"We take the central methodological problem in sociology to be that of demonstrating how the sociologist constructs his explanation and how this explanation relates to the reality he investigates; this concern has been ignored in sociology". (1)

Research strategies based on formal experimental design are sometimes of little relevance to the real needs of research in a social work agency. It is the purpose of this paper to develop this argument by discussing the demands which should properly be made of research of this sort and the difficulties which may be encountered in meeting these demands. The title of this paper is intended to suggest a theme through which this argument can be pursued. The dichotomy referred to - between method and madness - will be considered at two levels - the 'pragmatic' and the 'conceptual'...

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE: THE FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT

The Family Centre Project developed as a result of a major reassessment of the work being done by the Social Work Service, and the Youth and Children's Centre, of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence. The Social Work Service, which had been operating since 1953, was based on an 'open-door' policy which resulted in an annual caseload of approximately 600 families, most of whom came to the Brotherhood of St. Laurence for financial assistance. The families were mostly economically, socially and personally disadvantaged to a severe, often chronic degree. Many of them, in the words of a social worker, were "chronic aid seekers, who had built Brotherhood handouts into their patterns of coping with life". The service was staffed by professional social workers and welfare officers, and employed casework methods using financial and material aid as a tool. The Youth and Children's Centre drew its clientele from among 500 young people known to the service.

The reassessment of the service was a response to a number of sources of dissatisfaction. Client demand was great, resources were spread very thinly, and work was fragmented and superficial. Goals were confused, and there was little evidence of improvement in family functioning, or in the social or economic condition of the family. More and more knowledge was accumulated about the dehumanising and deprived life-situation of the poor. At the same time, these misgivings were supported by the widespread critique of conventional social and welfare work, and the new directions suggested by this critique.

The results of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence's part projects and research studies - for example, the Family Service Project and "The Have-nots" (a recent study of 150 low-income families) - added to the general feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction. The Family Centre Proposal arose out of discussions between the staff and various departments of the agency.

The following were the general aims and methods of the Family Centre, and have formed the basis of the projects development: (2)
"Over a period of three years to systematically determine ways in which the social functioning and self-esteem of "multi-deficit" and "multi-problem" families can be significantly enhanced. During this initial period it should become clearer which particular approaches and programmes are appropriate or inappropriate to achieve the following goals:

1. To help the families to view themselves, not as passive victims of society but as active participants who are potentially capable of change. This includes both change in themselves and the capacity to change the environment in which they live. Thus, the Centre will aim to fully involve them in making the decisions about their families' future.

2. To help the families to adjust to those aspects of the social structure which they cannot change, assisting them to effectively handle the social systems which most affect them.

3. To promote change in both public attitudes and existing social provisions which are often unsympathetic to poor people because they fail to conform to middle-class behavioural norms.

Underlying the need for change in each of these three directions is the requirement of more basic information. Therefore, a more total perspective into "the culture of poverty" is required which includes what is distinctive in patterns of family functioning in Australia. This task of gathering and recording data must be undertaken concurrently with other aspects of the programme.

In general terms, the programme will shift from the previous ameliorative and palliative functions to participatory, developmental and possibly treatment functions. A major aim in this is to discover the extent to which family behaviour patterns can be reshaped through the form of service and methodology used.

METHODS:

1. The integration of the Social Work and Youth Services into one department with a new programme head.

2. Cessation of the 'open door' policy and the selection of a small group of families to take part in the project.

3. A multi-programme approach (possible programmes and activities were listed in order to give Board members and staff some indication of what might be envisaged.)

4. To staff the project with an inter-disciplinary team which shared the special and different skills of each member.
5. The use of a "non-problem" orientation which, whilst not ignoring very real problems, placed greater emphasis upon such matters as task achievement, family strength and individual participation.

6. An "action" or "self-help" orientation, where the families themselves would take initiatives aimed at improving their basic circumstances.

7. To focus upon the total family as an interacting, interdependent whole rather than upon individual members. This is not to say that, e.g. programmes will not be run specifically for youth, but those programmes will be interrelated with other aspects of the family centre.

8. To employ research staff to build up a detailed qualitative picture of family patterns and attitudes; and to evaluate the programme from its onset.

The conceptual evolution of the project since that time has seen some changes in emphasis from this original statement. In particular -

a) the commitment to encouraging participation by the families has strengthened, so that it is now envisaged that the families will make decisions with staff acting only as resources.

b) underlying the Project's rationale is the belief that 'the problem with the poor is that they lack money'. One of the Family Centre's most crucial features is a comprehensive scheme whereby every family is entitled to a weekly income supplement which guarantees a regular minimum income. The importance of this is indicated by the estimated cost of this scheme over a twelve month period. -$45,000 for the 60 families.

c) the 'treatment' function is being further de-emphasised, in that families are not 'allocated' to a social worker for casework. Instead they are free to choose their relationships with any centre worker, and centre workers operate as 'resources' in such areas as employment, housing etc., rather than sharing a casework function.

The operational evolution of the project since November, when it officially opened in the building acquired for the purpose, is documented in the attached time chart. (3 Appendix 1).

