

# Social Definition in Child Care in the Irish Republic: Models of the Child and Child-care Intervention

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*Précis:* This paper developed from a case study of an Irish child-care institution and considers some fundamental definitions in child care in the Irish Republic. Three main aspects are explored: the transition from a social risk to a deprived model of the child under the influence of an emergent child-care movement; the evolution of a developmental model of child-care intervention in official reports of the 'sixties and 'seventies, in contrast to the segregation and training model obtaining since the inception of the Industrial School System; and the role of definitions of the child in care in boundary maintenance mechanisms. This paper argues for the analysis of the cognitive and evaluative bases of child-care thought and recommends a number of topics for socio-historical, conceptual and empirical research.

## I INTRODUCTION

This paper urges that we consider as worthy of attention and research the internal logic of child-care thought and practice in the Irish Republic, its emergence, persistence and change, and the social values and interests involved (cf. Young, 1971). By way of an initial attempt at analysis in this direction, a number of concepts and practices in Irish child care are explored in terms of their assumptions and social derivation, and a variety of suggestions for further research are made.

Both the substance and thrust of the argument developed here originated in the course of a case study of an Irish child-care institution (described at the time as an Industrial School) carried out in the early 1970s and referred to here as the Research School. While the focus of the study was on the socialisation processes within the Research School, it became obvious that the manner in which the school was organised, the nature of staff-pupil relationships and staff roles could only be fully understood when seen in the

context of changing definitions of certain fundamental concepts in child care. This had the effect of widening the perspective of the study to a consideration of child care in general in the Irish Republic, both in its contemporary and historical states. In this article the focus on the Research School remains, though it is now seen within the macro-world of national and international ideas on child care and social and cultural change. The data used are derived, in the main, from official reports — Research School documents and observation and interviews within the school — while the theoretical orientation is derived from the Schutzian tradition of sociology, particularly as enunciated by Berger and Luckmann (1971).

## II SOCIAL MODELS IN CHILD CARE

Drawing particularly on the phenomenological sociology of Schutz (1964), Berger and Luckmann (1971) argue that the manner in which we define, interpret and explain social phenomena and situations is itself a result of social processes. Even if one excludes those studies which are explicitly phenomenological, the suggestion that critical definitions in child care are socially derived can be found in many commentaries on child care and correction. This is particularly true of studies (e.g., Heywood, 1959, and Platt, 1969) which link innovations in child care and correction with the ideas and fashions of the time concerning the family and city life, with the prevailing social philosophy of the era or with the background and interests of social reformers. In Ireland there is little to indicate an awareness of the social derivation of ideas and practices in child care. What meagre research exists is etiological in nature, being almost exclusively concerned with the social, educational and psychological characteristics of children coming into care (Flynn *et al.*, 1967, Hart, 1970, Kennedy, 1970, McQuaid, 1971, and O'Connor, 1971), while more fundamental definitions of the child in care take the form of assumptions in debate and organisation and rarely become explicit. In this study we treat of a number of models and counter-models of the child in care and of child-care intervention. As used here models refer to ideal-type clusters of values, interests and typifications (a concept used by Schutz (1964) to describe the generalised knowledge of the recurring sameness of human individuals, course-of-action patterns, motives, and goals). We trace the fortunes of the social risk model of the child in which society's interests are pre-eminent and the transition to the deprived model, where the predicament of the child is seen as an affront to tenets of social justice. We show how a developmental model of child-care intervention came to replace that of segregation and training in official reports of the 'sixties and 'seventies and we speculate on links between the social location of the Research School staff and normal/pathological definitions of their pupils.

Considered within the sociology of knowledge, our focus is middle range, falling somewhere between the classical approach of intellectual history and the more recent concentration on the social construction of everyday realities (cf. Hamilton, 1974).

