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**“International Comparison of Social Work
As a Lead Profession: Canada”**

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Abstract

This paper describes the models used in North America for defining the professions, and describes the credentialing processes of registration, certification, and licensing, using as background material the statements of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The author describes in detail the issues which arise and are of continuing attention in the development of social work as a profession (control of practice vs. control of title; reciprocity across jurisdictional boundaries; generic vs. specialty practice, etc.), as well as describing how CASW has resolved these issues. Finally, the essential elements of a comprehensive code of ethics are presented, using as a model the CASW Code.

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INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF SOCIAL WORK AS A LEAD PROFESSION: CANADA

Introduction

It is an honor to be asked to speak, abroad, of one's profession in one's own country. Canada's national professional social work association is the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and we share the North American Region of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) with our American colleagues in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), with whose history we are inextricably bound. The Canadian Association is a federation of the ten provincial and (theoretically) two territorial associations, comprising approximately ten thousand social workers; NASW, on the other hand, is a national membership organization of approximately one hundred thousand, organized into in excess of fifty chapters in all American states and territories; some U.S. cities are sufficiently large that they have their own chapters (for example, New York City).

Social work's roots are in charity and as early as 2100 B.C. in recorded history (James & Gero, 1983). Our antecedents were volunteers in North American charitable organizations and neighbourhood settlement houses around the turn of this Twentieth Century; for many, this work represented a lifetime career of service, and it is to them we owe a debt of gratitude for organizing the first attempts to mold social work into a profession with educational preparation based in universities rather than in agency in-service training programs.

In 1898, the "first social work training school (was) established as an annual summer course for agency workers by the New York Charity Organization Society," followed by the founding in 1903, of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, now known as the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (Alexander, 1986). In that interval, the first school of social work was established in 1899 in Amsterdam; the first Canadian school in 1914, and CASW in 1926 (James & Gero, 1983). Although NASW only became known by that name in 1955 via a "merger of five professional associations and two study groups" (Alexander, 1986), the organizing associations had been in existence, sometimes under slightly different titles, for many years (for example, the American Association of Social Workers began in 1919).

In the roughly three-quarters of a century since its inception as a full-time, paid, professional enterprise, social work in North America has undergone a high degree of differentiation as the dominant profession within the broad field of social welfare. New fields of practice, methodological functions, social problems, populations served, geographic areas covered, systems sizes, and modalities of intervention have all evolved (Ramsay, 1986). Certain historical debates, such as generalist (or generic) approaches vs. specialization, social action vs. social treatment, etc. have been partially tempered by strong statements, since the early 1970's, concerning the common base of practice inherent in all professional social work. This unity within the diversity of practice has permitted the development of a unanimously--accepted Code of Ethics and definition of social work practice at the IFSW Brighton 1982 meetings, and has permitted CASW to develop a Code of Ethics (CASW, 1983) which also incorporates a statement of minimum competence for professional practice.

Along with these achievements has gone a consistent effort in Canada and the U.S.A. to control and regulate practice, first by gaining control of title and, then, by moving to control practice. This should not be viewed, naively, as an attempt to "get a corner on the market" in helping but, rather, as an attempt to control the ethics and standards of care of those who are paid and are known as helpers of a particular kind. Professional social workers wish to be in charge of their own practice and practice standards, as are other helping professions, and have no wish to meddle in the approximately 90% of helping which occurs in our informal systems (family, friends, co-workers) or in our formal self-help or mutual aid groups.

Giving this brief background introduction, let us examine social work education in Canada, what it means to be a profession, the rationale for regulation, the various means by which social workers may be credentialed (registration, certification, licensing), the context of the CASW Code of Ethics 1983, and some general guidelines for the development of a professional association. In the interest of brevity, these items will be dealt with in point-form whenever possible.]

Social Work Education in Canada

There are now 26 schools, faculties, and departments in Canada, designated as "accredited schools" or "provisional members", through their affiliation with the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW), the national standard-setting body. The forerunner of CASSW, established in 1967, was the National Committee of Schools of Social Work, which had existed since 1948.

