |
| 28                | 3               | 2           | 2           | 2   | 3             | 3     | —              | —             | 3   | —   | —       | —               | 3           | 2           | 3   |

CL = Clinical  
POL/NEG = Political-Negotiations  
ORG/INF = Organizational Influence  
EXP = Expediting  
PRIN = Principal  
TCHRS = Teachers

CLI = Client  
FAM = Family  
REL = Relatives  
PRO/DEF = Problem Definition  
AGR/ACT = Agreement to Act  
IMP = Implementation

Table 24  
RATING OF INITIATION OF ECOSYSTEMS APPROACH FACTORS:  
Non-Routine Cases \*

\*1 = Minimum  
2 = Moderate  
3 = High

| Non-<br>Routine<br>Case # | <u>Worker's Skills</u> |             |             |     | <u>School System</u> |       |                | <u>Client System</u> |     |     |         | <u>Relational System</u> | <u>Disposition</u> |             |     |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----|----------------------|-------|----------------|----------------------|-----|-----|---------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----|
|                           | CL                     | POL/<br>NEG | ORG/<br>INF | EXP | PRIN                 | TCHRS | OTHER<br>STAFF | CLI                  | FAM | REL | FRIENDS | Agency                   | PRO/<br>DEF        | AGR/<br>ACT | IMP |
| 3                         | 2                      | 1           | 1           | 2   | 3                    | 3     | —              | 3                    | 1   | —   | 3       | —                        | 1                  | 1           | 1   |
| 4                         | 1                      | 1           | 1           | 1   | 1                    | 1     | 1              | 3                    | —   | —   | —       | —                        | 1                  | 1           | 1   |
| 5                         | 1                      | 1           | 1           | 1   | —                    | —     | 1              | 2                    | 1   | —   | —       | —                        | 1                  | 1           | 1   |
| 6                         | 2                      | 3           | 3           | 2   | 3                    | —     | 3              | 1                    | 1   | —   | —       | —                        | —                  | —           | —   |
| 7                         | 1                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | —     | 3              | 2                    | —   | —   | —       | 3                        | 3                  | 2           | 1   |
| 11                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | 3     | —              | 3                    | 3   | —   | —       | 3                        | 3                  | 3           | 3   |
| 12                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | 2     | —              | 3                    | 3   | —   | —       | 3                        | 3                  | 3           | 3   |
| 15                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | —     | —              | 3                    | 2   | —   | —       | —                        | 2                  | 2           | 1   |
| 17                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | —     | 3              | 3                    | 3   | —   | —       | 3                        | 3                  | 3           | 3   |
| 18                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | 3     | 3              | 3                    | 3   | —   | —       | 3                        | 3                  | 3           | 3   |
| 20                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | 3     | 3              | 3                    | 3   | —   | —       | —                        | 3                  | 3           | 3   |
| 22                        | 2                      | 3           | 3           | 2   | 3                    | —     | —              | —                    | —   | —   | —       | —                        | 3                  | 3           | 1   |
| 23                        | 3                      | 3           | 3           | 3   | —                    | 3     | —              | —                    | —   | —   | —       | —                        | 3                  | 3           | 3   |
| 25                        | 1                      | 2           | 2           | 1   | 3                    | 3     | 3              | 2                    | 2   | —   | —       | —                        | 2                  | 2           | 1   |
| 29                        | 2                      | 1           | 3           | 2   | 3                    | 2     | —              | —                    | —   | —   | —       | —                        | 2                  | 2           | 1   |
| 30                        | 2                      | 1           | 1           | 1   | —                    | 2     | —              | —                    | —   | —   | —       | —                        | 2                  | 2           | 1   |

CL = Clinical  
POL/NEG = Political Negotiations  
ORG/INF = Organizational Influence  
EXP = Expediting  
PRIN = Principal  
TCHRS = Teachers

CLI = Client  
FAM = Family  
REL = Relatives  
PRO/DEF = Problem Definition  
AGR/ACT = Agreement to Act  
IMP = Implementation

The ratings for the non-routine cases, in the areas of problem definition agreement and agreement to act, were high for half of the cases (50%) in this category. However, the initiation disposition had a 62% low rating for these cases. In addition, the results for worker skills were mixed. For example, political/negotiating abilities and organizational influence were rated high for over 60% of the cases, while clinical skills were rated high for half of the cases (50%).

The school system's support for the approach was found to be rated high (over 60%) for most of the case participants. Similarly, the client and referral systems' support was rated high from 83% to 67% of these participants. These results were based on the number of assessment and conferences attended by these systems' participants. Tables 25 and 26, on pages 137 and 138, summarize the ratings of factors associated with effective ecosystems practice for routine and non-routine case procedures. These data must be considered exploratory and interpreted with caution, since the reliability of the ratings has not been established.

#### Summary of Study Findings

There were fourteen (14) cases in which there were routine case procedure recommendations and sixteen (16) cases in which there were non-routine case procedure recommendations. Routine case procedures targeted intervention change actions in the student and/or community systems, whereas, non-routine case procedure recommendations focused change on the family and/or school systems. There were twenty (20) project cases in which the ecosystems approach was initiated. These cases recommended routine and non-routine procedures. For the



**Table 26**

### Factors Associated with Effective Ecosystems Practice: Ratings for Non-Routine Cases

| <u>Worker Skills</u> (N=16*)  | High | %     | Middle | %     | Low | %     |
|-------------------------------|------|-------|--------|-------|-----|-------|
| Clinical                      | 7    | 43.50 | 5      | 31.50 | 4   | 24    |
| Political/Negotiating         | 10   | 62.50 | 1      | 6.25  | 5   | 31.25 |
| Organization Influence        | 11   | 68.75 | 1      | 6.25  | 4   | 25    |
| Expediting                    | 8    | 50    | 4      | 25    | 4   | 25    |
| <u>School System</u>          |      |       |        |       |     |       |
| Principal (N=6*)              | 5    | 83    | 0      | 0     | 1   | 17    |
| Teachers (N=9*)               | 6    | 60    | 3      | 20    | 1   | 10    |
| Other (N=7*)                  | 6    | 85    | 0      | 0     | 1   | 15    |
| <u>Client System</u>          |      |       |        |       |     |       |
| Student (N=6*)                | 5    | 83    | 1      | 17    | 0   | 0     |
| Family (N=12*)                | 9    | 75    | 2      | 17    | 0   | 0     |
| Relatives (N=3*)              | 2    | 67    | 1      | 33    | 0   | 0     |
| <u>Referral System</u> (N=5*) | 5    | 100   | 0      | 0     | 0   | 0     |
| <u>Disposition</u> (N=16*)    |      |       |        |       |     |       |
| Problem Definition            | 8    | 50    | 4      | 25    | 4   | 25    |
| Agreement to Activity         | 8    | 50    | 4      | 25    | 4   | 25    |
| Initiation                    | 6    | 37.50 | 0      | 0     | 10  | 62.50 |

\*Represents case participation number

ten (10) cases in which there was no initiation of the ecosystems approach, non-routine procedures were recommended.

Parent and school personnel participated in all routine case assessment and conference processes; the community system represented by foster care agencies participated in two cases. Problems were defined within the student system (6 cases); family system (6 cases); and community system (2 cases). Student system intervention actions included school-based counseling (8 cases), medical evaluation (2 cases), special education evaluation (1 case); community system intervention actions were foster care services (2 cases), community after-school programs (2 cases), and accessing housing (1 case).