### *Social Risk and Segregation and Training Models*

In the extension of the Industrial School system to Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century, the social risk model of the child prevailed. The "discovery" of vagrancy and destitution as pre-delinquent had been seen as a matter of public concern (Cussen, 1936, p. 7) and the Industrial School system, designed to prevent juvenile and adult crime through anticipatory intervention among those deemed to constitute a social risk, was introduced to Ireland in 1868. The assumptions of the social risk model are most apparent in the justification of the system by the Lord Chancellor to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland in 1870 (O'Hagan, 1870). The Industrial School system, he hoped, would prevent those "who are cast abroad as waifs and strays on the world . . . from developing into the criminal preying upon society whilst he is at large, and becoming a burden to it when it is forced to pay for his punishment". He spoke of such a system "giving so many useful citizens to the State — so many immortal souls to heaven" and rescuing thousands "from lives of penury and sin" who would have "lived and died in crime and misery — enemies of God and man". We find nothing in this model of the "innocence" (Ariès, 1962) of childhood, nothing of the moral indignation at the very exposure of children to the experience of destitution and vice. What had to be guarded against were the consequences of such exposure in terms of increased crime rates. Its concern was for society and, it could be argued, for certain social groups, rather than for individual welfare. Child-care intervention was seen in the same vein as was education for the working-classes in the nineteenth century — as a means of social control rather than of individual fulfilment (cf. Davies, 1976). Moreover, if we look at the nature of the information about pupils considered worthy of attention in the Research School records and at the manner of its recording, we find, even up to recent times, little recognition of the reality of individual differences. The necessity to place the child in a series of administrative categories — reason for committal, length of committal and religion — is predominant in the information made available to the school and recorded in the school register. Personalised information is confined to educational standard and physical characteristics. Similarly, in the school diary differentiation of pupils in terms of background, experience and personal attributes is rare and in the instances where a pupil's response to the school is recorded there appears an almost total

failure to appreciate either the predictability of a differentiated response among the pupil body or its etiology in the individuality of the pupil.

With those labelled as a social risk perceived as a group problem, the solution of segregation and training is formulated in a global fashion, stressing the overall experience of the child-care institution and its impact on the formation of the child (cf. Jones, 1968). From the Research School records, Department of Education annual reports and the Cussen Report (1936) on the Industrial and Reformatory School system, it would appear that a tripartite programme of physical care, literary and manual instruction and moral formation, undifferentiated either within the schools or, indeed, between industrial and reformatory schools, was considered to be multi-functional and to constitute a suitable training, not alone for those who had come into care due to poverty or desertion, but also for those who had committed a variety of offences. An over-riding faith in the efficacy of this programme pervades the Research School records and is particularly in evidence in commentaries on the careers and fortunes of ex-pupils. Such was the confidence in school effects that a system of vocational placement and foster-care does not appear to have been considered before the promptings of the Cussen Report (1936). The impression is given that vocational success and adjustment to the outside world are to be expected, and there is more than a hint of indignation in the recording of unfavourable reports on ex-pupils, as for instance in the case of the pupil who was said to be "not doing well": "He is selling papers on the streets of Ballyheavey<sup>1</sup>." This view of the child-care institution as an effective agent of socialisation is itself a reflection of a belief in the critical role of education in social and political formation which remained unchallenged up until the 1960s (O'Sullivan, 1972). Indeed, a central feature of the segregation and training model is a curious merging of sociologistic and psychologistic faiths: the child once removed from potentially corrupting circumstances will develop within the environment of the institution such personality traits as will insulate him against these and similar corrupting forces on his release. The impact of environment on personality and the resistance of personality to environment are at once affirmed.

In both social risk and segregation and training models the perspective is that of the system rather than the child. The child is seen as a potential threat to society rather than someone with needs and rights. The child-centred theme in the organisation of child care and the treatment of childhood and adolescence as particular phases of social, emotional and cognitive development are scarcely in evidence before the Cussen Report and had to wait until the 1960s before they were to attain a fuller recognition. The suggestion that the child in care has been denied life circumstances to which he could

1. A fictitious name for a small Irish town.

justifiably make claim is similarly rare in the early years of the system. Two interesting instances in which these ideas appear to have been anticipated are worthy of mention.

One instance emerges in the defence of the social risk model of the child against the counter-model of delinquency. The contention that industrial schools were reformatories of a milder kind, and corrective rather than educational in character, had existed almost from the inception of the system (Hunter, 1970). A number of structural features such as the provision that a child under 12 years charged with a punishable offence could be sent to an industrial rather than a reformatory school, the similarity in their programmes, and the administrative link between the system and the prison service, not finally severed until 1928, had contributed to this image. The transfer of responsibility for the system to the Minister for Education in 1928 appears to have been an instance of attempts on the part of the newly-formed Free State Government to refute the delinquent model of the industrial school child. This is particularly in evidence in the second annual report of the Department of Education (in fact it covered both 1925/26 and 1926/27) in which there appeared a scathing attack (a unique phenomenon in such a report) on the ideas of the Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools whom it considered responsible for the interpretation that industrial schools were reformatories of a milder kind:

. . . he criticised managers of some of the schools for not restricting the dietary of the pupils to what was vitally necessary, it being his opinion that unless dietaries were so limited they "afforded a premium for the commission of crime"! Many of the prejudices which for several years proved injurious to young people who had been in Industrial Schools because they had suffered from want of food and care in early years, although they had committed no offence, may be attributed to the "completely changed" policy given to the system (Department of Education, 1925-27, p. 86).