In addition, through a high degree of co-operation with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), New York, Canadian schools received accreditation of their programs. It was only with the initiation of

CASSW as a voluntary, national, non-profit association of university faculties, schools, or departments offering professional education in social work, that Canadian accreditation standards and criteria were established. (CASSW 1979) It should be noted that more than 50 years of liaison and co-operation among social work academics, internationally, has led to a remarkable degree of agreement as to what constitutes a core curriculum in social work education in whichever country it may be taught.

Most Canadian social work schools offer undergraduate and graduate degrees; the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree, known within the field as "the first professional degree", and the Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. Only the University of Toronto offers a program of studies leading to a doctoral degree in social work (Ph.D.); two other schools propose to offer a doctorate of philosophy in the near future: Wilfrid Laurier University Faculty of Social Work and the University of Calgary Faculty of Social Welfare.

There exists, as well, community college programs in social services, leading to a diploma or certificate. Usually of two years' duration, these produce graduates who work in direct social services, usually under the supervision of a university trained social worker. Although there is not currently a national or international accreditation body for these training programs, most have an active liaison with schools of social work in their region, to provide an educational ladder for those wishing to continue formal studies in social work.

In general, the BSW requires four years of study, with an additional year or two for completion of the masters degree. Some students may enter BSW or MSW programs with a prior undergraduate degree (usually, a Bachelor of Arts with a major in the social sciences) although they may be required to take a qualifying year, particularly for graduate admission. Doctoral studies, undertaken in Canada or the United States, usually require two to three years in residence plus a variable period of time to complete the required dissertation; the Canadian average is five years from the time of commencement of studies. As is true for all professional schools and at all levels of their programs, admittance is gained by superior academic achievement (as measured by grade point average), personal suitability, and, where possible, evidence of work experience or substantial volunteer experience in the field in which studies are to be undertaken.

Social work, like other professions, does not have an exclusive "corner on the knowledge market"; what is unique to social work is its perspective on people's problems in living, the solutions to those problems and, therefore, the body of knowledge required to sustain work from that perspective. Social workers take a broad view of problems that focuses on the inter-connectedness and interdependence of individuals with their society, believing that "private troubles" and "public issues" are intimately related. The knowledge base, therefore, is derived from research about individuals and society and, more importantly, about the dynamic relationship between the two (where general systems theory is a key principle).

(a) Core Subject Matter

Most social work education assumes a "two plus two" arrangement in BSW programs, i.e., a minimum of two years of (liberal) arts education in relevant areas (psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and economics) followed by two years of more specialized subject matter which reflects the perspective of social workers that individuals and their society are interdependent.

There is international agreement on the knowledge base of social work and the core subject areas are; human growth and social environment; social policy; social welfare administration; research methodology and design; supervised practice or field work experiences; and methods courses in the application of and integration of the learned knowledge base.

In addition, most Canadian education programs consider an interviewing and communications course an integral part of the curriculum.

(b) Specialized Subject Matter

Graduate and post-graduate education provide opportunities to specialize in a particular area (casework, group work, policy and administration, community organization, and research are the traditional forms), or in a given field of practice (child welfare, education and social work -- social work services in schools, gerontology, social work in health settings), or in a particular methodology (family therapy, behaviour modification, social planning, locality development, supervision).

The emphasis on research in social work is demonstrated by the requirement that all graduates must have successfully completed research courses in the arts portion and/or in the core social work portion of studies. The goal, mainly, is to train social workers to be good consumers of research and, secondarily, to design and conduct studies in their own profession, thereby fulfilling the profession's commitment to evaluation, which is considered a core skill in all forms of social work practice. Because social work draws heavily on the information provided by psychology and sociology, it is important that social workers be able to judge the validity and worth of their studies.

Reprinted from James and Gero, 1983; 86-88

Social Work as a Profession

The status of social work as a profession has been a subject of debate in North America since 1915 when "Abraham Flexner, addressing (the) National Conference of Charities and Corrections on "Is Social Work a Profession?", stated it did not qualify as a bona-fide profession; this initiated continual definition efforts" (Alexander, 1986). Sixty years later, and despite Flexner's contention, eight of Canada's ten provincial social work associations had legislated acts regulating social work (a ninth province has its own regulatory system by means of certification), and thirty-four states in the U.S.A. had legally regulated practice (Gowanlock, 1985 and "NASW News", 1984, respectively).