RESEARCH AND REAL-POLITIK

A great deal has been written about the difficulties of combining a research and evaluation function within an on-going agency programme. While the experience and implications of these situations can be important and useful — and a salutary reminder to university-based research projects as to what some of their colleagues outside the university are up against — the area is pretty well done over, in the literature, so
lengthy discussion can become a little tedious. The following refers specifically only to a few aspects of these difficulties, as they have been encountered in the Family Centre. The more general problem of which they are examples is however, a very considerable one, particularly in view of the increasingly diverse settings in which social work programmes are carried out and - it is to be hoped - researched.

The mundane justification for the motif of the title of this paper is that the task of successfully establishing an overall research method as part of an on-going, multi-disciplinary project is one which may well drive the researcher to madness.

In part, the reasons are quite trivial and derive from the normal ways in which organisations inevitably operate. Bureaucracy, red tape, pressure of time, administrative demands, budgetary restrictions, etc., are too familiar to require discussion. Other complications arise out of the particular roles which exist within the agency set-up.

It is generally recognised that the role of researcher is an uneasy one, requiring, on the one hand, some distance, detachment and objectivity, and on the other, effective trust and working rapport with other staff. The appropriate type of 'marginality' may be difficult to achieve in terms of organizational roles, and - a point less often recognised in the literature - in terms of the researcher's own human need to work in a congenial atmosphere with other staff. Accordingly, this is not simply a matter of organizational structuring. Indeed the belief that 'objectivity' can be obtained by appropriate positioning within an agency structure seems as dubious as the notion of 'objectivity' itself. It seems more realistic simply to realise that the position a researcher has in an organization will effect the nature of his view of its functioning, than to assume that true objectivity can be created. And if the researcher is to be able to maintain a consistent and self-aware research role in the organization, his personal needs and skills must be reckoned with and accommodated.

A continual problem for the researcher is the communication of a proper understanding of his task and what it involves, and the eliciting of appropriate co-operation from the staff. Sadly, this is one of the most general and disabling problems met by researchers in an action programme.

Thus, some potentially fruitful research possibilities may fail if the staff's collective obstinacy is greater than the researcher's individual forcefulness. My attempts to persuade staff to maintain a daily diary of their activities were finally abandoned when, after exhausting their excuses, a campaign of passive resistance and non-compliance was begun. Although this difficulty can sometimes lead to the researcher's feeling that he is not taken sufficiently seriously, in another sense he can be taken too seriously. There is a tendency for the researcher to be placed in a sort of guru role, an expectation that he is above the task problems, ideological conflicts, and personal involvements which other staff members encounter. He can therefore be called upon to advise, mediate or simply understand, in a way which may considerably overestimate his abilities in certain areas, while failing to realise that his expertise and usefulness really lie.
A vivid example of this occurred at a recent training conference of all staff and volunteers at the Family Centre, when I found myself called upon to introduce a discussion session on group processes and team work. Although maybe flattering, this was also somewhat disconcerting, especially as no attempt was made to draw me into a later discussion on 'the characteristics of the poor', a topic which I would have thought was much closer to my area of formal 'expertise'.

At the same time, this confusion around the research role has a definite positive side. Quite apart from the final outcome of the researcher's labours, it has become evident in the Family Centre that the on-going process of research within an action programme promotes an atmosphere of critical scrutiny and analysis and organizational self-awareness which can be of very real benefit to the programme. Both the demand which the researcher makes of the staff - such as consistency of approach, documentation of work, and self-awareness - and the input which he can offer - objectivity, overview, some degree of programme assessment - tend to become incorporated, to good effect, in the overall development of the project.

(It may even be arguable that actual research need not be done for this to occur. It may be that the designation of a staff member as researcher will set this process in motion, regardless of the quality or scope of his actual research work. However, although this suggestion of a 'dummy' researcher may appeal to those responsible for the economical staffing of an agency, hopefully it will be rejected by those interested in a more substantial research output.)

Clearly, this sort of role confusion is very likely to also arise in the researcher's contact with clients. The concept of research is, at the best of times, a difficult one to explain to people who have had no familiarity with it, and in a setting where all the other staff have roles which appear to be more immediately relevant to the client's needs, considerable patience and skill is necessary if an appropriate working relationship is to be developed. (In the Family Centre this problem is aggravated by the fact that, for reasons which will be discussed later, the research staff also administer the Income Supplement Scheme).

More specifically, the researcher's freedom to employ whatever methods seem appropriate is constrained by the nature of the programme within which he is operating. Some of these constraints are common to many types of programme, e.g. ethical considerations concerned with the protection of the programme participants; the need not to make excessive demands of staff nor to create anxiety amongst them. Other constraints arise specifically out of the nature of the particular programme. In the case of the Family Centre, these are quite formidable, and to some extent unusual.

Central to the concept of the Family Centre is the full and willing participation of its members in every aspect of its operation, and the protection (or, more realistically, the promotion) of their dignity and autonomy within it. This requires that research cannot be allowed to in any way demean, annoy or mystify the families. Guinea-pigs are out. Research activity can only be carried out with the agreement and understanding of the Families, and must encourage their involvement in it.

Similarly, the extent of the research possibilities which a project of this sort - with a small 'captive' clientele, a full-time research
and so on - would theoretically permit, is limited by the condition that the families not be over-researched. An excessive research demand on the families might well be resented by them, and might also affect their perceptions of, and responses to, the overall programme.