There is evidence here of a changing view of the child; he is given some consideration as an injured party, there is an element of social criticism and the child as a person is moving into focus. Yet in subsequent Departmental annual reports up to the end of the 1930s and in the Cussen Report (1936) it was considered sufficient to defend the social risk model against that of delinquency by reference to the predominance of children committed to industrial schools because of poverty and neglect. An earlier instance is provided where characterisations of the child as injured or deprived become useful as a foil to attest to the magnanimity and generosity of those involved in child care. In announcing the establishment of Letterfrack Industrial

School, the *Irish Builder* (1886) reported that the religious congregation responsible was acting "with that commendable zeal which had made their Order famous for its broad charity, and a desire to benefit those 'waifs and strays' of society, who, but for them, would be forgotten in a busy world". Similar hints of a modified social risk model of the child are also to be found in the laudatory comments of visitors to industrial schools (cf. Knox, 1894 and 1903). This tendency for legitimating mechanisms to contribute to cultural change has been recognised by Berger and Luckmann (1971, p. 125) in the context of religious thought.

### *Deprived and Developmental Models*

A fundamental change of emphasis with regard to neglected, orphaned and illegitimate children is to be found in the Cussen Report of 1936. Throughout its deliberations the possibility of such children drifting into crime and thus posing a potential threat to society was not as explicit as it had been in the nineteenth century. Exhortations to protect society from the children of the "perishing and dangerous classes" were conspicuously absent. While the obvious social benefits for society of an adequate child-care system were not minimised, the individual child's welfare was recognised more than heretofore. The focusing of attention on the child seems to have coincided with a similar turning point in the treatment of young offenders in England (cf. Ford, 1975). This indication of a change of emphasis apart, however, the Cussen Report in its acceptance both of institutionalisation and of a narrow definition of adequate care failed to anticipate two primary features of the developmental model of intervention.

A disenchantment with institutionalisation as a form of intervention is evident in the recommendation of such alternatives as adoption and boarding out in both the Report of the Commission on Mental Handicap (Briscoe, 1965) and of the Commission on Mental Illness (Henchy, 1966). By 1970 the developmental model's antipathy to institutionalisation can be seen to permeate the first major recommendation of the Kennedy Report on the Industrial and Reformatory School system: "The committal or admission of children to Residential Care should be considered only when there is no satisfactory alternative" (Kennedy, 1970, p. 6). In the same sequence of reports there is a departure from the narrow conception of care in terms of physical needs to encompass psychological and emotional dimensions of developmental tasks. In particular, the Mental Handicap report argued that many institutionalised children fail to realise their potential through "loss of firm ties of affection, lack of stimulation and absence of suitable adults to provide a feeling of security" (Briscoe, 1965, p. 124), while the Kennedy Report asserted the need to "reorientate our thinking" so as to lay "primary emphasis" on "the child's needs to enable him to develop into maturity and

to adjust himself satisfactorily to . . . society" (Kennedy, 1970, p. 12). In its emphasis on security and emotional attachment and in its antipathy to institutionalisation, the developmental model of intervention reflects the climate of thought on child care popularised by Bowlby's (1953) *Child Care and the Growth of Love*<sup>2</sup>.

While the adoption of a developmental model of child-care intervention in official reports indicated a recognition of the multi-faceted needs of the child in care and served to firmly establish the child at the centre of attention and concern, it was the emerging child-care movement of the early 'seventies which most successfully proclaimed the failure to cater for these developmental needs as constituting deprivation. A number of factors served to enhance the legitimacy of the emerging child-care movement — in particular, associations such as CARE (Campaign for the Care of Deprived Children) established at the end of 1970 (CARE, 1972). There was, for instance, the international concern for deprived children which had manifested itself in the 1960s in the massive influx of money into compensatory educational programmes in the United States and in the Plowden Report's (1967) concept of "positive discrimination" and Educational Priority Areas. There had also been much activity in child care in Great Britain with the Kilbrandon Report (1964), in particular, receiving considerable attention in Ireland. The professionalisation of human caring had also been developing to the extent that a significant number of social workers and, to a lesser extent, psychologists, attuned to contemporary thinking on social justice and deprivation, were available to add their support to child-care movements. This application of changing interpretations of equality to the life circumstances of children who come into care, mediated to the public through conferences, publications and considerable media coverage, was to be one of the major sources of the "discovery" of the deprived child in Ireland.