There are essentially three models for defining and describing professions; "trait, process, and power" (Popple, 1985). The trait model refers to a "list of fixed criteria" (Popple, 1985), and some of the traditional benchmark criteria are:

1. A long and arduous formal education followed by stiff examinations for entry into a profession
2. Community approval of members reflected in formal individual licensure and, where appropriate, certification of specialty competence
3. A code of ethics governing the conduct of members
4. A well-recognized body of systematic knowledge and technical skills
5. Self-regulation and a great deal of autonomy with the authority to discipline members who do not comply with the rules

Dr. Douglas Cameron, January 1980

Professions must possess:

1. Theory
2. Authority
3. Community sanction
4. Ethical codes
5. A culture of their own

Greenwood, 1976; 302 - 318

1. Practice is founded upon a base of theoretical, esoteric knowledge.
2. The acquisition of knowledge requires a long period of education and socialization.
3. Practitioners are motivated by an ideal of altruistic service rather than the pursuit of material and economic gain.
4. Careful control is exercised over recruitment, training, certification and standards of practice.
5. The colleague group is well organized and has disciplinary powers to enforce a code of ethical practice.

Rose (citing Leggett, 1970), 1974.

The power model is a "...description of a certain pattern of occupational control...a dominant position in a division of labor" (Poppo, 1985).

The process model of looking at professions maintains that "occupations span a continuum of professional attributes" and "professionalism is a process with many different occupations at many points on the continuum" (Poppo, 1985). Poppo clearly favors the process model, and cites Caplow and Wilensky's "life history" of occupations as they go through this sequence of steps, en route to becoming a profession:

1. "...becomes a full-time paid activity..."
2. "...establishes university training..."
3. "...forms a national organization..."
4. "...redefines the core task so as to give 'dirty work' to subordinates..."
5. "...experiences conflict between oldtimers (qualified through experience) and new people (qualified through education)..."
6. "...experiences conflict with neighbouring occupations..."
7. "...begins to gain legal protection through political agitation..."
8. "...develops a code of ethics..."

In conclusion, one cannot help but concur that "although an absolute distinction between professions and nonprofessions is impossible, 'nevertheless the term profession clearly stands for something'...power and prestige..." (Poppo, 1985; 563, citing Carr-Saunders & Wilson, The Professions, 1933) and given all of the criteria enunciated, one can also conclude that, at least in North America, CASW and NASW are professions well along the continuum, with only the stages of universal registration and control of practice remaining before they become totally self-governing independent professions.

This leads, logically, to why "becoming professions" seek regulation; the former Executive Director of CASW offers this reasoning.

Rationale for Regulation

"By promoting standards and control, regulation is said to protect the public against incompetence and fraud which might endanger the life, health, welfare, safety or property of citizens. Significantly, regulation is delegated to a profession or a occupation group by the appropriate (governmental) authority...only when professional or occupational self-government is in the best interest of the public.

There are, more subtle, reasons for regulation. From the profession's point of view, self-regulation confers a special authority and status. Quite apart from its value as a mechanism for discipline and control, regulation is a recognition of the profession's legitimacy. Equally to the point, regulation enables a profession to set its own priorities and standards."

Gowanlock, 1985

While regulation is seen as desirable, what forms may it take?

Definitions

Two Broad Categories of Professional Regulation:

1. Private credentialing

- a) registration
- b) certification

2. Public credentialing

- a) registration
- b) certification
- c) licensing (can only be done by the public sector)

Registration

"...a listing or registry of persons identifying themselves with (an) occupational activity....A private association issuing such a register does not have police powers.... The unregistered practitioner does not draw penalties...for engaging in the occupation unless the practitioner claims to be registered. Registration provides few restrictions on the practitioner, but does provide the client or consumer with a listing of vendors who have met certain standards" (Hardcastle, 1984, p.828).

"Public" registration means that there exists some legislated or legal control of title, but police powers are limited to penalties for misuse of title, i.e., the state is merely performing the same function as the private association.

