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THE EXPERIENCE OF CHILD CARE WORKERS: A HERMENEUTIC INQUIRY

by

MICHAEL THOMAS REYNOLDS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

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DEDICATION

This thesis represents the completion of one circle and the beginning of another. I choose to dedicate it to the people who gave me life and enrich it on a daily basis, my family. With it I honor the memory of my father Thomas William Reynolds and celebrate the birth of my daughter Kathleen Marie Reynolds. The circle ends and begins anew. The remainder of us are still somewhere in the circle and each of you, in your own way, have given me gifts without which I would be incomplete. To all of you, my thanks and appreciation.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated what it means to be a front line child care worker employed in the context of group homes that service adolescents in care. The exploration was hermeneutical in nature. Three men and three women participated in hermeneutical conversations with the author. These dialogues yielded the themes of life experience, relationship, change, professionalism, and frustrations. The first level of interpretation focussed on the presentation of the workers' experiences as they described them. The themes were then interpreted in relation to research in child care, radical constructivism, and the cybernetic epistemology of Humberto Maturana. Conclusions were presented concerning the utility of hermeneutic methodology, and the application of Maturana's theory to the experiences of front line child care workers.

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There are many individuals who contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this exploration. I would like to acknowledge those people who made this work possible.

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I. INTRODUCTION

> We social scientists would do well to hold back our eagerness to control that world which we so imperfectly understand . . . Rather, our studies could be inspired by a more ancient, but today less honored motive: a curiosity about the world of which we are a part. The rewards of such work are not power but beauty.
>
> Gregory Bateson (1972, p. 269)

A. The Perspective

This research explores the experiences of child care workers who are employed in community based group homes designed to service the needs of adolescents in care. Although a rapidly expanding body of literature is developing concerning the roles, functions, and training of child care workers, there is little research that directly addresses how the workers construe their own experiences of this reality, and its impact on their lives. Three men and three women agreed to share and describe their experiences as front line child care workers with me, and they are the core of this study. As the researcher my task was to engage with them in a joint exploration such that a number of themes emerged that described the experience of doing child care work with adolescents in group homes. My task was also to connect and relate these experiences to a philosophical and

theoretical position that best fits my current construction of my reality as a psychologist, therapist, and researcher. You the reader are invited to participate by allowing yourself to enter into this work with what I hope is something close to Bateson's stance of curiosity about the experiences and descriptions shared with me by my co-researchers, and the connections drawn to the theory base described below.

A conceptual framework is evolving from the work of a group of theorists and practitioners which, in my opinion, represents the development of a new paradigm for examining living systems. The theoretical research and writing of Gregory Bateson, Heinz von Foerster, and Humberto Maturana in the area of cybernetic epistemology is generating a growing body literature within the field of family therapy. The philosophical position of radical constructivism, as explicated by Ernst von Glasersfeld and Paul Watzlawick, which is closely interwoven with the cybernetic framework, is adopted in this research and will be discussed at length in a later section. The premises of radical constructivism and cybernetics, which question the efficacy of singular alignment with the logical positivist vision of science, caused me to search for an alternate methodology through which my co-researchers and I could focus on understanding and interpreting their

experience, rather than objectifying it. Recent applications of the dialectical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (e.g., Bain, 1986) demonstrate that it is possible for the researcher to access and present what Bateson (1972; 1979) termed the "maps" of the individual's past and present experience as an active partner, rather than as an objective observer in the research process. This research integrates and applies the above conceptual frameworks to gain entry into understanding the constructed realities of six men and women whose focus is working with adolescents in community group homes.