The fact that child-care definitions in official reports or social movements change is no indication that child-care practices will be harmoniously modified. Indeed, the phenomenon of cultural lag is relatively predictable in essentially conservative organisations such as child-care institutions. Frequently, aspects of the schools' organisation, formulated in accordance with a particular model, outlive the model itself. An example of this is provided in the nature of the information about pupils supplied to the Research School by the allocating agency for those pupils who formed

2. It is hoped to deal with recent trends in this area in a future article. Briefly, such recent initiatives as the elaboration of a Government Youth Policy (Department of Education, 1977), the establishment of Neighbourhood Youth Projects (Task Force on Child Care Services, 1975) and Community Care Programmes (McKinsey, 1971) have served to institutionalise the developmental models of preventive and supportive intervention.

the school population as recently as June, 1971.<sup>3</sup> This information falls into two principal categories – that of home background and institutional deviant career. Information relating to at least one aspect of the home background was provided in the case of 47 per cent of the pupils, and information concerning at least one aspect of the pupil's institutional/deviant career was made available in 35 per cent of the cases. In a breakdown of the particular aspects of home background for which information was made available to the school, it emerged that material characteristics were most frequently recorded, family size, parental income and physical conditions of the home being recorded for about one-third of the pupils. By contrast, information about other members of the family was infrequently recorded, information concerning fathers, mothers and siblings having been made known in 10 per cent, five per cent and six per cent of the cases, respectively. This information consisted of short comments such as "Father unemployed for health reasons", "Mother idle and dissolute character" and "Both brothers have criminal records". In the case of institutional deviant career, the nature and extent of the damage involved in the offence for which pupils have been committed to the Research School were the most frequently recorded. "Spent money on luxuries", "Easter eggs (value: £6.02½p) stolen from supermarket; eaten or destroyed", and "Stole drink, bicycle and clothes to the value of £34.19p" are typical examples.

What is most striking about the information supplied to the school, apart from its paucity, is the neglect of the pupil as a developing individual with social, cognitive and emotional needs and dispositions. There is, for instance, no recorded instance of a report from a psychologist or social worker in connection with any of these pupils, the information concerning home background provides little insight into the quality of family life in the pupils' homes, and the documentation relating to the institutional/deviant career of the pupils appears more concerned with the damage done to society than with the individual involved and the circumstances of his actions. The fact, then, that at a time when, in particular, official definitions in child care stressed the child and his development, information about the child which is considered sufficiently important to be officially recorded and made available to the school reflects social risk and segregation and training models, and acts as a salutary reminder to those who fail to appreciate the complex nature of the diffusion and adoption of official ideas and policies. And in the same manner as the nature and content of pupil records are much more than mere anomalies, in that they reflect particular models in child care, their continued use can be seen as a meaningful phenomenon, being in the case of the Research School related to the boundary maintenance problems of the

3. The pupil population of the school was less than a hundred at this time; to preserve confidentiality, the exact number is not given.



school staff. As we shall see below, it makes good organisational sense (Garfinkel, 1967) not to know too much about pupils, and particularly not to have what is known given a legitimacy, permanence, and transferability through official recording (Wheeler, 1969), in that it permits greater subjectivity in the categorisation of the pupil, with its attendant flexibility in goal setting, definition of school function and in the handling of prescriptions from external sources.

### *Normal/Pathological Models*

Increasingly, in the 'sixties and 'seventies, the staff of the Research School were to find themselves the victims of social and cultural change. Though the professionalisation of human caring had been expanding, resulting in the outflow of social workers, in particular, from the universities, staff training for those in the Industrial and Reformatory School system lagged considerably behind. Indeed, such was the situation that those who came nearest to professional competence in the area of child care were, in the main, working outside of the Industrial and Reformatory School system and vocal in the child-care movement. Whereas regular school systems and their personnel can be, and frequently are, subjected to demands and prescriptions from external organisations and individuals (cf. Gross, 1958), the situation whereby professionalism in the activity under discussion is more a feature of the external pressure groups is quite unique and, when it occurs, is likely to enhance the legitimacy of these pressure groups to comment and prescribe. While the legitimacy of external pressure groups was being enhanced in this manner, that of the schools' staff, almost totally religious, was being undermined by the questioning of the role of religious, both in education generally (FIRE Report, 1973) and in child care (cf. Stanislaus, 1971).

There had been a considerable decline in numbers admitted to industrial schools, particularly since 1950, though those committed because of an indictable offence had increased their representation and had come to be concentrated in three schools, the Research School included (O'Connor, 1963). Having been established to cater for "waifs and strays", the Research School now found itself in the role of junior reformatory. The child-care movement, speaking from its legitimated position, was to wax indignant at this mixing of "offenders" and "non-offenders" and the school was to be the object of repeated criticism for its failure to segregate the two categories of pupils. Other frequent criticisms related to its isolated location, institutional nature and inadequate staffing and facilities. And this was occurring at a time when the future of the Research School was being discussed at parliamentary level and by the religious congregation responsible for it. The response of the school staff was to provide a basis for speculation on some processes in the social definition of the child in care. In fact, it is argued

that, in the staff response, definitions of the child came to be an important facet of boundary maintenance mechanisms.