Certification

"...involves the issuance of credentials when the professional association attests that a person has obtained a specific level of knowledge and skill....Similar to registration, certification does not prohibit uncertified practitioners from engaging in the occupational activity, but it does prevent their use of the term 'certified' ... (however) it lists vendors according to the certification criteria and makes a more finite judgement as to the practitioner's competency ... (and) provides the public with an a priori judgment of the competency of certified practitioners ... the certifying group cannot enforce its definition of competency over all who work in the occupation; it can only enforce the definition over practitioners choosing to be certified" (Hardcastle, 1983, p. 828). In a sense, it is only a trademark.

"Public" certification means that there exists some legislated or legal control of title, but police powers are limited to penalties for misuse of title, i.e., the state is merely performing the same function as the private association.

Licensing

"...represents a quantum leap over registration and certification ...it prevents the unlicensed practitioner from engaging in the occupational activity. Licensing, in effect, grants the profession a monopoly over the occupational activity ... (and) it is a 'process by which an agency of government grants permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation upon finding that the applicant has attained the minimal degree of competency required to ensure that the public health, safety, and welfare will be reasonably protected' (Shimberg and Roederer)" (Hardcastle, 1983, p.830).

Licensing controls not only title, but practice. It is a mechanism by which "the state decrees that persons may not engage in particular economic activities and behaviour, except within the specific conditions set forth by the authority of the state and under its regulatory power" (Proposed Social Work and Social Services Personnel Act, Discussion Draft Number 2, April 1980, p.1).

"Licensing states explicitly the requirements for knowledge and skills, describes how these are to be obtained and demonstrated, and uses the state's regulatory or police powers to enforce the definition of standards and behaviours" (Hardcastle, 1983, p. 830).

Licensing As A Profession and Licensing as an Occupation Differ; Professions Must:

1. "Perform a relatively specific, socially necessary function upon the regular performance of which the practitioner depends for livelihood and social status
 2. Require competence in special techniques based on a body of generalized knowledge requiring theoretical study
 3. Possess a generally accepted ethic that subordinates private interests to performance
 4. Have formal professional associations that foster ethics and standards of competency"
- (Hardcastle, 1983, p. 831, citing the Council of State of Governments, 1952)

A key distinction between social work and the mainline organized professions like law and medicine is that, while virtually all social work associations in Canada have control of specific titles for their members and registrants, (such as "Registered Social Worker") there is no professional social work association in Canada with complete control of practice as well as of the (assorted) titles. In many provinces people can refer to themselves as a "social worker" or may practice "social work" without fear of infringing on any law. This uneven distribution of powers, rights and obligations of the profession has led to confusion in the minds of the public, and to difficulties in relating to the mainline professions, particularly around issues which may, at times, remain unregulated by law (for example, issues such as sharing confidential information).

In most provincial social work jurisdictions the initials RSW, following a particular practitioner's name, indicates that practitioner has subjected himself to the full range of professional and civil legal responsibilities and is, therefore, subject to charges of malpractice and incompetence, as well as breaches of the Code of Ethics.

Social work most resembles law in the organization of its professional members; while no particular specialties are recognized by statute, members are allowed to confine their practice to specific areas but must, upon investigation, be able to justify why they, by virtue of experience and training, are practicing in a particular area. Thus, the pattern in medicine (i.e., of specialties involving specific titles and entitlement) is not the model used by most social work associations in Canada to indicate to the public the characteristics of its practitioners.

Because of social work's connectedness with governmental and organizational forces, it is the profession's belief that it is important to demand a degree of accountability from policy makers and organizational experts who apply what policy makers and others have developed regarding institutional arrangements for helping people. It is for this reason that the social work profession has continued to demand accountability not only from direct service practitioners but also from those individuals who (while their job description may call them executive directors, managers, consultants) obtained their position by virtue of their social work training and are, therefore, still accountable to the social work profession for their professional performance of duties.

Reprinted from James and Gero, 1983:92

CASW Code of Ethics 1983

At the heart of every profession is its Code of Ethics, and CASW is a mere two years short of the fiftieth anniversary of its first Code.