Included are the perspectives of Watzlawick, Segal, Weakland, and other former and present members of the Mental Research Institute, whose commitment to expanding the horizons of the process and practice of therapy encouraged me to pursue this framework. The works of Dell, Tomm, and Keeney, who are attempting to integrate the concepts of Bateson and Maturana in their own work with clients are presented as a further indication of the efficacy of the perspective. While there are as many disparities as there are similarities in the above practitioner's attempts at applying system concepts to therapy with individuals and families, it is suggested that a common thread runs throughout their work. A perspective is emerging that will allow the possibility of

connection with the systems with which they are working to facilitate a "fit" with the client's model of reality, rather than the traditional empirical approach in which the focus is on discovering or revealing a "match" between the behavior of the client and generalizable "laws" of behavior.

Acceptance of this perspective necessitates a radical shift in epistemology and a reconstruction of the logical positivist view of science. Core concepts such as the notion of objectivity of the researcher, linear causality, feedback in open systems, and the role of the observer in research are viewed as one of an array of alternatives with the choice of model representing the distinction of the researcher, rather than a singularly correct or true representation of the persons or phenomena examined. The position selected for discussion in this research (Maturana, 1975; 1978; Maturana & Varela, 1975; 1980; 1988) perceives the individual to be actively engaged in constructing his or her own reality as a living autopoietic system. The system is an informationally closed unity, where logic and causality are circular and recursive, with each individual operating in the world as a product of the distinctions generated from the unique organization and structure developed as a living being interacting in various mediums. Application of this

perspective requires that core concepts including learning, cognition, and language be redefined to reflect the shift from acceptance of an externally verifiable reality. New usages of concepts such as computation, punctuation, languaging, pattern, and structural coupling are the points of entry into this examination of my co-researcher's constructions of their experiences of their work as front line child care workers.

It is proposed that the perspective being discussed in this research represents a new epistemology with significant implications in the field of psychotherapy and in the wider context of how we as humans organize, perceive, and act in what Bateson (1972; 1979) has termed the "multiverse". The present study is an initial exploration into the constructions of six individuals labelled "child care workers" in terms of how they describe themselves in relation to the work that they do. It is not intended to redefine a body of knowledge that philosophers and scientists have been grappling with for over two thousand years. What is hoped is through the exploration and application of what I perceive to be a number of core principles to these individuals, the possibilities of this perspective for describing and interacting with my own and my co-researcher's worlds will become more accessible and apparent. The following

section will outline the background and experiences that lead me to become curious about how child care workers view their work.

B. Evolution of the Study

I was first exposed to the work of Gregory Bateson as an undergraduate in psychology, and like many other people (cf. Wilder & Weakland, 1981) developed a fascination with the breadth and depth of his thinking about the world we live in, and an almost total frustration in my attempts to comprehend the concepts he presented in such a clear and simultaneously elusive manner. In many ways the present study represents another step in my search for understanding as a person who lives in the world, and a therapist who works in conjunction with others to allow them to understand and live in their own unique worlds. As the following chapter will indicate, Bateson has provided a base from which systems theory and cybernetics has grown into a multitude of theoretical and practical applications in widely diversified areas of study. In many ways, my personal development as a psychologist and therapist has paced these developments to their current and hopefully still changing position.

The evolution of this study is a reflection of my own evolution over the last ten years. As a student, and as a

private practice psychologist, I have dealt primarily with a client population of adolescents and their families, with a significant proportion of my clients being placed under the care and supervision of the Department of Family and Social Services. In ascending order of intrusiveness, placement options for children range from foster care in a surrogate family setting, to long term institutional placement, which is staff and treatment intensive. In the middle of this range is the group home setting in the community, and the majority of adolescents during their history of care are placed in one for varying lengths of time. These group homes vary in terms of their mandate (e.g. short term receiving vs. long term care and placement), their staffing structures, and the models that they employ to deliver treatment and service to their clients, but as a general rule attempt to house between three and six children between the ages of twelve and eighteen years of age.