The nature of the project is such that formal experimental design is not real applicability. The more problematic implications of this will be dealt with later but some obvious ones can be mentioned here.

- The sample, for instance, has no scientific basis underlying its selection, and any claim as to the representativeness of the Family Centre membership would have to be very cautiously offered.

- The various forms of input into the programme are determined by its own developing momentum, rather than by any experimental considerations, making the task of adjusting research processes to meet these additional variables extremely awkward.

In November, the Family Centre's sole activities were a sewing group and the coffee lounge. By June, they included a Management Committee (and associated subcommittees), cooking, yoga, child care, photography, reading and a range of other social, craft, educational and action groups. In almost every case, these activities developed purely in response to the initiatives of families.

The simultaneous operation of a variety of inputs does not enable the systematic and controlled observation of specific variables, except in a few, rather contrived situations.

This difficulty affects, in particular, our research submission to the Poverty Enquiry on the operation of the Income Supplement Scheme. To scientifically observe this scheme, under controlled conditions and in isolation from other variables, up to three matched groups would be needed in addition to the Family Centre group: one group receiving only income support, one receiving the facilities of the Centre but without income support, and one receiving no service at all. Clearly, the nature of this project does not permit such complete experimentation. We have therefore had to recognise that it may not be possible to prove that changes in a family's situation are due solely to a particular variable, such as income support. In the case of income support, for instance, research is directed at indicating areas in which it seems that movement could not have occurred without this input, or in which income support clearly contributed to movement. (One attitude survey, exploring differing explanations of the reality of 'poverty' is being planned on a comparative basis. This will be discussed further below.)
For this reason, too, it is not possible to systematically avoid any distortions, which may arise from and reflect the research component of the project rather than other inputs. Instead, the research function has been made a quite public and deliberate aspect of the project.

These, then, are some of the ways in which the complexities of the overall programme complicate the systematic application of scientific method to the Family Centre Project, and suggest the dichotomy referred to in my title. To cover myself in this regard, I have written elsewhere, in a slightly apologetic tone which I do not actually feel is necessary, "overall the whole project, and the research aspect of it, is broad and explanatory, rather than strictly experimental. Hopefully, as the programme develops, indications will emerge of areas in which more specific hypotheses might be tested at a later date or by other projects".

**RESEARCH AND REALITY**

But this is only the edge of the madness, and the problems outlined thus far would be accepted by many people in the field as not being particularly unusual, maddening though they may be.

It may be, then, to slightly dramatise the argument, that, at a less mundane level, the whole enterprise is somewhat mad. Not the enterprise which constitutes the Family Centre Project per se, (although there would be nothing novel about a claim that that too was mad); but the enterprise of attempting to understand and evaluate by research means, the overall project.

The problem, in the first instance is one of definition, isolation and deployment of resources. What is to be studied, by what means, for what reasons, and - so what? In a programme whose aims and operating techniques are as broad as those of the Family Centre Project, there are as many possible areas of inquiry as there are post-graduate students in search of new research topics. A basic analysis of the programme in terms of the key areas of functioning only makes the problem more vivid, e.g.

- total programme change in an established voluntary agency.
- staff response to agency change and innovation.
- the effects of the programme on family functioning.
- family response to the new programme.
- agency role in the welfare network.

The range of the inquiry, then, is limited only by the research resources available, and the capacity of the project to bear the research demand. The problem therefore, becomes one of overall conceptualisation. Decisions must be made as to how to deploy the available resources in such a way as to secure the most fruitful returns. But before even this
can be done, it is necessary to understand what those available resources in fact are, and what sort of 'returns' would be 'fruitful'. Beyond the simple considerations of manpower, time and funds, are those of techniques and methodology. The development of a repertoire of resources from which certain possibilities can be chosen requires imaginativeness and inventiveness as well as the no-nonsense logic of science; the choice itself requires, in addition, the skills of organizational 'real-politik' without which, as has already been argued, the task of doing research in an action programme results in madness rather than method.

The research methods employed must be practical, and consistent with the overall rationale of the programme; the difficulties this requirement raises have already been discussed. But they must also be reliable, not only internally i.e. in terms of the accuracy and validity of a particular research technique, but also conceptually. The problem here is that of the particular research brief within the Family Centre Project.

"To undertake the development of data-collection instruments and in consultation with the families to collect base line data.

To develop measurement instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes aimed at change in social functioning.

To test and develop theories relating to multi-deficit families and to provide data for social action purposes."

The research task, therefore, is not the setting up and testing of an experimental situation in order to follow through a specific, controlled variable; it is not the formulation, and testing of discrete hypotheses; it is not the development of theory. Rather it is the monitoring and evaluation of an open-ended, dynamic and multi-faceted project, shaped and constrained by its own momentum and rationale rather than by the needs of disciplined research, and aimed at improved knowledge and understanding of its central concerns. It is this that the research has to deal with, and it requires of the researcher that a whole range of data collection techniques be set running which, over time, will monitor all those aspects of the project which may be necessary for that understanding.

The research strategy must enable the 'mapping' of a social system. In the same way that maps can be drawn by establishing a sufficient number of ascertained spatial points to complete an outline of the whole entity, it seems that the development of the Family Centre Project must be charted by gathering information at a number of different points, or dimensions, of the programme. Robert Weiss and Martin Rein discuss this very carefully by distinguishing between 'narrow aim' and 'broad aim' programmes.