The current Code, available in both of Canada's official languages (English and French), is not inconsistent with the IFSW Code, adopted in Puerto Rico, July 10, 1976. In my not altogether unbiased view, the CASW Code seems to be the most detailed and complete in the English-speaking world.

The Introduction to the Code defines such terms as "client", "standard of practice", "malpractice and negligence", and the Preamble describes the philosophy and purpose of social work as well as the accountability of social workers. This is followed by the "Social Worker Declaration", which consists of ten first-person statements ("I will...") that each person makes who subscribes to the Code, the statements covering key aspects of social work. In turn, the Code provides a "Commentary", i.e. a series of statements which further explain each of the ten items in the "Social Worker Declaration". This way of giving examples of each of the "rules" is a means of making the Code also a statement of minimum competence to practice, and a model we have borrowed (with permission) from the Canadian Bar Association. In brief, the CASW Code covers these items and their meanings in practice:

1. Primary professional obligation
2. Integrity (including conflict of interest)
3. Competence and quality of service (including the knowledge base required)
4. Confidential information (including recording, disclosure, retention and disposition)
5. Outside interests and the practice of social work
6. Responsibility to the workplace (including academic settings and private practice)
7. Responsibility to the profession
8. Responsibility to society

Because, in Canada, legislating the professions is a provincial prerogative, each provincial and territorial association of social workers must adopt its own code; the majority have adopted the CASW Code, verbatim, and none has a code that contradicts the CASW Code, which has been the guideline for the nation.

Guidelines for the Development of a Profession

There are some general principles or guidelines beginning professional organizations may wish to consider as they plan their development:

1. Determine who (national or local government, etc.) has the power to grant an occupational grouping professional status.
2. Decide whether you wish to seek (private or public) registration or certification, or (public) licensing. Determine whether there is an established process one must follow when seeking professional status (in my province, for example, there is a process established by government which includes, among other things, consultation with and the support of existing professions with which your own might overlap). [Please refer to Appendix "A" for NASW's advice in this area.]
3. Recruitment. The majority of the current practitioners in the occupational grouping must agree on (professional) standards and training levels.
 - a. If there are competing groups, try to resolve differences and find a common ground before approaching legislators or other professions. No government will or should resolve disputes between or among competing interests.

4. Decide whether you wish to seek control of title or control of practice (or to do both, over a period of some intervening years).
5. Do your “homework” with other affected professions as the first step in seeking public support for your cause.
6. Get the support of college and university administrators who offer training and educational preparation in your profession.
7. Build-in requirements for continuing professional education.
8. Attempt to develop differential, use of social, welfare and social work manpower, i.e., who can do what with which qualification?
9. Build-in the "educational, ladder^ concept, i.e., how one can proceed from the established first professional degree through to graduate and post-graduate training?
10. Pay attention to existing national and international guidelines for training, membership, and codes of ethics, to allow your profession maximum portability and transferability of credentials, to permit reciprocity with other nations (if desired).
11. Develop or enhance your code of ethics, and strive for congruence with other national and international codes. Your code should take into account at least these factors:
 - a. the philosophy, purpose, and goals of your profession
 - b. a definition of your field of practice
 - c. a personal definition/declaration of those behaviours to which the professional is (legally) committed
 - d. an explication of that declaration via practice examples.
 - e. unequivocal statements about the practitioner's primary professional obligation; what integrity means; what competence means in this profession; what relationships with clients/customer/consumers mean; how confidential information will be regarded; a description as to how conflict-of-interest is to be handled; the practitioner's responsibility to the workplace, the profession, and society; and a commitment to on-going professional education.
12. Ensure the availability of (group) malpractice coverage.
13. Develop, in consultation with retained legal counsel, guidelines for the process of the hearing of complaints, including the right of appeal.
14. In establishing, building, or strengthening your profession, use balance as a guiding principle:
 - a. between generalists and specialists in the profession; please refer to Appendix "B" for a model of the "Evolution of Specialty Interests in Social Work" in North America (Ramsay, 1986)
 - b. between actions undertaken in the public interest and those undertaken when the beneficiaries are clearly the professionals themselves
 - c. between these newly-admitted to the profession and those who were the architects and builders of it
 - d. between local, regional, state, provincial or national requirements and interests and international interests and duties
 - e. between formal education requirements and experiential or externship/internship requirements f) between professional preparation and continuing professional education
 - f. between altruism and economic survival
 - g. between membership and licensure requirements, i.e., between the supportive peer group relationships and activities, and those strictly related to the gaining, maintaining, and suspension or cancellation of the right to practice
 - h. between internal and external validation of academic credentials
 - i. between parochial behaviours and international affiliations -- professionals tend to disregard political and geographic boundaries