My initial intention was to examine how these children describe their experience of care in this type of setting. As my personal focus began to shift to attending to and working with larger systems I became more directly involved with the men and women who staff the group homes, and their perceptions and experience of the work they were doing with the children. In part, this shift was a

reflection of my own movement from working almost exclusively as a therapist, to assuming the role of consultant and staff trainer to agencies whose primary mode of service delivery was the staffed group home. This in turn required more ongoing and intensive interaction with the staff. Of equal importance was the realization that while my contact with the children was usually limited to a one hour session on a weekly basis, the child care workers were interacting with the children in an intensive fashion for The Other 23 Hours (Trieshman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969) seven days a week in a wide range of areas pertaining to the child's development.

Phelan (1985) in describing the field of child care stated:

> In no other discipline is the extent of the intervention into the child's life space so complete. The child care counsellor must be extremely skilled in this most intrusive of all interventions and in the design of the therapeutic environment. Furthermore, the profession has the unique characteristic of uninterrupted contact with both the client group and the working team. This ongoing intensity of contact can be found in no other discipline. (p. 41)

As my own work evolved it became more apparent that the child care staff, and at a more macro level in some cases the agencies themselves, needed to be incorporated into the consensual reality at which an individual client and I would arrive. What I had initially assumed to be errors or misunderstandings in communication between myself and staff, which resulted in different and often contradictory approaches to working with a child, were more than that. What I was seeing was the individual worker's applications of their constructions of the needs of a child, and in a more general sense, their constructions regarding how care and service delivery should be implemented. To use Maturana and Varela's (1988) language, a consensual medium had not been created that allowed the individual systems (e.g. therapist, staff, and child) to become structurally coupled in such a way that a shared reality existed for all concerned to operate within. Without consensuality and coupling there was no possibility for coordinated conduct between the individuals involved.

As I began to listen to the needs and frustrations of the child care staff I found myself paying closer attention to their language. Terms such as behavior control or modification, power struggle, gaming, being set up or hooked, as well as many others occurred frequently in conversation. In addition, the workers saw themselves

as the primary treatment resource for the children. While I recognized that the language they used was part of my own history and training as a therapist, many of the concepts were seen by myself as either being no longer applicable in my own work, or were being used in different context. It became apparent that I needed to find ways of clearly presenting my own constructions regarding treatment and change, and develop a working model that would allow me to be more sensitive to the history and constructions of the workers, as well as the clients, so that interactions were of benefit to all parties involved.

The challenge, thus, became not only a matter of attending to the workers, but also attending to, and tracing my own evolution through the theory base to my present construction of reality as a therapist and a researcher. My adoption of the position of radical constructivism (Efran, Lukens, & Lukens, 1988; Kelly, 1955; Segal, 1986; von Foerster, 1981,1984; von Glasersfeld, 1984; Watzlawick, 1984), which proposes that the reality the individual perceives, and the behaviors that emerge, are a product of self referential constructions allowed for the development of a working perspective that was sensitive to the constructions of the child care workers. Beginning with the "double bind" hypothesis (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Berger, 1956;

Berger, 1978; Sluzki & Ransom, 1976), which Bateson was instrumental in proposing, a new perspective (cf. Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1982; Watzlawick, 1978; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1977; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974) has been developing which attends as much to the context of the systems individuals create and interact with, as to the unique behaviors of the people within the systems. Bateson's (1972; 1979) continued emphasis on the need to focus attention on relations and the patterns that are generated from them in a cybernetic framework had considerable impact on my perception and understanding of my role within any system. It was, however, the writings of Maturana and Varela (1975; 1988) and Maturana (1978; 1980) that suggested a perspective where a balance was reached in which the self, perceived as an organizationally closed autopoietic (i.e. self producing or creating) unity could couple with other unities, in such a manner that the mutual perturbations would allow changes in the structures of both systems. As will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, I would suggest this theory base to meet the requirements of the present study in that it attends to systems, the environment, and the individual organism, with the focus being on the latter.