For the non-routine case procedure recommendations, it was found that parents participated in most of the assessment and conference processed (14 cases); school personnel were represented for all assessment and conference proceedings. Students were interviewed for fourteen (14) cases and formally participated in six (6) conferences. Problems were defined within the student system (3 cases); family system (5 cases), school system (4 cases); and dual systems (4 cases). Student interventions were school-based counseling (2 cases), curriculum change (6 cases), and change in teacher attitude (3 cases); community interventions focused on accessing housing (1 case). Interventions totaled more than the number of routine and non-routine cases because more than one intervention plan was recommended for cases.

For this study, effective initiation of an ecosystems approach was influenced by the following factors:

- . using a collaborative strategy which encouraged participation of each conference participant concerned with problem and required skillful engagement and negotiation during the assessment and conference stages by the school social work participant
- . agreement on the problem definition which provided clarity on each conference participant's perception of the student's school-related difficulty and the appropriate target(s) for the change effort
- . agreement on intervention goal and related activities which provided clarity regarding specific goal(s) to be achieved and action(s) to be taken to accomplish the goal(s)
- . agreement on tasks to be performed by each conference participant which mobilizes necessary resources and gains commitment to the intervention efforts

These factors are in keeping with the literature and are a key study finding.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it was found that to achieve a high degree of agreement for problem definition, and agreement to act and initiate the ecosystems approach, the following conditions must be met:

- . a high degree of school social worker participant skills in the areas of clinical, political/negotiating abilities, organizational influence, and expediting the initiation process.
- . a high degree of client system (student, parents, relatives) and school system (principal, teachers and other school staff) participation, understanding and support for the initiation process.
- . a high degree of community system referral agencies' understanding and support during the initiation process.

It was found that for the ten (10) non-routine case procedures in which these conditions were not in evidence, the ecosystems approach was not initiated.

NOTES: Chapter 4

1. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, pp. 15-16.
2. Steiner, "Social Workers in School Politics," p. 51.
3. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, p. 16.
4. Allen-Meares, "Analysis of Tasks in School Social Work," pp. 196-201.
5. Elsie Osborne, and Muriel Barrett, "The Child, The Family, and The School: A Clinical Perspective," in The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children, eds. Emilia Dowling, and Elsie Osborne (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 33.
6. Brager, "Helping vs. Influencing," pp. 559-560; Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, pp. 25-26; Steiner, "Social Workers in School Politics," pp. 41-57.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

"The distinctive function of the social worker--to work at the interface area where people's coping patterns interact with patterns of the environment--provides the basis for understanding the school social worker's role in the interface between pupil, school, and community."<sup>1</sup> This project focused on the initiation of an ecosystems approach in six New York City public schools. This chapter summarizes the findings of the study in relation to the initiation. While the project did not explicitly focus on issues related to implementation and institutionalization of an ecosystems approach to school social work, there are, nevertheless, a number of suggestive ideas in these areas which can be derived from this study.

#### Project Effectiveness

Efforts to win increased support for school social work services depends in part on documentation of program effectiveness. The present study contributed to this effort by offering valuable insight into the process of initiating an ecosystems approach in school social work practice. It indicated that the ecosystems model was effectively initiated in twenty (20) sample cases. Fourteen (14) of these initiated cases had routine case procedures, whereby intervention actions targeted the student and/or community systems. Six (6) of the initiated cases had non-routine case procedures, whereby change actions

focused on the family and/or school systems. The remaining ten (10) cases in the project sample did not initiate the ecosystems model and proposed change in the family and/or school systems. The study described the steps and processes for initiating the approach. The effective initiation of the ecosystems approach required the following components:

- . a high degree of school social worker skills in the clinical areas,
- . political negotiating abilities,
- . organizational influence and the ability to expedite,
- . a high degree of client system, school system and referral agencies' understanding and support for the initiation process.

The synthesis of these skills and abilities was a necessary condition for the attainment of an agreement on problem definition, agreement to act and the agreement to allocate resources to deal with the problem, i.e., initiation.

The ecosystems model depends on the creation of trust and support between student, family, school and community systems. Genuine collaborative relationships cannot occur without it. A relationship in which expertise for problem-solving is shared by all conference participants. Unlike the medical model, there are no assumptions that the school social worker, or school authorities are the only participants who had knowledge and/or skills necessary to resolve the problem. The conference as a mechanism for joint problem-solving and decision-making is a process in which the school social worker uses his or her skills to encourage the development of a genuine collaborative relationship in which systems share information, opinions and resources. This process has the potential to prompt feelings of ownership for

the case plan and a commitment to act on the intervention activities by conference participants.

The ecosystems approach cannot work without a cohesive relationship between teachers and school social workers. Ongoing consultation with teachers after the planning conference, was a central theme in the successful application of the ecosystems approach in this study. Zischa and Fox have written that consultation is an integral part of school social work practice.<sup>2</sup> This study supports this view and concludes that the development of a collaborative relationship between teachers and school social workers during the conference process may have facilitated follow-up case consultation efforts. It is suggested that cooperation by these key participants may have: sanctioned the process and created an openness to new ideas; encouraged a willingness to invest time and effort in the initiation process; and prompted a readiness to chart a new course of action that would be acceptable to all concerned and in the best interest of the referred student.

The project's goal was to reframe student school-related problems from a student specific view to a holistic view in the initiation process. Those who seek to replicate the project should consider both the benefits and the costs. The benefits from initiating an ecosystems approach are:

- . assurance of opportunities for clients to craft a strategy to meet their needs and wants
- . development of a relationship of trust between school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and school social workers
- . identification of needed school and community resources

- . improvement in the effectiveness of services by reducing systems barriers
- . improvement in the efforts to deliver viable school social work services

What would it cost to operationalize an ecosystems approach to New York City public schools? Quite a bit. Costs are most likely to be in energy, time, retraining and a certain amount of organization conflict. It is recognized that school social workers' and school staff's time is usually spread thin. The school social workers sometimes staggering caseloads and the large number of schools they service frequently necessitated "quick fix" interventions. Yet, to make a significant difference with parents, students, and school personnel, complex, multi-contact, lasting interventions are needed.

A critical consideration has to be given to the potential for linking human and fiscal resources from separate systems to multiple systems, e.g., the family, school and community. This research showed that the ecosystems approach seemed to push the school social worker to coordinate services across systems and provide a vehicle for change and growth within systems; yet considerable expenditure of time and other organizational resources, such as employing additional social workers in order to lower caseloads, will be required. The question is, is the possibility of improving student academic achievement and social performance and lower caseloads a benefit worth the trade-off?

### Procedures

To optimize program effectiveness, the following set of principles should be established when initiating the ecosystems approach.

These are:

- . an ecosystems approach must begin with the reconception of cases from a linear model to a way of thinking about behavior as cycles of reciprocal interaction. "The question why (cause and effect model), is replaced by how the phenomenon occurs, and interaction and repetitive patterns which surround the event."<sup>3</sup>
- . there must be a planning process between family, school and community participants utilizing a collaborative relationship.
- . the problem definition and intervention plan should be determined and agreed to through a conference process.
- . the conference process must be aimed at fundamental change in the relationship between family, school, and community systems. The ecosystems approach to case planning is a collaborative process in which all members are equal partners. It provides an opportunity for administrator, teacher, student, parents, other school personnel and community members to participate in making decisions which may impact on the operation of the school. There is a notion of power equalization in the process which represents a fundamental change in the relationship between the systems.
- . there must be support and sanction for the ecosystems approach by key participants.

To operationalize these principles, the practice guidelines are:

- . use an ecosystems approach to collect data on the case situation.
- . establish a collaborative relationship with participants.

- . use the conference for feedback to parent, student, and school personnel, and for joint decision-making.
- . promote opportunities for trust-building during the assessment and conference processes which will lead to open communication and involvement in the decision-making process.
- . sustain effort during the initiation stage through follow-up and accountability procedures.