Building a credible profession and professional organization is very hard work; were it not so, professions would be more numerous than they are. Those who struggle for this goal should be prepared for years of effort, public disbelief, and even saboteurs from within. These efforts, and those who undertake them, become part of the culture each profession possesses, however.

Professionals believe in their discipline and in their right to profess it, and they exercise, as well, a self-discipline of effort, attention, and commitment that lasts a lifetime. This takes courage, and it takes persistence. ... but you will also share most of your working life with those who approach life and work in the same fashion. While it is true that, as a professional, you will likely enjoy greater benefits in this society than the average person, you will learn (if you do not already know) that the price for a position of relative privilege is exacted in a higher standard of behaviour and service, both in your professional and in your personal life, and that this standard is legally enforceable. In short, because you are more, and have more, more is expected of you. With your greater freedom goes greater responsibility.

Professionals are comfortable possessing a high degree of responsibility and, equally important, they are comfortable with the authority which accompanies it. They may well insist on their own authority and the authority of the past, the kind of expertise that is built-up, over time, in any profession (Lasch, 1979) This is sometimes misperceived by the public as profession as "professional arrogance".

Perhaps the most appealing facet of any profession is its sense of intergenerational continuity (Lasch, 1979). Here, professions differ most dramatically from occupations. Any profession is always building, always adding to its knowledge base, and to its history. Only in a profession are one's ancestors and one's predecessors so valued as they grow in wisdom as they do in age. A profession is a good place to come of age and grow old in America. As someone was a mentor to you, so you may become, to a new generation in your field ...and all that you have learned, all that you have gained, is a bequest to them. This is a far cry from the kind of short-term thinking which emanates from any occupations, where competitiveness rules out collegial effort and life-long bonds with one's peers. Professions are an endeavour for generations of people, and each individual professional knows that he or she has a critical role to play in that effort, and feels it is a worthwhile venture.

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APPENDIX A

NASW Policy Statement 5: Standards for the Regulation of Social Work Practice, Approved by the NASW Board October 1976

1. Regulation must be directed to the licensure of practice, rather than to the protection of title only.
2. Regulation must recognize all levels of practice that are based on discipline and knowledge of the profession.
3. Regulation must establish criteria for autonomous or independent practice and for private practice or fee-for-service practice.
4. Legislation for the licensure of social work must require that each level or practice, including that of independent practice, have a valid means of objectively assessing the qualifications, knowledge, and competencies of applicants for licensure, in addition to requirements for specific educational attainment.
5. Regulation must cover all areas or settings in which social work is practiced, including public and voluntary, profit and nonprofit.
6. Regulatory legislation must require periodic renewal of the license and a requirement for some form of continuing education for those licensed.
7. Legislation regulating social work must provide that client-worker communication will be considered confidential, subject to the permission of the client.