In addition to developing a perspective for the examination of living systems, Maturana and von Foerster (Segal, 1986) have a clearly defined position on the role of the observer in the research process in science. Whether the observer is commenting on his or her own personal distinctions regarding the structure and patterns that determine their reality, or is coupled with another observer who is creating distinctions regarding the structure and patterns of another person, all of the above authors see the principle point of entry into the system to be that of the language employed in the descriptive process. The notion of an empirically verifiable objective reality where the perceptions and history of the observer does not effect the system being studied is posited to be patently impossible in that all each of us has, as a self organizing unity, to perceive and interpret our reality is the sum total of history of experience. To suggest that we can suspend our experience in such a way as to observe another system without bias is to suggest that it is possible to dissociate ourselves from the very organization and structure that maintains each one of us as a living system.

The evolution of the study is thus a reflection of my own personal and professional development. By aligning with the constructivist position and the closed system

approach of Maturana, I have become more aware of my own process of creating distinctions. It is the personal language and distinctions employed by the child care workers in conversation with me that allowed me entry into their realities of self and work. The dialectical hermeneutics of Gadamer (1975; 1976; Palmer, 1969) provided a frame for the exploration of the maps the co-researchers generated, both as a guide during the immediacy of the conversations, and in my interactions with the transcriptions of the conversations. In the following chapter the rationale for selecting Gadamer's perspective as the methodological base for this study, and its connection to the theory under discussion will be examined in detail.

C. Purpose of the Study

The starting point of this study was the question "How do you, as a front line child care worker, describe your experience of working with adolescents in the group home context?". The question represented the initial step in a process of mutual exploration in which the six men and women, who were my co-researchers, with me following their lead, entered their world of distinctions and personal constructions about the experience of doing front line child care work with adolescents in group homes.

Thus, the initial purpose of the study was to attend to, and validate, the personal realities of my six co-researcher's constructions of themselves as child care workers, the children that they work with, and the systems that they work within. As a result of this process, themes emerged, which were common to all my co-researchers, concerning different aspects of their realities. These themes will be presented with extensive usage of direct quotations to allow you the reader an opportunity to engage in your own dialogue with the text. Finally, my purpose was to relate the constructions, distinctions, and patterns that the co-researchers generated to the concepts and constructions in the areas of radical constructivism and cybernetic epistemology, which serve as my current framework for research and practice.

This study was an initial exploration into the world of child care in a specified context, with its primary purpose being to give a group of child care workers the opportunity to describe their own experience of the reality in which they work. It is hoped that the information presented will add to the understanding of what I consider to be a challenging and often misunderstood area of service delivery to children in care. It is further hoped that you the reader will become

curious enough to explore what I perceive to be a fascinating and useful method of exploring both my own and other people's realities. Following is a brief overview of the remaining chapters.

In chapter II, I will review the relevant literature in the areas of child care, the development of cybernetic epistemology, radical constructivism, simple cybernetics, the cybernetics of cybernetics, which includes the work of Bateson and Maturana, and the dialectical hermeneutics of Gadamer. The review is intended to acquaint the reader with the concepts that have had significant impact on my personal construction of reality as applied to my work, and this study in particular.

In chapter III, I will discuss the methodology of the present study. Included is a further discussion on dialectical hermeneutics, a description of the co-researchers and the researcher, the process followed in the conversations, which includes a sample transcription, and my method of inquiry which led to the generation of the themes.

Chapter IV is the heart of the research, and its first level of interpretation. Within it are the constructions of the co-researchers regarding the experience of child care. Each of the co-researchers constructions of their experience will be presented

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> What we observe is not nature itself, but
> nature exposed to our method of questioning.
> Werner Heisenberg

A. Preamble

The following sections explore in detail the areas of research that comprise the context and position of this study. A review of the literature in cybernetic epistemology might be likened to a somewhat confusing journey through a series of recursive loops, searching for what Bateson (1972; 1979) called "patterns that connect," that all appear to lead back to the place one started. The literature is rife with neologisms and usages of known concepts in novel fashions which are both author and context dependent. In addition, the area draws on terminology and concepts from such diverse disciplines as philosophy, biology, computing science, anthropology, physics, and psychology. Where appropriate, concepts in the following review will be defined, or the reader will be directed to a reference which in my opinion offers a cogent explanation of the concept or area in question.