#### Complexities of Ecosystems Approach Initiation

The study found that there were some natural constraints to the process of initiating an ecosystems approach. Further, it is hypothesized that for routine and non-routine case outcomes the ecosystems approach is an intricate process which can be difficult to master. As noted by Meyer and supported by this study, there are two major constraints when using this approach. First, it places a strain on the school social worker's knowledge base. It forces the social worker to consider the various models, research, and policy issues in their field of practice. Second, it forces the practitioner to take a contextual rather than a methodological stance on practice. The social worker must review and organize the multiplicity of variables and their multiple relations. For the school social worker, there will be more to do than noticed before using the ecosystems approach.<sup>4</sup>

Adding to these complexities were other conditions. The school social worker had to be able to clearly present the approach to school staff, parents and students. The concept of the "total child" and the impact of the quality of systems' interactions on the student's

academic and social performance had to be communicated. School social workers had to understand organizational attitudes, family and organizational dynamics, and the external forces in the community, such as social conditions, power groups, and educational legislation. These issues and concerns impacted on participants' views regarding proposed strategies to meet the student's educational and social needs.

Intricately related to these skills was the use of a traditional social work model. It was found that the school social worker had to be conscious of the ways to utilize and adapt traditional social work methods. The concept of a positive relationship is essential to social work practice and it was vital to the initiation of the ecosystem approach. The school social work participants' use of the professional relationship, together with their knowledge of human behavior, social environment, social welfare policies and programs acted as a frame for the initiation process. The study showed that traditional social work skills such as effective communication, good listening skills, awareness of the socio-cultural context and the interpersonal process were critical to the success of the initiation effort.

In the review of the thirty project cases, it was found that those cases in which the ecosystems approach was not initiated, there were weaknesses in the school social worker participants' skill level. The study suggests that practitioners need a clearer understanding of an ecosystems approach and its relationship to the traditional social work model. This finding would seem to concur with the Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein study who note that the clarity of an inno-

vation to organizational members needs to be taken into account when explaining the success or failure of initiation efforts.<sup>5</sup> The project's orientation session with participants was not sufficient to meet this prerequisite and more intensive training was required. A companion implication is related to social work education which will be discussed in a later section. In addition to the intricacies of required social work knowledge and skills, the study identified complex issues and concerns relating to the school, family, and community systems. These complexities presented particular barriers to the initiation process. In regards to the school system, the project called attention to the difficulties in reordering subsystems in the best interest of students. The subsystems that had been targeted included groups of teachers, administrators, ancillary staff, and parents. For example, on the high school level, turf issues emerged which reflected the rivalry between pupil personnel services staff for status and power within the school setting. These issues also demonstrated the competition between these subsystems for limited school resources. Similar conclusions can be made regarding the school administrative groups. Their rejection of recommended services and the restructuring of school schedules was based on their competition for program status and school resources. The size of New York City high schools and the complexities of its structure and processes can create barriers to the initiation of an ecosystems approach. This was particularly clear for the high school cases described above.

Other conclusions regarding initiation difficulties for this

system are related to teachers. Teachers are faced with many challenges: changing curriculum requirements, parent and school administrators' expectations, regulations which require measurement of student performance which translate into demands for teacher effectiveness and accountability. With rapidly changing demands and values, teachers can feel immobilized. Participating as a conference team member produced additional obligations. For some cases, teachers had to self-examine their attitudes and values in order to recognize that personal prejudice, negative attitudes, or unrealistically high or low student expectation affected the teacher/student relationship. Assisting teachers to rethink the influence of interpersonal style on student performance was often met with resistance. In this regard, the study showed that the development of consensus on such controversial points requires sensitivity and diplomacy by all participants. There was a natural tendency to in such situations for participating teachers to want to avoid challenges to their status and position. In such case situations, the study found that operationalizing planned change efforts was very difficult.

Another difficult initiation issue raised by the study was the influence of key participants on the collaborative planning process. Where collaboration occurs voluntarily and not as a result of coercion from a higher authority, it occurs because the participants perceive a mutual benefit and shared interest in it. Collaborative efforts were not successful for those cases in which school administrators pressed the need for change by means of self-selected coalitions such as administrator, school social worker and teachers, or administrator

and school social worker. These coalitions did not include those who might disagree with the intervention actions and kept disagreements from surfacing (only to resurface in covert ways). For such case situations, participating teachers or parents did not feel free to communicate differences of opinion. Two non-routine case conferences that illustrate this point recommended parent education and teacher workshop actions. The former was a coalition of school administrator, teachers and school social worker (no participation) and the latter was a coalition of school administrator and school social worker. Teachers did participate in this conference situation but did not openly share their opinions or feelings.

Other conclusions that can be made regarding the complexities of initiating an ecosystems approach relate to those cases in which family system changes were not supported by the parents. It was difficult, if not impossible, to gain parental support for those case situations in which parents were asked to address problems they may not fully understand. For this study, an example would be family developmental changes, such as adolescent students' need to establish personal autonomy; new immigration to the United States (different cultures); divorce; and/or surrogate parents. Comer notes that parents have not been prepared or trained to meet the changing needs within the family. He cautions program planners and clinicians to expect resistance when such goals are a part of the case plan. The implication is that no one can simply invite parents to participate in the problem-solving process without preparing them.<sup>6</sup> It should be understood that parent reactions to student school-related problems vary

depending on their values, beliefs and expectations. This does not mean that the school social worker and the school should do nothing about parent involvement because it is too individual and complex. This study demonstrated the importance of parent participation in case planning. "However, many highly competent parents can feel threatened by school staff. Parents with little education, income and social achievement are particularly vulnerable."<sup>7</sup> These are salient factors especially for large, urban school systems such as New York City.

Although the study found that the parent response to assessment and conference participation was sizable (26 cases), it is not unusual for most parents to be concerned that they are being invited only to be told about the failure of their children. This is often viewed as a statement that they have failed. To sustain parent involvement, it is recommended that parent programs be developed. These programs should be proactive, giving parents a sense of being adequate and able to participate in the various school decision-making processes: from case planning to school policy and programs. It is quite possible that such programs would have facilitated the initiation process, especially for those cases that recommended family systems changes.

Referral to community agencies was an intervention action often employed for serving parents and students. Assuring effective and easy access to community services were complex tasks. The adoption of an ecosystem approach by community agencies required that they lay aside vested interest, attempts at territorial protection, and the desire for autonomy. Such issues would hamper initiation efforts.

The school social worker had to be aware of the fact that each agency has distinctive values, philosophical orientations, as well as possible differences in language, personality, history and reputation. The study found that expertise in network building, information sharing, and service eligibility criteria was required. In addition, it was important that selected community services were culturally relevant and able to meet the student and/or family needs in a timely and sustained manner. The need to consider such a mass of elements added to the difficulties in initiating an ecosystems approach.

Although these conditions are intricate and time consuming, this study found that there was school social work competence in these areas that could be built on and likewise that conference participants were often responsive to recommended actions, even if they could not always follow through. Further, most community agencies were not averse to engaging in a comprehensive and collaborative case planning process. Students, parents and school personnel benefitted from a firmer understanding of the ways in which community agencies can provide relevant services. Additionally, the community agencies and the schools profited from a reduction in confusion and duplication of services.

#### Directions for Future Research

This study has shortcomings. The sample is not random and there is no way of knowing if it is representative. Still, the sample covers a respectable diverse number and levels of schools. Much more work needs to be done to systematically evaluate the ecosystems perspective

as a viable school social work practice model and to broaden the base of information regarding the initiation process in urban schools.