"A narrow-aim programme might be intended to increase an individual's language facility, to prepare him for a job, or to upgrade the quality of his housing. The criteria of success are evident in the statement of aims; or said another way, the aims are nearly operational. ... The term broad-aim programme is intended to describe programmes which hope to achieve non-specific forms of change-for-the better, and which also, because of their ambition and magnitude, involve unstandardised, large-scale interventions and are evaluated in only a few sites. ... The difficulty
is not that the aims of the broad-aim programmes are
unformulated, but rather that the aims may be speci-
fied in many ways.....
The attempt to evaluate success in terms of narrowly
defined criteria misrepresents the actual aims of
broad-aim programmes". (4)

In these terms, the researcher's task in a broad-aim programme
can be weakened, not only by deficiencies in established techniques,
but, quite critically, by a lack of sufficient imagination on the part
of the research worker.

This then provides the answer to the problems posed above - that
of overall conceptualisation. The nature of broad-aim programmes is
such that overall conceptualisation in advance is rarely, if ever, ap-
propriate; rather, research must be directed to 'mapping' the project's
evolution to enable such conceptualisation at its conclusion.

Related to this is the fact that as was suggested in the earlier
outline of the Family Centre, one of the aims of the overall project
(and therefore of the research function within it) is to question, to
render problematic, conventionally accepted professional assumptions.
This challenge to many of the techniques and values of social work
forces centre workers to new assessments of their skills and aims, and
to some extent deprives them of the protective structure which profes-
sions invariably create for themselves. This operates across a number
of levels. At the ideological level, for instance, families are pre-
sumed not to be 'inadequate', rather than the reverse. At the practical
level, such innovations as 'open filing' - files on families are written
up in collaboration with the families - require considerable adaptive-
ness of social workers, and a willingness to relinquish the social
worker's customary monopoly over the formulation of a diagnosis and
treatment plan.

The demand this makes of research is considerable. Literally, it
is for value-free or maybe, more realistically, value-conscious - re-
search. The explicit and, more critically, the implicit values which
affect the methodology and interpretations employed must be consciously
considered and declared.

At a general level, this paper is an attempt to do this. But the
same sort of analysis must be applied at specific levels. Part of the
function of research in the Family Centre is to inquire into the real
meaning of, for instance, such concepts as the 'culture of poverty',
and 'family functioning'. These abstractions are, however, almost ir-
retrievably value laden. The way in which behaviour comes to have a
social meaning is a result of societal processes and values. Thus de
facto relationships, for instance, have generally a rather dishonoured
role in our society, are 'labelled' accordingly, and suffer at the hands
of society's disapproval. For this reason, a fatherless unmarried fam-
ily will receive fewer benefits than a widowed one, or a child care
authority will be less sympathetic to a de facto couple than to a mar-
rried one. The ways in which this process occurs and reinforces itself
should be well known to social workers!
It is a self-fulfilling process of social selective perception which discriminates and distorts facts until the vicious circle it creates becomes embedded in society. Social research which does not recognise this process risks becoming tame and tautological. Cicourel has shown how research based on statistics and reports from police files simply reflects the gross distortions contained within them. The dangers of research based on socially accepted value concepts is just as great. For instance, the criteria on which most attempts to ensure 'family functioning' are based are very vulnerable to such biases, employing as they do such factors as attitudes to welfare agencies, propensity to physical violence, work motivation, or domestic cleanliness. It is therefore the real relevance and meaning of these aspects of family behaviour, and the ways in which they are taken up by the social process, that must be considered by any research into 'family functioning'.

The imperative of independent research is not to ignore these implications, of course, but to try to understand their function for society and to those people under consideration. 'Facts' must be recognised as problematic matters whose complex nature cannot simply be understood by reference to middle class norms. Independent research must look to the phenomena under study and follow them through the social process.

From the above discussion it follows that the considerations by which the research strategy for the Family Centre Project should be judged, are those of adequacy both within the requirements of conventional research discipline, and of an imaginative and authentic understanding of the project.

A working distinction can be drawn between those research processes concerned with the families themselves, and those concerned with the development of the project as such. Those research processes directed to gathering information about individuals, and families, include the following:

- every week or fortnight each family's income supplement entitlement is calculated during a discussion between a member of that family and one of the two research workers. At this interview specific data is obtained and recorded dealing with the source and amount of the family income over that week, the size and structure of the household, the type of accommodation, the numbers of days worked by any employed family member and the rent paid. From this the two components of the total subsidy are calculated (i.e. the minimum income, and rent, subsidies).

In addition, general discussion often occurs around such areas as the family's overall financial management over the week, expenditure and consumption, employment, and so on. The information being built up in this way should prove particularly valuable in establishing a dynamic picture of families' economic patterns and behaviour over time. This should provide much needed balance to the 'snap-shot' static techniques which are generally used in attempts to assess and understand poverty, as well as indicating any changes.
which occur over the development of the project. The data will be further analysed with a view to exploring the role of different variables in family circumstances.