As the above quotation from Heisenberg suggests, my method of questioning is a reflection of the distinctions

I draw in my own process of observing, and the literature selected for consideration is a point of entry into my constructions of the constructions of these theorists and practitioners. In selecting literature to review I was guided by my initial intention that this study was an exploration through mutual conversation between the child care workers and I, with its purpose being to describe and interpret their experience. Since I had limited knowledge of their experience prior to the conversations, the child care literature surveyed was intended to construct a frame whose relevancy to the experience would not be known until the research was completed. The remainder of the chapter traces the development of cybernetics and dialectical hermeneutics. It is intended to acquaint the reader with the theoretical prejudices or preunderstandings that I bring to this study as a researcher entering the hermeneutical circle. As was the case with the child care literature, I had no knowledge prior to the conversations how my reality or horizon (Gadamer, 1975) would change through my encounters with my co-researchers. In the tradition of Gadamer I, therefore, required myself to reflect on and clarify my own preunderstandings of my horizon of the subject and situation of this research. The concepts reviewed in the following sections represent my horizon concerning the

work that I do with adolescents and the staff whose responsibility it is to provide them service.

Finally, in keeping with a constructivist stance I will end this preamble with two quotations from the man whose writing was my own entry point into its possibilities in psychology. George Kelly's position of constructive alternativism, which states that "we assume that all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement" (1963, p. 15), is relevant to this research project. He further states that a scientist searching for realities "looks to man to propose what the character of its (sic) import may be" (1973, p. 209). The following literature review was a "present interpretation" that was subject to revision as a result of my joining with my co-researchers in their descriptions of their experience of child care work.

B. Child Care Literature

To date efforts to describe the roles and functions of child care workers, while subject of considerable scrutiny in the literature recently, seems to reflect at best a beginning stage. Ricks and Charlesworth (1982) describe child care workers in Canada as the "new kid on the block", even though they have been identified as a discrete group for more than twenty years. They have

noted what they describe to be a "professional identity crisis" as being pervasive among child care workers, and report that role confusion, job dissatisfaction, and frustration are representative findings in the sample they surveyed.

Ferguson and Aglin (1985), commenting on their survey of literature contained in the first fourteen years of publication of the Child Care Quarterly likened the development of the child care profession to the development of an "introspective adolescent". Research addressed continued concern with issues of identity and role definition (Beker, 1979; Birnbach, 1973; Foster, 1972; Powell, 1977; Rathbun, Webster & Taylor, 1983; Ricks recognition (Beker, 1976a; 1976b; Whittaker, 1971-72), doubts regarding competence (Barnes & Kelman, 1974; Beker, 1980; Ebner, 1979), and the need to professionalize (Beker, 1973; 1975; 1979; 1984a; 1984b; Helmer & Griff, 1977; Phelan & Weisman, 1988; Rozentals, Piper, & Whipple, 1974). Various treatment and intervention models including Jung, Bernfeld, Coneybeare, and Fernandes' (1984) "scientific practitioner" method, Maloney, Fixen, Surber, Thomas, and Phillips' (1983) systems approach, and Austin and Halpin's (1988) phenomenological approach to child care have been proposed. Like similar debates in the area of psychotherapy, many of these authors seem to

be attempting to "sell" their methods and programs, with little evidence being seen of any cohesive or unifying model emerging.

There have been suggestions that some clearer differentiation as a profession would be aided by more child care workers contributing directly to the child care knowledge base (Beker, 1979; Mattingly & Vander Ven, 1981; Powell, 1981). Rathbun, Webster, and Taylor (1983), after reviewing the literature, stated that very "few attempts of any kind have in fact been made to find out and publish what child care workers think about their job function, educational requirements, and professional status" (p. 5). Thus, while the child care worker is suggested to be a major therapeutic agent by some authors (Alt, 1953; Kreuger, 1983; Phelan, 1985), there is little apparent attention devoted to the direct examination of the worker's constructions of the job that they do. Studies that have made an effort to directly solicit their experiences most often take the form of structured surveys (e.g., Ricks & Charlesworth, 1982), where the researchers predetermine the nature of the information to be gathered.