Research in this area would further document the contribution of the approach to the complete understanding and interpretation of the interface between student, parent, school, and community,

The effectiveness of ecosystems interventions on student, family, school and community systems was not addressed in this study. Clearly, the exploration of outcomes, such as improved student-family interactions; enhanced communication in the family because of the improved parent and student self-image; improved home-school relationships, and increased parental and community participation in the schools would demonstrate the value of the ecosystems approach as a school-based practice model. Additionally, analyzing and evaluating these aspects of the innovation would further help guide practice.

Implicit in the present study was the critical nature of school social worker skills in the initiation process. Additional examination of worker's skills should be carried out. Specifically, this would involve research to measure clinical skills, political/negotiating abilities, organizational influence abilities and capacity to expedite the initiation process.

There are difficulties involved in conducting a citywide representative study of school social workers. However, such an effort would have far-reaching results. Such studies would further strengthen the scientific base of school social work practice, and determine the readiness of New York City school social workers to respond to the call for innovative and relevant approaches to practice.

Another question prompted by this exploratory study was the role of social work supervision in the initiation of practice innovations. Clinical supervision is an educational administrative component in the New York City public schools. In order to enhance the development of a competent, self-reliant staff, the dissemination of knowledge, and instruction in skills are considered essential supervisory endeavors. New York City clinical supervisors were not participants in this study; however, it would be helpful to study the impact of their expertise during an initiation process.

Another finding was the expediting role of the school social worker. It was an important element in achieving ecosystems goals. The school social workers had made extensive referrals to community agencies. The role of the community system in the initiation effort, i.e., factors that facilitated community agency cooperation, could benefit from further exploration. It would be helpful to examine the skills which assist in effective expediting, such as bargaining for resources, identifying mutual goals and concerns, and collecting agency information. In addition, how are these techniques used within the ecosystems perspective? How are the community referral agencies included in follow-up decision-making activities?

Future research should also explore the effectiveness of the ecosystems approach as a strategy to promote policy and programmatic changes in local schools. An important issue in this regard is the need to further document the effectiveness of the approach in meeting education's and school social work's concern and focus: the emotional well-being of students and their academic responsiveness to the educa-

tional setting. Indeed, studies that look at school climate, structure and size; extra-organizational factors, such as public and private organization publications on improving public schools, legislation (mandated programs, and services) and politics are needed. Research could document the effect of these influences, as well as the role and responsibilities of school social workers and other participants in change efforts and initiating innovative ideas.

The present study proposed that the ecosystems approach offered an opportunity for the school social worker and other school personnel to mobilize as change agents to help students and to meet educational goals. A possible outcome of this strategy could be high visibility and credibility of the school social worker with students, parents, school personnel, and community agencies. Additional research in this area would be useful to meet the demands for credibility and legitimization of school social work practice.

#### Implications for Social Work Education

Awareness of innovations being developed in the field and the ability to implement such concepts are critical to the effectiveness and survival of social workers in the school setting. A shift to an ecosystems approach has been proposed as a viable practice innovation by this study. Indeed, the ecosystems approach provided a framework for the school social worker to understand the interrelatedness of individual, family, community, and school systems. School social workers identified a target for attention (student, family, school, or community), but also took into account the transactions between

these systems. Therefore, intervention activities addressed the reciprocal nature of these relationships and recommended activities that provided a holistic approach to treatment.

Inherent in the project was the requirement that the school social worker address a range of problem situations requiring clinical and organizational analysis skills. For some of the project's school social workers, the depth of capacity for applying these skills was limited. Specifically, this meant that there was a deficit in the skills needed to successfully initiate the ecosystems approach for these school social workers. A weakness in the knowledge-base about ecology, general systems, and organizational theories on the part of these school social workers affected the initiation of the ecosystems approach.

The nature of school social work practice requires an expertise that combines application of knowledge with autonomy. Frequently, school social workers are alone in their practice setting and do not have the supports that may be available to other groups of professionals. Working with School of Social Work faculty could provide an opportunity to develop in-service training programs and courses for continuing education. Training programs are needed that will further develop, extend, and refine the skills necessary to critically analyze the student, family, school and community systems.

The Schools of Social Work should also encourage the development of programs for school social work practice. In addition to a strong generic social work background, the course of pre-service study should

provide a special curriculum, particularly a practicum designed for educating school social workers. Current training does not prepare school social workers for the widely varying role demands in the school setting. There should be an opportunity for practitioners to understand the nature of organizations such as schools, and the specific aspects of the educational setting: its legal authorities, jurisdictions, power and structure. As school specialist, the social worker also needs knowledge and skills from the field of education. There is evidence of the need for training in several areas specific to education, such as early childhood education, vocational education and special education.

The time has come for a curriculum to prepare school social workers to perform their tasks and duties with imagination and a sound knowledge base. In this regard, the Schools of Social Work will have to assume a leadership role.

In summary, it can be concluded that the ecosystems perspective is a promising holistic and collaborative approach to school-based case planning. Although it is a complex model, the project demonstrated that the approach can be useful when constraints can be overcome. It can foster a cohesive relationship between school social worker, students, parents, and school staff. It takes a broad view of problems and employs interdisciplinary perspectives. Most importantly, it can bring a new energy and a renewed sense of purpose to school social work practice.

NOTES: Chapter 5

1. Germain, "An Ecological Perspective," p. 3.
2. Pauline C. Zischka, and Raymond Fox, "Consultation as a Function of School Social Work," SWE 7 (Winter, 1985):69.
3. Dowling, "Theoretical Framework," p. 8.
4. Meyer, "The Search for Coherence," pp. 22-25.
5. Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, p. 27.
6. Comer, pp. 125-145.
7. Ibid.

**APPENDIX A: Training Handout****SCHOOL-BASED ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PROCESS PROJECT**

| <b><u>PHASES</u></b> | <b><u>STEPS</u></b>                                                                                                   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Assessment        | 1. Review of Referral Problem<br>2. Identification of Need<br>3. Data Collection and Analysis<br>4. Intervention Plan |
| 2. Planning          | 1. Engagement<br>2. Statement of Intervention Plan                                                                    |

---

Source: This conceptualization is an adaptation and modification of a model formulated by Winters and Easton (1983).

Phase 1:     Assessment

STEPS IN SCHOOL BASED ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PROCESS

1. Review of Referral:

Critical Questions:

- . what is the reason for referral?
- . what additional information is required?
- . how is the information to be obtained?

2. Identify Needs: The identification of needs will focus and prioritize data collection and analysis

- a. Identification of Pupil Needs: Pupils' needs may be related to coping with developmental tasks and changes.

EXAMPLES:

- . transition from home to school and adjustment to pupil role
- . changes in the family, ie, birth of a sibling, separation, divorce, reconstituted family, death
- . immigration or migration to New York City
- . physical/sexual abuse or neglect
- . latch-key child

- b. Identification of Needs Associated with Ameliorating Problems in the Learning Environment: This step is the recognition that behavior should not be viewed or interpreted in isolation. Consideration must be given to the school setting and the standards and expectations of that setting.

EXAMPLES:

- . school climate--concern and consistent programming and concern for affective development of pupils, ie, positive view of self and learning environment is encouraged. Staff is encouraged to build an attractive environment
- . appreciation for cultural differences
- . consideration and understanding of pupils with different developmental patterns and learning styles associated with race or ethnicity
- . acceptance of special education pupils in mainstream programs and classes

Identification of Learning Environment Needs (Continued):

- . school expectations, ie, policy and practices that consider curriculum and methods of instruction that are meaningful to poor and minority children as well as others
- c. Identification of Needs Associated with the Interaction of Families and School: This step refers to the need to develop open, cooperative, and continuous communication between parents and school personnel.