A number of surveys, based on conventional questionnaire and survey methods, are underway or planned. A basic data profile of each family at the early stages of the project has been established by the administration of a structured interview schedule dealing mainly with 'hard' data concerning areas as housing and children's education. A survey into family attitudes to health and their access to treatment has been undertaken, in conjunction with the provision, by a medical practitioner, of medical checks for every family member.

At present, a major survey is being planned designed to test, by way of an attitude scale, the applicability of the situational and cultural models of poverty in the context of the operations of the Family Centre. It is intended that this be used both longitudinally to investigate changes during the course of the project and comparatively, across a few groups outside the Family Centre. (5)

Conventional case files, maintained by social workers, have been replaced by an 'open-filing' system, whereby files are written up only in conjunction with the person involved, and, ultimately, at their initiative. Although this approach, which is highly innovative in a welfare setting, risks some early loss of data, it should result in far richer and more authentic information about the families, with less professional bias or mystification.

Take, for example, the following entry, dictated to a social worker by an illiterate mother of 24, a "text book case" of deprivation and "inadequacy".

"Ways I have changed since the camp. (A camping programme is run as part of the project). Before that I used to sit back and take everything in. At the camp I had a terrific time - I don't know what it was but mixing with others which I never had done before, and listened to them and thought 'bugger this, I can have a say too'.

I have changed in the way I talk. Fred's mother noticed this and said I am talking much better than what I was .......

Later, in relation to an application for the admission to care of the youngest daughter:

"I have decided to allow 'Jane' to go to foster parents and not be adopted out. This is because in a year's time I will think about it and be sorry that I had her adopted out and will never see her again ......

'Fred' must still be thinking about 'Jane' as he accidentally called 'Sue' "Sunshine" which shows that she must be
A family discussion group, which has chosen for itself the name 'Research and Social Action Group' meets fortnightly. Participation of the families is, of course, voluntary and the focus of the discussions is determined by the families themselves. The discussions are taped and later transcribed.

They provide rich information about the circumstances, attitudes and values of the families, and the complex interplay between them, and, significantly, add another methodological dimension to that of the individual interview. It is hoped to expand these processes to enable the families to extend their means of expression and communication e.g. by the use of video equipment.

Recently the Family Centre staff decided that, rather than each worker having a 'caseload' of families for whom that worker was responsible, staff would individually become responsible for certain areas of general concern to all the families. Thus one staff member has become the Family Centre 'resource' person in all matters relating to housing, one in employment, and so on. This system follows logically from the Centre emphasis on the social deprivation of its members; rather than their personal inadequacy; it also has useful research implications. In particular, it should enable each worker to develop an expertise in a particular area and to understand and document the families' experiences thoroughly. Co-operation in this with the research staff should enable valuable information to be systematically accumulated in specific matters of social policy.

It will have become evident that in some cases the available research methods are constrained by other aspects of the overall programme. In other cases, the research possibilities themselves arise out of, or complement, other features of the programme. The open files, for instance, have a very distinct purpose in terms of the project's aims of encouraging client participation and exorcising the 'pathology' assumption from social work; the discussion groups have a strong social action and consumer involvement function.

There are also a number of ways in which the overall development of the project itself can be tapped.

particularly important research material is provided by any documents which arise out of the programme. Some of these purposefully chronicle features of the projects and serve as historical records of its development, such as reports prepared by staff members, and the Newsletter. Many other documents, although they do not have this conscious historical purpose, constitute very significant evidence of the processes and progress of the Centre. These include the minutes of various formal groups (such as the Management Committee), the 'diaries' which it is hoped all the activity groups will produce (extending the open-file approach from individuals to groups), and staff memos and letters to family members which arise out of the administrative procedures of the Centre. Such sources
as the 'Suggestions' placed in the Suggestion Box, and the library records, showing the patterns of book borrowing, provide a more colourful means of further filling out the growing picture of the Family Centre. Documentary evidence of this sort has the great advantage of constituting the type of non-reactive 'unobtrusive measurement' which Webb so enthusiastically urges, in his unusual book of that title. (6)

- a great deal of rather self-conscious attention is paid to staff development in the Family Centre. Staff participation in decision-making is almost total, and takes place during weekly three-hour meetings. These meetings are fully transcribed, and the records of their proceedings provides an enormously rich account of the evolution of the project. In fact the value of these records in understanding the project's growth cannot be overestimated.

Staff meetings are also held at the conclusion of each day. Notes from these meetings, although they tend to deal with day-to-day business, rather than grand theory, are also of great value.

- an important and easily overlooked dimension of the Family Centre's existence is its political role. It is fashionable and useful to use ecological models for the analysis of various forms of system, and from this perspective it is likely that the Family Centre will have significant effects, both intended and unintended, on the community welfare network of which it is part, and on the Brotherhood of St. Laurence itself.

A wide range of effects could be considered here: the use made by Family Centre members of other welfare services, the effect of the Centre in stimulating demands, anxieties and the like from other welfare consumers, the role of the Centre in promoting new approaches in other agencies and so on. As the project has a substantial political, educative and social action function these effects, particularly as they relate to deliberate policy change in other agencies, will become increasingly important. So far, a systematic approach to research in this area has not developed: in microcosm it seems to contain many of the problems dealt with above.