Mention has already been made of the paucity of information made available to the Research School concerning the pupils' backgrounds and personalities and of the absence of professional reports and assessments from psychologists and social workers. Nor was it known how pupils came to be categorised as "indictable offenders", "lacking in proper guardianship" and "school non-attenders"; our own analysis failed to identify any meaningful differences between the categories in terms of age, socio-economic background, family size, stability and structure, educational progress and previous court appearance (O'Sullivan, 1977). In short, there was nothing in the information about pupils conveyed to the Research School which demanded acceptance by the staff as legitimated categorisation, be it on the basis of professional or legislative authority.

Davies (1973) has pointed out that "in the absence of sufficient agreed objective information about their (children's) attributes, and the attributes of knowledge and effective learning situations, beliefs or values about all of these things assume a greatly magnified importance". In their everyday characterisation of the pupils, the staff, apparently quite unconsciously and without ulterior motive, alternate in their appeal to models — one normal, the other pathological. On the one hand, the child is seen as someone who has been removed from an unfavourable environment. If he has been charged with an indictable offence, the parents and the environment they created are blamed; he is seen as lacking in culpability, having reacted in a predictable manner to his environment. Above all, he is considered to have suffered no psychological damage; he is a "normal child", no different from any other except in relation to the background from which he has been removed. On the other hand, the child is seen in distinctly pathological terms. Whatever their origin — the role of parents is not highlighted — the child is considered to possess distinctly deviant traits that must be guarded against. He is seen as abnormally self-protective and to this end is devious, cunning and untrustworthy. A feature of the use of these models is the reluctance by the staff to differentiate *within* the pupil body in these terms. Whatever model is appealed to in interaction is applied to the pupils as a group, though individual pupils may be used to explain or substantiate particular facets of the model.

In one of the institutions studied by Strauss *et al.* (1964, p. 353), they recorded that among staff with no psychiatric training "lay philosophies predominated and were accommodated to institutional conditions". In the case of the Research School staff, their ambivalence in the definition of the pupil population as either normal or pathological needs to be seen in the light of external pressures and criticisms and in relation to the holding

operation being performed by a staff awaiting a formal declaration on the future of the school. Some relevant variables are listed in Table 1. These relate to the perceptions of the staff concerning government and congregational plans for the Research School, the role of the congregation in child care, and their attitudes and response to the prescriptions of pressure groups within the child-care movement. The nature of these perceptions and attitudes was quite variable and complex and can only be represented in global terms in Table 1. Perceptions of government and congregational plans for the school are presented as anticipating either closure or development. Perceptions of the role of the congregation in child care yield three possibilities: provision for non-offenders only, the rehabilitation of delinquents or a withdrawal from child care entirely. The categorisation used to describe reactions to pressure groups was devised by setting Litwak and Meyer's (1965) open, swinging and locked door approaches to community linkages in the context of Berger and Luckmann's (1971) analysis of social responses to alternative definitions of reality. A central and recurring theme throughout these variables was that of boundary maintenance, both in relation to congregation and school — the relationship between the vocation of the staff and the nature of child care, the implications of government investment in school redevelopment for congregational control, and the inevitability of having to incorporate other than congregational members in the work of the school if the recommendations of the child-care movement, particularly with regard to specialised staff, were to be acceded to. Discussions with members of the congregation and a consideration of its history suggested that these boundary maintenance problems were part of a wider concern for the identity of the congregation at a time of considerable educational change in Ireland (cf. Erikson, 1966).

In Table 2 we list some of the combinations of variables which appeared to be associated with normal and pathological perceptions of the pupils. While the establishment of causation is always a hazardous exercise, it appeared, in observing the emergence of these combinations, that the definition of pupils as either normal or pathological was in many cases a response to them. In general it can be seen that normal perceptions of pupils were associated with redevelopment plans for the Research School by the congregation and/or the government, linked to a "non-offender only" definition of congregational role. The most frequently recorded combination associated with the pathological perception was congregational and governmental closure plans linked to a "non-offender only" definition of congregational role. Pattern F was very rare, though some staff appear to accept a role for the congregation in the area of delinquency treatment, and where this was linked to redevelopment plans the pathological model was dominant. Reaction to the prescriptions of pressure groups was typically one of

Table 1: Variables relevant to staff adoption of normal/pathological models of pupils.