EXAMPLES:

- . inaccessibility of teacher(s) and/or administrators to parents
- . involvement of parents in planning for pupil's academic progress
- . involvement of parents in developing and improving school policies and practices that affect all pupils

3. Collect and Analyze Data:

Sources of Information:

- . written school records
- . conference with teacher(s) and other significant school personnel, including team members
- . interview with parent and student
- . observation in classroom and other relevant school areas, ie, lunchroom, playground, gym, and so forth
- . observations of staff during lunch periods, staff meetings
- . consultation with administrator(s)

Data Analysis:

Critical Questions:

- . what are the factors that impede pupil's ability to cope with life tasks?

EXAMPLES:

- . growing up in the family and learning in school
- . what reason(s) may prohibit the school from providing needed resources, services, and opportunities?
- . policies and practices of the school which create problems or aggravate existing ones

**EXAMPLES (Continued) Data Analysis:**

- . what are the dynamics of the internal functioning of the family and/or school which may cause problems?

**EXAMPLES:**

faulty communication(s)  
 conflict between members  
 inadequate procedures for making decisions and problem solving

4. **Intervention Plan:** Ecological-systems intervention plan sets the purpose and method of service. Intervention recommendations should be an explicit statement of goals to be established with pupil, family and/or relevant school persons. Goals must be set and may be modest, and short ranged as a first step. This can be a means of reducing resistance. Goals should be related to identified problem situation.

The following presents a frame of reference for ecological-systems intervention goals and activities:

**Goals:**

- . to provide early identification of populations at risk
- . to provide immediate intervention to reduce stress within or between individual pupil and groups
- . to provide support services to pupils, parents, school personnel
- . to develop resources and services within the school and/or community

**Activities:**

Teacher and/or parent workshops  
 Parent training groups  
 Peer problem-solving groups  
 Class meetings  
 Individual pupil counseling  
 Consultation with school personnel  
 Short-term family counseling  
 Liaison with community agencies  
 Advocacy for community resources, ie, after-school programs, mental health services, etc.

- . facilitate the formation of school task groups, which could include parents, to develop and improve school policies and practices, ie, affective education curriculum, accommodative learning environment, etc.

### Phase 2: Planning

Eco-systems interventions can be on many levels: pupil, family, school and community; these are not mutually exclusive. Engagement, the first step in this phase, refers to developing or using established relationships with those persons identified as significant in the problem situation. The second step is a statement of the intervention plan with those involved in the change process. Agreement with the goal(s) and method(s) of service is required if implementation is to be successful.

Strategies and techniques to influence change and motivate support for the intervention plan are considered important during this phase. The school social worker should consider the following:

1. goal(s) and method(s) of service should be thoughtfully discussed with school personnel
2. identify significant persons, including parents, who can be allies in gaining support for the plan
3. use influence, ie, knowledge, expertise, status and reputation, information, established relationships, etc.
4. identify resistance and respond to it--all of the above strategies and techniques can be helpful in overcoming resistance; in addition, setting short-term goal(s) can also be useful

For the purpose of this project, the planning phase is focused on school personnel and their response to recommended intervention(s).

3. Intervention Plan: BRIEF, EXPLICIT STATEMENT ON PROPOSED GOAL(S) AND ACTIVITY. INCLUDE WHO WOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION.

---

---

---

---

Student \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Family \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Peers \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

School Personnel \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

Community  
(Specify if after-school activities) \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

## APPENDIX B: Draft of Letter to Superintendent

321 Pemaco Lane  
 Uniondale, New York 11553  
 January 13, 1997

Dear

I am requesting your approval to conduct my doctoral research project in the Queens Region. I am a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, Hunter College School of Social Work. The study has been approved by the Office of Educational Assessment. I have conferred with Mr. Phil Sokol regarding the project and he has expressed interest, pending your approval. The project would require six social workers in one or two school districts.

My dissertation topic, Initiating an Ecosystems Model in School Social Work Practice: The Urban School Setting is concerned with viewing student school related difficulties from a holistic, dynamic perspective. The school social worker addresses student needs within the context of the school environment. Equal emphasis is placed on learning about the strengths and deficits of the school environment and the student. Following this assessment, an intervention plan is formulated by the school social worker. This plan will serve as a blueprint for discussion with school personnel, parent and student at a conference.

The objective of my school social work project is to examine what happens during the conference when interventions chosen to remediate referred student's school related difficulties are discussed. It is a qualitative study, and is focused on the conference process. The content analysis will describe school social worker's perception of the conference interaction, in relation to four variables. The variables are:

- . agreement on problem definition
- . agreement on intervention goals
- . agreement on intervention tasks
- . use of a collaborative strategy

These variables provide the framework for the research instrument, data analysis and interpretation of results.

Enclosed is my letter of approval, research application form, research instrument and parent consent form.

I can be reached at the Clinical Professional Development Unit, 110 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201, Room 439. The telephone number is (718) 933-3739.

I thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

YVONNE A. NELSON

Enclosures

## APPENDIX C: COPY OF QUEENS DEPUTY ASSISTANT APPROVAL LETTER

**New York City  
Board of Education**

Nathan Quinones  
Chancellor

Division of Special Education  
Edward M. Sermier  
Chief Administrator



Richard J. Crowley  
Deputy Assistant Superintendent  
Queens Regional Office  
Francis Lewis HS  
58-20 Utopia Parkway  
Flushing, N.Y. 11365  
(718) 357-8510

January 21, 1987

Ms. Yvonne Nelson  
Clinical Training Unit  
110 Livingston Street, Rm. 439  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11210

Dear Ms. Nelson:

This is in response to your letter of January 13, 1987 requesting approval to conduct your doctoral research project in the Queens Region.

Please be advised we welcome your research and will provide any cooperation necessary. I suggest you contact Mr. Sokol who will arrange for you to meet the necessary people to determine the most suitable places to conduct your research. He will also provide you with required letters of authorization.

I look forward to learning the results of your study.

Good luck!

Very truly yours,

*Richard J. Crowley*  
Richard J. Crowley  
Deputy Assistant Superintendent

RJC:lrs

**APPENDIX D: ECOSYSTEMS PROJECT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER QUESTIONNAIRE**

The following questions are about yourself. Please remember all responses are confidential. Please indicate your answer by checking one:

1. WHAT YEAR DID YOU RECEIVE YOUR MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK?
  - ☐ 1. PRIOR TO 1970
  - ☐ 2. BETWEEN 1971-1980
  - ☐ 3. BETWEEN 1981-1985
2. HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN EMPLOYED AS A SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER BY THE NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION?
  - ☐ 1. LESS THAN ONE YEAR
  - ☐ 2. 1 - 4 YEARS
  - ☐ 3. 4 - 7 YEARS
  - ☐ 4. 8 - 10 YEARS
  - ☐ 5. MORE THAN 10 YEARS
3. HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN ASSIGNED TO THE SCHOOL USED IN THIS PROJECT?
  - ☐ 1. LESS THAN ONE YEAR
  - ☐ 2. 1 - 4 YEARS
  - ☐ 3. 4 - 6 YEARS
  - ☐ 4. MORE THAN 6 YEARS
4. HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH THE ECOSYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE?
  - ☐ 1. VERY FAMILIAR
  - ☐ 2. SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR
  - ☐ 3. NOT FAMILIAR
5. IF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE ECOSYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE, HAVE YOU UTILIZED IT IN YOUR PRESENT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE PRIOR TO THIS PROJECT?
  - ☐ 1. NEVER
  - ☐ 2. OCCASIONALLY
  - ☐ 3. OFTEN
  - ☐ 4. ALWAYS

**APPENDIX E: SUMMARY OF ECOSYSTEMS ASSESSMENT PROCESS****Date:****Case Identification Number:****School:****Grade:**

- 
1. **Referral Problem:** BRIEF STATEMENT REGARDING REASON STUDENT WAS REFERRED TO THE SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TEAM, INCLUDING SOURCE OF REFERRAL.
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

2. **Assessment:** BRIEF STATEMENT ON SALIENT FACTORS IN COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA ON THE STUDENT/LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**APPENDIX F: DIARY OF ECOSYSTEMS CONFERENCE**

Date of Conference: \_\_\_\_\_ Conference Participants: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Case Identification Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Social Worker: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Principal: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**STATE INTERVENTION PLAN GOAL(S) AND RELATED ACTIVITIES:**


---



---



---



---



---

In this section you will be asked questions about the introduction of the ecosystems intervention plan to school personnel during the conference.