8. Regulation must include authority to hold practitioners accountable for their professional and ethical conduct.

APPENDIX B

Evolution of Specialty Interests in Social Work

Criteria

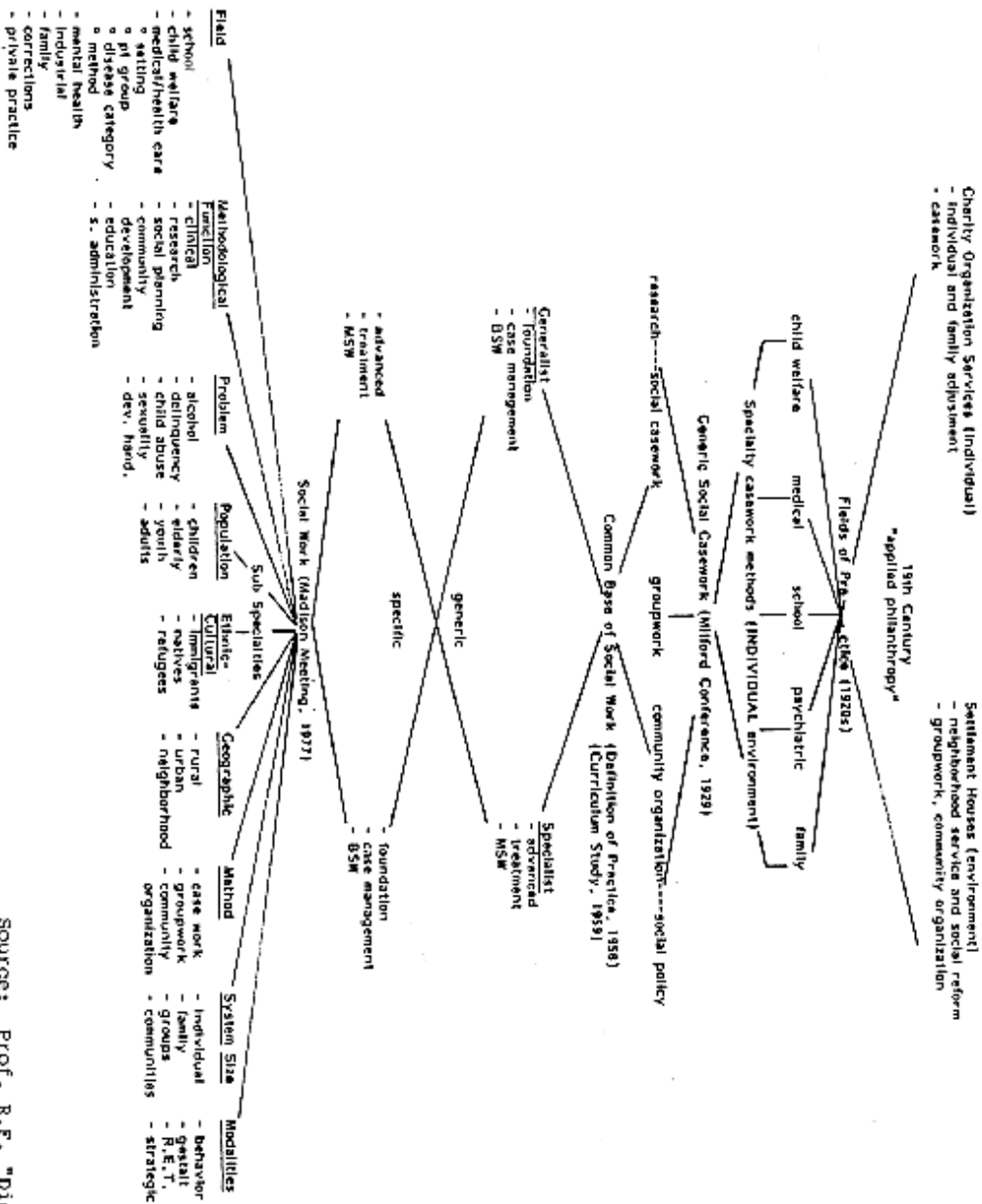
- recognized curricular specialization
- mutually exclusive subcategory
- recognized special interest in practice

Basic Assumptions

- all professions assume the right to define intraprofessional subspecialties;
- a scheme of specialties must be conceptually clear and delineate mutually exclusive subcategories;
- all specialties must be rooted in an agreed upon set of generic attributes common to all members of the profession;
- the specialty categories in any profession are always evolving; always in process.

Source: Professor R.F. "Dick" Ramsay
M.S.W., R.S.W. (Alberta)
June 6, 1986

APPENDIX B
EVOLUTION OF SPECIALTY INTERESTS IN SOCIAL WORK



SOURCE: PROF. R.F. "DICK" RAMSAY
M.S.W., R.S.W. (Alberta)
June 6, 1986