<i>Perception of Congregation's most likely decision on the future of the Research School</i>	<i>Perception of government's plans for Research School</i>	<i>Perception of Congregation's role in child care</i>	<i>Reactions to pressure groups prescriptions</i>
Closure in the near future	Closure in the near future	Non-offender only	Openness
Redevelopment with the aid of government investment	Investment and redevelopment	Delinquency treatment only	Filtration
		No role in either area	Nihilation

Table 2: Clusters of variables associated with staff adoption of normal/pathological models of pupils

	<i>Perception of Congregation's most likely decision on the future of the Research School</i>	<i>Perception of government's plans for Research School</i>	<i>Perception of Congregation's role in child care</i>	<i>Reactions to pressure group's prescriptions</i>
Normal perception of pupils	A. Redevelopment B. Redevelopment C. Closure	Redevelopment Closure Redevelopment	Non-offender only Non-offender only Non-offender only	Nihilation Filtration Filtration
Pathological perception of pupils	D. Closure E. Closure F. Redevelopment	Closure Redevelopment Redevelopment	Non-offender only Non-offender only Delinquency Treatment	Nihilation Openness Openness

nihilation; the validity of the prescriptions was challenged by pointing to their non-practitioner origin ("well-meaning do-gooders"; "theoretical psychologists"; "people who have no knowledge of what it's really like here", etc.), though they could be used with varying degrees of filtration and openness to handle undesired discrepancies between perceived congregational and governmental plans for the school. Generally, when closure rather than redevelopment was desired, as in pattern E, the validity of external prescriptions was accepted and marshalled in support, whereas when the opposite was desired, as in patterns B and C, staff use of external prescriptions was more guarded and selective. A very frequent instance of nihilation as a response was the dismissing of the "failure to segregate 'offenders' and 'non-offenders'" criticism of the child-care movement by proclaiming the homogeneity of the pupil population. The actual definition employed, be it normal or pathological, depended on the accompanying criticism, the pupils' "normality" being stressed in denying the need for specialised psychological/psychiatric staff, while their pathological nature was emphasised to highlight the naivety of arguing for the employment of house-mothers or a sexually-mixed pupil population.

It seemed likely that with more intensive study of staff orientations it would have been possible to identify sub-varieties of these two models, as well as varying degrees of commitment to them, in association with complexes of external and internal conditions pertaining to boundary maintenance. What our findings suggest, and their suggestive rather than conclusive nature must be stressed, is the existence of an ambivalence, subject to situational fluctuations, among staff in the definition and explanation of the personalities and behaviour of the pupils in the school.

### III RESEARCH ON SOCIAL DEFINITION IN CHILD CARE

The failure to make models of the child in care and of child-care intervention explicit and open to debate has been one of the most fundamental failings in child-care theory in Ireland. Criticism of existing provisions for children who come to the attention of the authorities for such reasons as desertion, ill-treatment and indictable offences is not lacking. Indeed, few aspects of child-care provision have escaped attention in this regard; judicial arrangements, assessment and placement, size, location and general organisation of institutions, and after care, for instance, have all been considered in need of innovation, particularly by the Kennedy Report (1970) and CARE (1972). Justifications of these innovations take the form of appeals to modern interpretations of social justice, developments in child-care provision in other countries and the findings of empirical research. Because of a tendency to reify these legitimating phenomena, they are unlikely to be

seen as end-products of social processes. Yet the rights of children are subject to considerable historical and cultural variations (Mead and Wolfenstein, 1955, and de Mause, 1974). Child care (Heywood, 1959, and Ford, 1975) and child-rearing (Ryerson, 1961, and Weiss, 1978) have seen a succession of wisdoms, and even such an apparently "objective" area of knowledge as empirical research findings, generated, it might be argued, by Mannheim's socially neutral intellectuals, is influenced by prevailing interests among research and funding bodies and, as mediated to laymen and para-professionals, by mass media, publishing interests and membership and reference groups. Inevitably, therefore, certain fundamentals in Irish child-care thought have remained unexplored. There has been little semblance of a "deprived/depraved" (Sparks, 1969) debate, though the distinction is central to allocation and placement and to the controversy on the mixing of "offenders" and "non-offenders". Nor does there appear to be any recognition that the needs of children as identified via the developmental model are "culture-bound" in terms of current Irish social reality (see also Bernstein and Davies, 1969); the Kennedy Report's (1970, p. 12) exhortation that the industrial school pupil should be helped to "adjust himself satisfactorily to the society in which he lives", for instance, begs a series of questions relating to "society" and "satisfactory adjustment" to it. Two broad areas of research are indicated: socio-historical studies of child-care definitions and the construction of models through conceptual and empirical elaboration.