1. Briefly describe what happened during the conference.

---



---



---



---



---



---

2. Was there agreement on the definition of the problem? Please check one.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If "Yes", what was the area(s) of agreement?

---



---



---

---



---

If "No", what was the area(s) of disagreement? Please list.

---



---



---



---

Other Comments:

---



---



---

3. Was there agreement on the intervention goal(s) and related activities? Please check one.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If you answered "Yes", please go to question 4

If "No", state reasons for disagreement. (Cite examples).

---



---



---

In order to gain commitment to recommended goal(s) and mobilize resources, it is necessary to agree on tasks to be carried out by each member.

4. During the conference, what tasks were agreed upon? (List tasks).
- 
- 
- 
- 

5. Who agreed to carry out these tasks? (List members, e.g., teacher(s), school administrator(s), other school staff members, school social worker, student parent).
- 
-

In this next section you will be asked to describe your basic feelings regarding the conference that has taken place.

6. GUT LEVEL FEELING: Briefly describe your reaction to the conference interchange.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

7. Do you feel the intervention plan will work in this school? Please check one. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

What are your reasons? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

In this final section you will be asked questions regarding the outcome of the planning conference. Please respond to these questions 10 weeks AFTER the conference.

8. Briefly describe what happened as a result of the conference.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

9. What do you think supported or impeded this outcome? (Cite examples).

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

10. Other comments you want to make regarding the introduction of the ecosystem intervention plan in your school.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**APPENDIX G: COPY OF LETTER OF REQUEST TO NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Proposal Review Committee/MEDARP  
New York City Public Schools  
110 Livingston Street - Room 507  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

**TO THE PROPOSAL REVIEW COMMITTEE:**

I am requesting approval to conduct my doctoral research project with New York City public school social work staff. I am a doctoral student at the Graduate Center City University of New York, Hunter College School of Social Work. My dissertation topic, Initiating an Ecosystems Model in School Social Work Practice: The Urban School Setting, is concerned with viewing student school related difficulties from a holistic, dynamic perspective.

The school social worker addresses student needs within the context of the school environment. Equal emphasis is placed on learning about the strengths and deficits of the environment and the student. Following this assessment, an intervention plan is formulated by the school social worker. This plan will serve as a blueprint for discussion with school personnel, parent and student.

With school social worker responsibilities being extended to the general education setting and increased focus on prevention, interest in the project has been expressed by clinical supervisors in Region 3, District 17; Region 4, District 23; and Region 5, District 28.

My dissertation proposal, letter of approval from the Dissertation Committee and parent consent form are enclosed.

You may reach me at Clinical Training Unit, 110 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201, Room 439, (718) 596-5198.

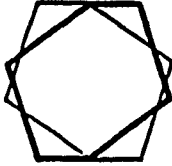
May I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Dated: October 20, 1986

Yvonne A. Nelson  
Yvonne A. Nelson

APPENDIX H: COPY OF PROPOSAL APPROVAL LETTER TO NEW YORK CITY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION



**The Graduate School and University Center**  
of the City University of New York

Doctor of Social Welfare Program  
School of Social Work, Hunter College: 129 East 79 Street, New York, N.Y. 10021  
212 570-5179

October 15, 1986

Proposal Review Committee/MEDARP  
New York City Public Schools  
110 Livingston Street, Rm. 507  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

To the Proposal Review Committee:

Please be advised that the dissertation committee of the Graduate Center, City University of New York, Hunter College School of Social Work has approved the dissertation project proposal, Initiating an Ecosystems Model of School Social Work Practice: The Urban Setting, submitted by Yvonne A. Nelson on June 5, 1986. Ms. Nelson is ready to proceed with her doctoral research.

Very truly yours,

Harold Weissman, D.S.W.  
Executive Officer

HW:jp

## APPENDIX I: COPY OF APPROVAL LETTER FROM NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION

New York City Board of Education      110 Livingston Street  
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Nathan Gunones  
Chancellor

Office of Educational Assessment  
Richard G. Guttenberg  
Director  
(718) 224-4043

December 29, 1986



Ms. Yvonne A. Nelson  
New York City Board of Education  
Clinical Training Unit  
110 Livingston Street, Room 439  
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Dear Ms. Nelson:

I am happy to inform you that your study on initiating an ecosystems model in school social work practice: the urban school setting has been approved by the Office of Educational Assessment with the following conditions.

1. Approval by this office does not guarantee access to any particular school or child. It is your responsibility to make appropriate contacts and get the required permissions and consents before initiating the study. Participation in your research must, of course, be strictly voluntary. The following written consents are required.
  - a. Principals who agree to participate must sign the enclosed Research Application Form. In some districts, the superintendent must also sign. You should check with each principal to determine if the superintendent's signature is also required in that district. The signed form(s) should be returned to this office.
  - b. Before involving any child in your study or collecting student data, you must obtain written parental consent.
  - c. In addition to the above written consents, all participants (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors, children) must be informed that they are not required to participate in the study, and that there are no consequences for non-participation.
2. Your report of the study should not include the identification of any school, student, or staff member. A coding system should be used if necessary.
3. Please send a copy of your final report to this office; we are most interested in the results of your research.

Sincerely,

*Richard Guttenberg*  
RICHARD GUTTENBERG  
Director, O.E.A.

RG:mo  
Enclosure

EVALUATION • R & D • TESTING • DATA ANALYSIS

## APPENDIX J:

NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

## RESEARCH APPLICATION FORM

To the Principal:

The researcher identified below has obtained preliminary clearance to conduct research in the New York City public schools, and is now seeking principals and community superintendents willing to cooperate in a research study. However, before beginning the study, the researcher must present you with a signed letter of approval from the Director, Office of Educational Assessment. In return, the researcher must submit this form to O.E.A. with the signatures of cooperating principals.\* Please sign below if you agree to have your school participate in this study.

Name of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

University or Professional Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Student \_\_\_\_\_ Professor \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

If investigator is a candidate for a degree, which degree? \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Study \_\_\_\_\_

List tests, questionnaires, interview schedules and other evaluation instruments to be used. COPIES OF THESE INSTRUMENTS, A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THIS PROJECT AND A STEP-BY-STEP OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS APPLICATION WHEN IT IS PRESENTED TO PRINCIPALS AND COMMUNITY SUPERINTENDENTS.