The basic query, which must be made as to the overall adequacy of this strategy forces us back to the underlying question. Can as complex and vast and ever-changing a project as the Family Centre be understood by an assortment of specific research techniques? How can a research strategy be devised which will ensure that enough dimensions of data are collected to enable a reliable outline of the project to be mapped? Is there not a risk of constructing a largely tautological research inquiry by conducting research in those areas which are assumed to be significant, whereas it is the aim of the project and the job of the researcher to discover which those areas are?
In a more erudite and systematic way and with a solid philosophical
spinning, (based on the work of Schutz, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty)
are the sort of doubts expressed by such critics of conventional
sociology as Cicourel, Garfinkel, Matza and others and, in a different,
relevant, setting, Laing. They question, in what seems to me to be
very compelling way; some of the most established techniques of so-
ological method. Some of these problems are more generally recognized
pitfalls of research methodology and attempts are made to avoid them
improved techniques. Distortions of material arising out of poorly
filled questionnaires, unsatisfactory interviewing, sampling error,
sensitive coding, unjustified quantification of data and the like
have been accepted as very real problems of research method. But their
professional criticism is harder to meet. In fact it is one which I find dif-
ficult to clearly understand and articulate, because it really is a prob-
lem of the sociology of knowledge and, as such, requires that sort of
ability to step outside one's own fundamental frame of reference which
is difficult to achieve. It is the argument that much of social science
and methodology is suspect because the explanations it offers them-
selves derive from the assumptions, logic and methods which social sci-
kists impose on the phenomena they study. For instance, conclusions based
questionnaire findings assume a consistent and straightforward relation-
ship between people's answers to a highly contrived and artificial series
of questions, and the way in which they actually make decisions in their
real world. Measurement and quantification often assumes that prop-
erties which are logically related, e.g. attitudes to minority groups,
attitudes to authority, can therefore be held to constitute an over-
and consistent syndrome, e.g. 'tender-mindedness', and be quantified
then treated according to numerical rules. In Cicourel's phrase,
statement by fiat. (7).

This is not the place to pursue these arguments further, except to
state their relevance to research in the Family Centre - and other com-
parable situations. The problem already referred to, of how to locate
data points which will reliably 'map' the project, represents the
conceptual difficulty of implementing research which meets the actual
situation, rather than the researcher's conception of what that situa-
tion is. Another example. It is generally agreed that one of the most
important issues related to any system of income maintenance is that of
work-incentive. Does income maintenance reduce the incentive to
work, as is often suggested by opponents of such a scheme, or is there
other effect... or is there no generalisable effect? It may be
possible to show a relationship, within our project, between the provi-
dion of income and the extent to which men work. In fact this would be
very simple and orthodox research operation. But what, in truth, would
clearly do to say about the work-incentive? The notion of incentive
work is ours - 'I mean we middle-class, professionally trained, Pur-
social scientists and social workers; it is a constructed explana-
meeting our logic, our situation, our responses.' How would we,
could we, know whether this explanation actually accounts for the
reasons which the people involved make regarding work? The very lan-
ge which we use conceals within it a telling assumption as to how we see
the matter. Might not the subjects of our study find the phrase
'theom not to work' or 'compulsion to work' a more realistic statement
of the issues?
To bring this point home — I am not arguing that research is not possible or worthwhile in this context; only that it is a maddening enterprise, and, maybe, so fraught with problems as really to be a little mad!

So finally, just to run this slightly contrived motif to the ground, let me offer the most literal and purist extension of the above argument, as to why such research as this may really be 'madness' rather than 'method'. This involves floating briefly the full-blown phenomenological critique of sociology and considering its relevance to social work research. This approach, which underlies much of what has already been said above, makes very different assumptions from the more conventional, structural-functionalist sociology.

"Social structure (and meaning) is not seen as subject to objective measurement. It is, rather, the product of human action, of human actors. Society is socially constructed by man's actions. Rather than tending to see man as a passive responder to the environment, phenomenologists view man as creating his own environment through a process of interpreting and giving meaning to all he sees around him .... A sociologist cannot take the meaning of a particular social event to the actor for granted. He must, therefore ground his interpretation in the meaning the event has for the everyday actor he is studying ...." (8)

If this argument is taken seriously and accepted as representing, if not a complete indictment of conventional sociology, then at least an essential complement to it, sociological research must try to meet this challenge. But — what methodological form will do this? The phenomenologists' answer is the notion of ethnomethodology, a ponderous term describing a somewhat vague range of techniques drawn largely from anthropological work. These techniques, attempt, in various ways, to obtain the actor's own account of his world of meaning uncontaminated by the constructs and methods of social scientists. The work of Oscar Lewis and Richard Hoggart and Elizabeth Bott, might, in different ways, be considered to be attempts of this sort. Participant observations, cinema verite, autobiographies, and possibly certain types of extended, on-going discussions, would be appropriate techniques.

But the difficulties are great. These methods lack systematic clarity and depend greatly on the ability of the scientists to faithfully enable, record, describe, and understand without, at the same time, imposing himself on the subject of his study. As, by definition, most forms of structured research methodology are forbidden, the researcher must fall back on his own skills, which may need to be more like those of a novelist, artist, or journalist than the professional craft of a social scientist. Pushed to its limits, this really does require a madness of the researcher — the ability to transcend his own reality and enter that of some one else! And then, having captured that reality, to re-enter his own professional world and communicate to it, without falsification, that reality.