#### *Socio-Historical Research*

We confined our analysis of the historical background of child-care theory for the most part to official reports. It is scarcely necessary to emphasise that those invited to act on such committees are unlikely to be other than mainstream in their thought. Yet even within these limits it would be informative to learn how these reports came to be written — in particular, how different ideas came to be impressed upon the committee members, by whom and with what effect. This would involve an analysis of the terms of reference, the submissions invited and received, the social and intellectual biographies of the members, and above all the committee's minutes, all of this to be set in its historical and social context. A particular analysis that could prove rewarding is that of the antagonistic response of the Free State Department of Education, or of individuals within it, in the 1920s to some of the child-care ideas proclaimed during British rule. Such an analysis could be usefully located in the response of a post-colonial society to the ideas of its former masters. If the heated outburst of the 1925–27 report of the Department of Education was found to represent a meaningful reaction against earlier child-care ideas, it could well represent a rare example of

educational innovation (albeit in theory) in the early years of the State that was not purely nationalistic in motivation. More generally, it should prove useful to examine the function of official reports, the impact and uptake of their ideas, and their contribution to the formation of social policy and legislation (May and Smith, 1970).

Research of this nature can also be extended in terms of the differential diffusion and adoption of child-care ideas in Irish society. Certain individuals and groups anticipate ideas before they become mainstream in acceptance and ideas are maintained by some after they have lost this status. It is interesting to note, for instance, that a very rare example of support for the integration of "offenders" and "non-offenders" in Irish child-care institutions is to be found in *Some of Our Children* (Tuairim, 1966), compiled by the London branch of Tuairim at a time when such a suggestion was being debated in England. Yet it was the Kilbrandon Report and particularly the Scottish system of family courts which has most influenced the ideas of the child-care movement in the Irish Republic (CARE, 1974).

Considering their near-total monopoly of Irish child-care institutions, the role of religious congregations in the history of child-care ideas is critical. Religious developments such as the Reformation (Blyth, 1967) and the emergence of religious teaching orders (Ariès, 1962) have in the past been identified with changing definitions of childhood. Many questions arise in the Irish context. Did the religious congregations anticipate the deprived model of the child in the last century when they, rather than the local authorities, assumed responsibility for child care? Or were they, too, influenced by the social risk model with, perhaps, a strong moral loading? Would a concern about a moral risk for girls explain the fact that in 1869, for instance, when Irish industrial schools were first certified, only two of the twenty-one schools certified catered for boys?

Of more universal significance in the evolution of child-care thought are changing interpretations of children's rights (Takanishi, 1978), a local instance of which is the precedence given to the welfare of the child "as the first and paramount consideration" in the Adoption Act of 1974. No doubt demographic and economic considerations are involved in the changing legal status of children; a decline in birth rates makes individual children more valuable and precious, while economic progress makes guarantees of fundamental life chances more feasible (Meyer and Nagel, 1975). Recent attempts in a number of cultures (Chamboredon and Prévot, 1975, Bell, 1978, and Schlossman, 1978) to socially situate the interaction between definitions of the needs and rights of children and the nature, location and obligations of women in the context of an ideology of maternal domesticity suggest that changing interpretations of children's rights might also be usefully viewed in relation to the feminist movement and the de-

reification of traditional conceptions of the female role. In particular, one wonders if the phenomenon of "independent woman", whose fulfilment within marriage is not seen to demand child-bearing or child-rearing, creates the need for children to have their rights established more definitively than when normative controls stemming from the "good mother" role were considered sufficient. And in the same manner as the "independent woman" within the family is seen in isolation from children, perhaps we are now beginning to witness the emergence of the "independent child" whose existence is also seen in isolation from parents and whose rightful need to develop is considered to justify liberation from his family on the basis of pretexts dismissed in the past as inevitable variations between privatised families.

*Model Construction: Conceptual and Empirical Elaboration*

The models of the child in care and of child-care intervention which we have used could benefit from further refinement and elaboration. A basis for this is to be found in a more extensive application of *typification*, as earlier defined, and in a further Schutzian concept, *relevance* (as used by Berger and Luckman, 1971, to refer to the internal relevance structure of bodies of knowledge which, given the problem in hand, selectively guide attention in what are considered to be "worthwhile" directions), as well as in McHugh's (1970) concepts of *conventionality* (the degree of inevitability of an act) and *theoreticity* (the extent of the actor's awareness of alternatives to his act). Once developed, these models should facilitate the identification of the variety of understandings and explanations of the behaviour and personality of children in care that exist in society, as well as the different interpretations of how intervention is understood to operate and influence (O'Sullivan, 1976). As an obvious beginning there is a need to know the models held by such significant groupings as apprehension and judicial agents, child-care personnel, those associated with the child-care movement, and two groupings rarely considered in this regard, the children themselves and their parents.

Within the court system there is some indication that the segregation and training model is still influential. In an analysis of the terms of committal of those sent to the Research School during the five-year period 1967/71 (O'Sullivan, 1977), it was found that those who had come through the Metropolitan Children's Court in Dublin, significantly the only full-time children's court in the Republic, were less likely to be committed for the maximum term — that is, until they reached the age of sixteen — than pupils from courts in other parts of the country. (This, in effect, meant that some pupils were committed for up to seven or eight years.) In terms of



actual years, those coming from the Metropolitan Children's Court received, on average, approximately half the committal term of the other pupils.