Estimated duration of study: \_\_\_\_\_

| Cooperating School | District # | Research will involve: |              |             |                    | Signature of Principal |
|--------------------|------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------|
|                    |            | Grade(s)               | # of Classes | # of Pupils | # of Staff Members |                        |
| 1.                 |            |                        |              |             |                    |                        |
| 2.                 |            |                        |              |             |                    |                        |
| 3.                 |            |                        |              |             |                    |                        |
| 4.                 |            |                        |              |             |                    |                        |
| 5.                 |            |                        |              |             |                    |                        |

\*Some districts also require the signature of the district superintendent on this form. Inquire in each district included in your study, and, if necessary, have the superintendent(s) sign here:

Superintendent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

District \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX K: COPY OF PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

**Dear Parent:**

Today with the concern about student educational achievement, parent input is important in planning effective educational support services. I am a New York City school social worker/staff trainer and a doctoral candidate at the Hunter College School of Social Work. I have been interested in school social work services and the challenge of helping students cope with the demands of their school and community environments. I am asking for your assistance in a school social work project that I have developed as part of the requirement for my doctorate.

The project will offer an opportunity for parents, students, school social worker and school staff to jointly address how we define problems in learning and/or behavior, and develop a plan to remediate these difficulties. Emphasis will be placed on understanding the total picture, that is, learning about the student and the school.

The study will involve an interview with the school social worker at your local school. During this interview, you will be asked to share information about your child's past and present developmental, medical, social and school history. In addition, the school social worker will interview your child and ask him or her questions about their attitude toward school, teachers, classmates and learning. This information will be used by the school social worker to understand your child's current functioning in the school, home and community, and to choose a goal and support services activity to help your child in school.

Following the interview, you will be invited to attend a conference with the school social worker and school staff to discuss the chosen goal and activity. Your opinion is very important. The objective of this project is to examine what happens during the conference. Do school social worker, parent and school staff agree on goal(s) and activities?

The interview should take one hour and the conference should be thirty to forty-five minutes.

It is clear that if problems experienced with children in school are to be dealt with more effectively, bridge building is needed between educators and parents. Your cooperation will go a long way in helping us improve the communication between school staff, student, family members and reach commonly agreed upon service goals.

Please be assured that your child's identity will remain anonymous. Any personal information will remain confidential.

May I thank you in advance for your assistance. Please feel free to contact me at (718) 596-5198 if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

*Yvonne A. Nelson*  
Yvonne A. Nelson  
Social Work Doctoral Candidate

Institutional Affiliation:

Hunter College School of  
Social Work

---

Please check one box indicating that you either approve or do not approve your child's participation in this project. Also, please sign this form. Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_ Approve

\_\_\_\_\_ Do Not Approve

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alderson, John J., and Krishef, Curtis H. "Another Perspective on Tasks in School Social Work." Social Casework 59 (December, 1973): 591-600.
- Allen-Meares, Paula. "Assessing Behavior Disorders in Children: An Eclectic Approach." Social Work in Education 7 (Winter, 1985): 100-114.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Interrupted Time Series Design and the Evaluation of School Practice." Social Work in Education 2 (October, 1980): 50-61.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Integrating Systems Interaction and Treatment Approaches in Working with Handicapped Children and their Families." In School Social Work and PL 94-142: The Education for all Handicapped Children Act, pp. 81-90. Edited by Richard J. Anderson, Molly Freeman, and Richard L. Edwards. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Analysis of Tasks in School Social Work." Social Work 22 (July, 1977): 196-201.
- Allen-Meares, Paula, and Lane, Bruce. "A Content Analysis of School Social Work Literature, 1968-1978." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 38-48. Edited by Robert T. Constable, and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Aponte, Harry. "The Family School Interview: An Ecostructural Approach." Family Process 15:3 (1976): 303-311.
- Barbaro, Fred. "School Social Work: The Politics of Professional Survival." Social Work in Education 3 (October, 1980): 5-17.
- Bartlett, Harriet. The Common Base of Social Work Practice. New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1970.
- Bigge, Morris L. Learning Theories for Teachers. 4th ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.
- Bloom, Benjamin S. Human Characteristics and School Learning. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Brager, George. "Helping vs. Influencing: Some Political Elements of Organizational Change." In Social Administration: The Management of the Social Services, pp. 557-570. Edited by Simon Slavin, New York: Haworth Press and Council on Social Work Education, 1978.

- Brown, John A. "The School as an Organization: An Approach to Problem-Solving in the School Setting." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 282-289. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. . 349 U.S. 294. 1954.
- Change in Bureaucracies, cited by Joseph P. Viteritti, Across the River: Politics and Education in the City, p. 339. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980.
- Chavkin, Nancy F. "School Social Work Practice: A Reappraisal." Social Work in Education 3 (Fall, 1985): 3-14.
- Cloward, Richard A. and Ohlin, Lloyd. Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs. New York: Free Press, 1960.
- Cohen, David K. "Loss as a Theme in Social Policy." Harvard Educational Review 46 (November, 1976): 553-571.
- Coleman, James. S. "Rawls, Nozick, and Educational Equality." Public Interest 40 (Spring, 1976): 121-128.
- Comer, James. School Power: Implications of an Intervention Project. New York: Free Press, 1980.
- Committee on Social Work Services in Schools. Standards for Social Work Practice in Schools. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1978.
- Constable, Robert T., and Montgomery, Eldon. "Perceptions the School Social Worker's Role." Social Work in Education 4 (Summer, 1985): 244-258.
- Constable, Robert T., and Flynn, John P. "General Perspectives on Theory and Research in School Social Work." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, p. 95. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Costin, Lela B. Social Work Services in Schools: Historical Perspectives and Current Directions. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "School Social Work Practice: A New Model." Social Work 20 (March, 1975): 135-139.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Analysis of the Tasks in School Social Work." Social Service Review 43 (September, 1969): 274-285.
- Crouch, Robert C. "Job-Description: School Social Worker Special Education." Social Work in Education 3 (January, 1981): 59-61.

- Davis, Allison. Social Class Influences on Learning. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948.
- Dowling, Emilia. "Theoretical Framework: A Joint Systems Approach to Educational Problems with Children." In The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children, pp. 5-30. Edited by Emilia Dowling, and Elsie Osborne. London: Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Education of All Handicapped Children Act. Public Law 94-142, U. S. Code, vol. 20 (1975).
- Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1977. S.v. "School Social Work," by Lela B. Costin.
- Finch, Jr., and Wilbur A. "Social Workers Versus Bureaucracy." In Change from Within: Humanizing Social Welfare Organizations, pp. 75-85. Edited by Herman Resnick, and Rino J. Patti. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Flynn, John P. "Research Processes for System Change and School Social Work Services." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 321-330. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Congruence in Perceptions of Social Work: Related Tasks in a School System." Social Service Review 50 (September, 1976): 471-481.
- Freeman, Edith. "Analyzing the Organizational Context of Schools." Social Work in Education 7 (Spring, 1985): 141-159.
- German, Carel, and Gitterman, Alex. The Life Model of Social Work Practice. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- German, Carel. "An Ecological Perspective on Social Work in the Schools." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 3-12. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Gliedman, John, and Roth, William. The Unexpected Minority: Handicapped Children in America. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1980.
- Gottlieb, Benjamin H., and Gottlieb, Lois J. "An Expanded Role for the School Social Worker." Social Work 16 (October, 1971): 12-21.
- Greer, Colin. The Great School Legend. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.
- Grief, Geoffrey L., and Lynch, Arthur A. "The Ecosystems Perspective." In Clinical Social Work in the Ecosystems Perspective, pp. 35-74. Edited by Carol H. Meyer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