It should be noted that the main names usually associated with this critique are not social workers, but a rather small group of sociologists who are themselves in significant disagreement with the majority
It may be that the social worker's reaction to
this chasm should be one of self-satisfied puzzlement. For would not
social workers argue that the process of casework proceeds from
this basis, from - to quote from an orthodox classic on social
work, "knowing how to take hold of a case, how to proceed in under-
standing the import of a person's problem to him........"? (9)

I have not had social work training and do not really know what
is taught in, and expected of, casework. But certainly it appears
that the profession of social work comes closer to the aims and the
methods of 'phenomenological sociology' than do any of the more high-
gioical professions - even if its language is more intelli-
gible and its methods more accessible. However, this is not the oc-
tion to inquire further into the question of whether there is such
meeting point between the two disciplines (- except to realise that,
whenever conclusion is reached, there is a radical critique of social
work similar to the phenomenological critique of sociology. The fact
that social work is frequently criticised as problem-oriented, middle-
and politically conservative, suggests that between the profes-
sional creed and the actual practice of social work this sort of un-
derstanding can be lost).

Nevertheless, social work, as a specific sociological discipline,
is possibly better able to meet this critique of sociology, than are
these related disciplines. This is very encouraging for social work
research. I have been arguing that, to be of real value, social re-
search must probe beyond conventional assumptions and established me-
ths in order to understand the reality of what it studies. It does
that the true spirit of casework implies such an attempt. this
attempt should therefore also be part of social work research.

In part this attempt takes the form of a professional orienta-
tion - an imaginativeness and flexibility - which should inform all
social work and which, as I have been arguing throughout this paper,
would inform the overall conduct of social work research.

Hence, the range of different methods which constitute the re-
search component of the Family Centre. But I would also argue that
further research technique is suggested. The techniques of eth-
methodology are really a research version of casework, i.e. a means
understanding the world of another person in his own terms. And
particular ethnomethodological technique of social work is the
study.

In addition, then, to all the conventional research techniques
which have been discovered earlier (surveys, data collection and an-
alysis), I am suggesting the need for research bases on case studies.
In some way, the logic, richness and individuality of families'
needs must be understood, if the generalised outlines provided by
other research methods are to be made sense of. Such case stu-
des must enable the researcher to learn, from the individual, about
concerns; in his terms. Again, methodological problems loom
Selection and sampling, nature and frequency of contact, use
language are all difficulties which must be dealt with. It is be-
this sort of research approach depends as much on madness as on
that it is often ignored in research operations. Its inclusion
the overall research strategy of the Family Centre, alongside more
tradial and conventional techniques, is a matter for

FOOTNOTES

2. C. Benn: "The Family Centre Project - First Report" (Nov. 1972)
3. C. Benn: "The Family Centre Project - Second Report"

Webb makes a similar point by using, as an analogy, the 'outcropping' model from geology:

"The 'outcropping' model from geology may be used more generally. Any given theory has innumerable implications and makes innumerable predictions which are inaccessible to available measures at any given time. The testing of the theory can only be done at the available outcropping, these points where theoretical predictions and available instrumentation meet. Any one such outcropping is equivocal, and all types available should be checked. The more remote or independent such checks, the more confirmatory their agreement". (p.28)

"It is only when we naively place faith in a single measure that the massive problems of social research vitiate the validity of our comparisons. We have argued strongly for a conceptualisation of method that demands multiple measurement of the same phenomenon as comparison". (p.34)


5. The major part of this survey is being planned and undertaken by Mr. Gordon Ternowetsky, of La Trobe University.
6. Webb (op. cit)
8. Vulliamy G.: "New Ways to Teach" New Society March 8, 1973 (p.527)
To indicate the slow development of cohesiveness amongst families and staff members and the beginnings of the transfer of power from staff to family members.

**Legend:**
- **M** - model of operation
- **SCI** - indicator of the development of staff cohesiveness
- **FCI** - indicator of the development of family cohesiveness
- **TPI** - indicator of the development of the transfer of power from staff to families
- **SSC** - stimulus to staff cohesiveness
- **SFC** - stimulus to family cohesiveness
- **STP** - stimulus to transfer of power