The rhetoric of the Department of Justice in setting up Loughan House as a secure unit suggests a modification of the segregation and training model, with the training element being replaced by "treatment"; the juvenile offenders involved are considered to be maladjusted and in need of specialised help, as in the case of physical illness, to cure the underlying "disease" of which the delinquent act is merely the presenting symptom (Matza, 1964). Given certain aspects of the reality of Loughan House, however – in particular, the employment of prison officers and the tendency for such secure units to represent a response to wider issues of social control than to the needs of young people (Millham *et al.*, 1978) – one wonders to what extent "the vocabulary of therapy has been exploited to serve a public relations function" (Allen, 1959). The tendency to re-label penal facilities without any accompanying change in practice has been highlighted in Britain by May (1971) and more recently he has contrasted rhetoric and reality in the operation of the children's panels in Scotland (May, 1977). According as our judicial/institutional arrangements for children change, as seems likely, it will be essential that we look in a similar manner at the relationship between the official presentation of the system and the alternative interpretations of the underlying realities (O'Sullivan, 1977).

The models subscribed to by child-care personnel and those in the child-care movement are likely to be particularly influential in formulating policy and practice. Yet, because of the involvement of such groups as social workers and psychologists in organisations such as CARE, much of the characteristic "disinterest" (Platt, 1969) of philanthropic movements is lost. There is, it could be argued, an interest to be declared on the part of child-care personnel who create clients for their profession through their "discovery" of new categories of children at risk and who extend their employment opportunities through moral exhortations concerning child-care provisions. Pfohl (1977), for instance, has suggested that the "discovery" of the "battered child syndrome" by paediatric radiologists in the United States covertly rewarded the group itself through status enhancement and functional expansion within organised medicine. The role of social workers, facing the inadequate employment opportunities for their profession in the 1960s, in the discovery of the deprived child could well prove a provocative topic for future research.

The inclusion of the child in care and his parents as groups whose ideas on child care are critical may surprise. As Clark (1960) was to argue in another context, the organisational problem of controlling a clientele that is continually within its walls is frequently solved by stressing the professional ability of the organisation's staff to know what is best for its clients. In the

case of such organisations as child-care institutions, the very fact of intervention further undermines the legitimacy of parents to determine what treatment their children should receive. No official report considering child care in the Republic has recorded attempts to determine how the children themselves interpret what is happening to them or how their parents perceive the experience of having their children brought into care. Viewing the child in care as subject rather than object in even the most superficial sense (Beyleveld and Wiles, 1975) is confined to a few studies (O'Connor, 1971, and O'Sullivan, 1977 and 1978). Yet it is these very groups who are the focus of intervention and the failure to consider their models is little short of proclaiming their inability to influence their own lives. And as Coleman (1976) has pointed out, it constitutes a serious inadequacy in a political democracy that policy research frequently ignores the ideas of those affected groups who are unlikely to have access to power centres or decision-making bodies.

Through research and analysis of this nature it is hoped that we will come to see the influence of our intellectual history, culture and social structure on our child-care ideas and be less inclined to view them in a "taken-for-granted" culture-bound fashion.

#### IV CONCLUSION

Inevitably it will be argued that the research we have recommended is essentially theoretical and can scarcely claim priority in a child-care system that has seen little change since its inception. A call for reform in one aspect or another would understandably evoke more sympathy and support. Nor would it be difficult to identify areas which "common-sense" interpretations suggest to be in need of reform. Yet what "makes sense" in one culture at a particular point in history may well be unique to its time and place.

It can also be claimed that attending to the social construction of our child-care ideas and practices is not without its practical implications for planned change. Socially situating child-care policy in interacting administrative and implementing contexts can heighten an awareness of the complex nature of the translation of an idea into practice. Recognising the existence of alternative definitions of both policy and the manner of its implementation to those held by professional and child advocacy bodies should encourage a greater realism and sensitivity in relation to the policy's target groups. A searching exploration of their rhetoric by those involved in the child-care debate might well reveal subtle differences and contrasts that tend to be concealed within the group consensus that is frequently created during times of conflict, as in the professional/man-in-the-street division in the Loughan House controversy. Without adequate elaboration and clarifi-

cation, differences of this nature can create considerable divergence, much of it concealed, at the implementation stage.

The plea of this paper, then, has been that we look critically at what seems "obvious" about the child who comes into care, about child-care objectives and intervention strategies — in short, that we divert some of our attention to the cultural, cognitive and evaluate bases of our child-care thought and practice.

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