- Gross, Neil Giacquinta, Joseph B., and Bernstein, Marilyn. Implementing Organizational Innovations: A Sociological Analysis of Planned Educational Change. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- Hall, Richard H. Organizations: Structure and Process. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.
- Handy, Charles B. Understanding Organizations. 2nd ed. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Hansen, James C., and L'Abate, Luciano. Approaches to Family Therapy. New York: MacMillan, 1982.
- Huslage, Susan, and Stein, Jill. "A Systems Approach for the Child Study Team." Social Work in Education 7 (Winter, 1985): 114-123.
- Johnson, John L. "Mainstreaming Black Children." In Black Psychology. 2nd ed., pp. 258-262. Edited by Reginald L. Jones, New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Lambert, Camille, and Mullaly, Robert. "School Social Work: The Congruence of Task Importance and Level of Effort." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 72-92. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Laosa, Luis M. "Nonbiased Assessment of Children's Abilities: Historical Antecedents and Current Issues." In Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children, pp. 1-20. Edited by Thomas Oakland. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1977.
- Lee, Laura J. "The Social Worker in the Political Environment of a School System." Social Work 28 (July-August, 1983): 302-306.
- Lora vs. Board of Education. 74 FRD 565, (E.D.N.Y. 1977).
- McLaughlin, John, and Protinsky, Ruth Anne. "Perspectives on Valuing in Special Education." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 149-154. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- Meyer, Carol H., ed. Clinical Social Work in the Ecosystems Perspective. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Meyer, Carol H. "The Search for Coherence." In Clinical Social Work in the Ecosystems Perspective, pp. 5-34. Edited by Carol H. Meyer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Miller, LaMar P. "Testing Black Students: Implications for Assessing Inner-City Schools." In Black Psychology. 2nd ed., pp. 165-175. Edited by Reginald L. Jones. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Minuchin, Salvador. Families and Family Therapy. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974.

- Minuchin, Salvador. Families of the Slums: An Exploration of their Structure and Treatment. New York: Basic Books, 1964.
- Monkman, Marjorie M. "The Contribution of the Social Worker to the Public Schools." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 13-28. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Outcome Focus for Differential Levels of School Social Work Practice." Professional Issues for Social Workers in Schools: Conference Proceedings, pp. 138-150. Silver Springs, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1981.
- Moorman, David, Morrison, Vaughn and Tiefenthal, Marguerite. "PL 94-142 and its Regulations." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 100-108. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.
- National Association of Social Workers. The Human Factor: A Key of Excellence in Education. Silver Springs, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1985.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education, 1983.
- New York City Board of Education, Bureau of Child Guidance. "The School Social Worker in the New York City Schools: Impact on the Educational Process." New York, 1973. (Typewritten.)
- Oakland, Thomas. "Using Tests in Nondiscriminatory Assessment." In Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children, pp. 52-69. Edited by Thomas Oakland. New York: Brunner & Mazel, 1977.
- Ogbu, John. Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Black Education: A Cultural-Ecological Perspective." In Black Families, pp. 139-154. Edited by Harriet McAdoo. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1981.
- Okun, Barbara F. "Family Therapy and the Schools." In Family Therapy with School Related Problems, pp. 1-12. Edited by James C. Hansen, and Barbard F. Okun. Rockville, MD: Aspen Systems, 1984.
- Osborne, Elsie, and Barrett, Muriel. "The Child, The Family and the School: A Clinical Perspective." In The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children, pp. 33-50. Edited by Emilia Dowling, and Elsie Osborne. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

- Patti, Rino J. "Social Work Practice: Organizational Environment." In Change from Within: Humanizing Social Welfare Organizations, pp. 46-52. Edited by Herman Resnick, and Rino J. Patti. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Organizational Resistance and Change: The View from Below." In Social Administration: The Management of the Social Services, pp. 540-546. Edited by Simon Slavin. New York: Haworth Press and Council on Social Work Education, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. , and Resnick, Herman. "Changing the Agency from Within." In Changing from Within: Humanizing Social Welfare Organizations, pp. 215-226. Edited by Herman Resnick, and Rino J. Patti. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Peters, Richard Stanley. "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education". In John Dewey Reconsidered, pp. 102-123. Edited by Richard Stanley Peters. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Pincus, Allen, and Minahan, Anne. Social Work Practice: Model and Method. 4th ed. Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1974.
- Radin, Norma. "A Personal Perspective on School Social Work." Social Casework 56 (December, 1975): 605-613.
- "Report of the Commission on Special Education: A Call for Quality to Mayor Edward I. Koch" by Richard I. Beattie, Chairperson, New York, NY: June, 1985. (Typewritten.)
- Resnick, Herman. "Tasks in Changing the Organization from Within." In Change from Within: Humanizing Social Welfare Organizations, pp. 200-215. Edited by Herman Resnick, and Rino J. Patti. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Rist, Bernard. "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectation: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education." Harvard Educational Review 40 (August, 1970): 411-451.
- Ryans, David. "Some Relationships Between Teacher Characteristics and Pupil Behavior." In Readings and Learnings in Human Abilities, pp. 243-245. Edited by Richard Ripple. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Savage, James E. and Adair, Alvis V. "Testing Minorities: Developing More Culturally Relevant Assessment Systems." In Black Psychology, 2nd ed., pp. 196-200. Edited by Reginald L. Jones. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Schein, Virginia E. "Political Strategies for Implementing Organizational Change." Group and Organizational Studies 2 (March, 1977): 42-48.
- Schneider-Lidz, Carol. Improving Assessment of School Children. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1981.

Seeley, David S. "Seymour Sarason and the Problem of School Change." Harvard Educational Review 55 (August, 1985): 342-353.

Social Casework, What Is It, What Is Its Place in the World Today?, cited by Wendy G. Winters, and Freda Easton, The Practice of Social Work in Schools: An Ecological Perspective, p. 149. New York: Free Press, 1983.

Steiner, Joseph R. "Social Workers in School Politics." Social Work in Education 1 (October, 1979): 41-57.

Taylor, Denise. "School as a Target for Change: Intervening in the School System." In The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children, pp. 152-176. Edited by Emilia Dowling, and Elsie Osborne. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Timberlake, Elizabeth, Sabatino, Chris, and Hooper, Sally. "School Social Work Practice and PL 94-142." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 49-71. Edited by Robert T. Constable, and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Issues Related to the Interface between Mental Health Services the Public Schools." In School Social Work: Practice and Research Perspectives, pp. 180-200. Edited by Robert T. Constable and John P. Flynn. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1982.

Tucker, James A. "Operationalizing the Diagnostic Intervention Process." In Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children. pp. 91-114. Edited by Thomas Oakland. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1977.

Vinter, Robert D., and Sarri, Rosemary C. "Malperformance in the Public Schools: A Group Work Approach." Social Work 10 (January, 1965) 4: 11-13.

Viteritti, Joseph P. Across the River: Politics and Education in the City. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983.

Weinback, Robert W. "Implementing Change: Insights and Strategies for the Supervisor." Social Work 29 (May-June, 1984): 282-287.

Williams, Robert B. "School Compatibility and Social Work Role." Social Service Review 44 (June, 1970): 169-176.

Williams, Robert L. "Abuses and Misuses in Testing Black Children." In Black Psychology. 2nd ed., pp. 77-91. Edited by Reginald Jones. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Winters, Wendy G., and Easton, Freda. The Practice of Social Work in Schools: An Ecological Perspective, New York: Free Press, 1983

Ysseldyke, James, and Mercer, Jane R. "Designing Diagnostic-Intervention Programs." In Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children, pp. 70-90. Edited by Thomas Oakland. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1977.

Zielinski, Terry, and Coolidge, Julie. "Systems Model of School Social Work: Barriers to Implementation." Professional Issues for Social Workers in Schools: Conference Proceedings, pp. 123-137. Silver Springs, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1981.

Zischka, Pauline C., and Fox, Raymond. "Consultation as a Function of School Social Work." Social Work in Education 7 (Winter, 1985): 69-79.