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANT EVENTS</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19/10/72</td>
<td>Selection of a roster by staff which suggested the first model of operating the Centre. Centre to be open 6 days and nights a week. In reality method of operating the Centre was casework interlarded with activities.</td>
<td>M1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/10/72</td>
<td>First meeting of Family Centre Members (in Coolibah Club) 50-60 people.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/11/72</td>
<td>Staff Training Camp</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/11/72</td>
<td>Idea of a co-ordinator suggested, that is someone to co-ordinate the activity in the Centre. Realization that with the present mode of working there was not enough staff to keep the Centre open 6 days and nights each week.</td>
<td>M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/11/72</td>
<td>Combined Staff/Vol. Meeting. Volunteers recruited from old Youth Work Service.</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/11/72</td>
<td>Caseload of 70 families to be distributed evenly among seven general Family Centre Workers with training - social workers, welfare officer and youth workers. These workers to be known as the Main Workers. Idea did not preclude relationships with other Centre workers.</td>
<td>M3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/11/72</td>
<td>Centre opens 6 days/week and 2 nights (Friday and Sunday). Thursday to be staff discussion day, Centre to be closed to families except for emergencies. Sewing, which was started before the move to the Mission House, was the only activity. One hour staff evaluation sessions at the end of each day commence.</td>
<td>M3, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–31/12/72</td>
<td>Family Camps</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9/1/73</td>
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## APPENDIX 1  Family Centre Project (contd.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANT EVENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/1/73</td>
<td>Numerous discussions of the meaning of the &quot;open centre&quot; resulted in a new method of manning the Centre or operationalizing the open working situation. Three workers each day rostered as on duty - one co-ordinator and 2 support workers i.e. people available to move into any area at direction of co-ordinator. Coffee Lounge activity to be available whenever Centre is open. Families asked to suggest preferred activities.</td>
<td>STP, M4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19/1/73</td>
<td>Family Camp</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/1/73</td>
<td>Four co-ordinators to each work 1 week at a time, all members of staff to be available to man &quot;open&quot; Centre.</td>
<td>M5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2/73</td>
<td>Meeting of Families to explain Income Supplement formula.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2/73</td>
<td>Staff/Vols meeting</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/2/73</td>
<td>Income Supplement commenced.</td>
<td>TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2/73</td>
<td>Sunday hours: reduced from 11 a.m. - 11 p.m. to 3 p.m. - 11 p.m.</td>
<td>TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/2/73</td>
<td>Cooking activity started as one of the families' suggestions.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/2/73</td>
<td>Beginning of development of permanent staff teams on Friday night and Sunday, i.e. same people working each Friday night and Sunday.</td>
<td>SCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/3/73</td>
<td>Staff/Vols Training Camp</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/3/73</td>
<td>Open files started.</td>
<td>STP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/3/73</td>
<td>Open Centre not working. Decided to have only one co-ordinator and a backstop who will attempt to devise a scheme to work open centre.</td>
<td>M5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/3/73</td>
<td>Family Centre member puts forward idea that families should help to run Centre by electing a Committee of Management.</td>
<td>TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/3/73</td>
<td>Co-ordinator presents team approach to run Centre each day or night to have a permanent team of staff and vols to run Centre. (This resulted in staff having either 2 or 3 sessions each week).</td>
<td>M6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4/73</td>
<td>Learning Group started (Wednesday evening). Centre now open 6 days and 3 nights each week.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/4/73</td>
<td>Family meeting to discuss new formula for Income Supplement.</td>
<td>SFC &amp; TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/4/73</td>
<td>Staff decided each member should develop an area of expertise e.g. employment, housing, legal etc.</td>
<td>SCI</td>
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### SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/4/73</td>
<td>Family members meet after a meal prepared by themselves for staff and members to elect a Committee of Management. Nominations were like a popularity poll, people knew little about voting methods. Committee of ten elected: 8 family members, 1 staff member, 1 volunteer (proportions were a staff suggestion).</td>
<td>FCI, SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and 19/4/73</td>
<td>Two special staff meetings to discuss the role of casework in the Open Centre.</td>
<td>SCI, SSC, TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/4/73</td>
<td>First Committee of Management meeting.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/4/73</td>
<td>Easter Family Camp.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5/73</td>
<td>Continuation of special staff meetings to discuss the role of casework in the Open Centre.</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5/73</td>
<td>Combined Staff/Vol meeting</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/5/73</td>
<td>Families through Committee of Management request Centre should be open on Thursday.</td>
<td>FCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/5/73</td>
<td>Committee of Management requests transport arrangements to and from Centre at night and on Sundays and that staff give their views on charging for Centre activities.</td>
<td>TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Family Centre News Bulletin distributed (run jointly by 1 staff and 1 family centre member).</td>
<td>STP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-25/5/73</td>
<td>Two camps (1 for children between 6 and 10 years and 1 for adolescents)</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/5/73</td>
<td>Committee of Management discuss staff views on payment for activities then set up their own sub-committee to suggest principles of operation (sub-committee made up of 1 staff, 1 C. of M. member).</td>
<td>TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/6/73</td>
<td>Committee of Management (1) change times for Sunday operation from 3-11 to 12-8; (2) decide friends and visitors will not be allowed to visit Centre on Wednesday night which is to be &quot;skill achievement&quot; night.</td>
<td>FCI, SCI, STP</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff decide to dispense with main workers and to develop staff as resource people.</td>
<td>STP, SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/6/73</td>
<td>Staff/Vol Training camp</td>
<td>STP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/6/73</td>
<td>Committee of Management (1) requests staff to work out roles and responsibilities of Staff and Committee of Management in the Centre. (2) Approves staff suggestion of a special night for adolescents so adolescent night starts. (Centre now open 6 days and 4 nights each week). (3) Sets up a sub-committee of staff and</td>
<td>SFC, TPI, TPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
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<td>INDICATORS</td>
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<tr>
<td>21/6/73</td>
<td>Staff respond to C. of M. request to work out roles and responsibilities of each group by suggesting a joint meeting.</td>
<td>TPI, STP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/6/73</td>
<td>C. of M. 1) accept staff offer of joint meeting and suggest 12/7/73. 2) accept election sub/committee's ideas of arrangements for election including secret ballot, nomination forms, returning officers.</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>