Rathbun, Webster, and Taylor (1983) conducted structured interviews of child care workers in British Columbia. While the information was gathered in a structured format, they did allow for some flexibility of

response on the part of their subjects. While the following list is extensive, it is included to give the reader some understanding of how child care workers describe their roles. Included are: (1) establishing and maintaining the routine; (2) evaluating and assessing the child and other persons; (3) providing physical and recreational activities; (4) giving individual care; (5) developing relationships; (6) approaching tasks and activities from the child's point of view; (7) being available to the child and others; (8) counselling the child and other persons; (9) acting as a person who helps coordinate activities among various institutions and organizations; (10) parental substitution; (11) disciplining the child; (12) giving therapy to children and others; (13) providing an adult role model; (14) working with the family of the child; (15) training and having charge of staff and others; and (16) working as a team member (p. 11). It seems that at least for this sample of child care workers the role is an exceedingly complex and demanding one. They provided an equally exhaustive listing of qualities required of a child care worker, which included self-discipline, flexibility, honesty, empathy and understanding, and optimism, to highlight a few. As a therapist and researcher interested in working with this population, I was left with a sense

of frustration. While this research did generate an extensive list of labels for roles and qualities from the workers, there was very little sense of their actual experience of doing child care.

In relation to the status of child care in Alberta, Berube (1984) reported that there were approximately 1,400 child care counsellors in the province at that time. From the information he cites, only twenty and one half per cent of the workers had a diploma or degree specific to child care and twenty eight per cent had no formal education of any sort, resulting in "the most disturbed and needy population of children in the province . . . being treated by lay people who have no preparation or training for the task" (p. 3). The Child care worker certification program of Alberta manual (1987/88) gives the total number of workers certified as of June, 1987 as one hundred and fifty-six. Given the population these workers are servicing, and the fact that approximately eighty per cent of them come into the field with no pre-service training specific to child care, Berube (1984) and many of the above mentioned authors call attention to the need for more training programs and a clearer direction towards development of the profession. Since the Berube review, there have been some advances in providing educational programs for child care (Gokiert,

Ing, & Probert, 1988), and residential facilities are more often requiring some form of post secondary education. In addition there is a concerted drive to encourage workers, regardless of their educational background to pursue certification, but as Marilyn Phelan's recent review (1988) indicates, it has not met with the success expected to date.

In summary, while the literature is consistent in its call for clarification of the roles and functions of child care workers, the bulk of the research is directed at the development of general principles for child care, rather than focussing directly on the actual experience of the child care workers themselves. I am not suggesting that these are not important issues in the field, but rather that the lack of attention to the information available directly from the front line workers represents a serious gap in the literature. The focus of the present study is to generate exploratory information in the gap, from a small number of men and women who work on the front line of child care. The following sections describe the theory base utilized in this exploration.

C. The Development of Cybernetic Epistemology

> . . . creating a new theory is not like destroying an old barn and erecting a skyscraper in its place.

> It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views, discovering unexpected connections between our starting point and its rich environment. But the point from which we started out still exists and can be seen, although it appears smaller and forms a tiny part of our broad view gained by the mastery of obstacles on the way up.
>
> Albert Einstein

The epistemological problem of how knowledge of reality is acquired, and how well that knowledge matches or represents a reliable or "true" picture of reality has been the subject of debate in philosophy for well over two thousand years. It is not my intention to present a detailed account of the debate, but rather to build a frame to provide a context for the genesis of this study. Von Glasersfeld (1984) quotes Putman's statement: "It is impossible to find a philosopher before Kant (and after the pre-Socratics) who was <u>not</u> a metaphysical realist, at least about what he took to be <u>basic</u> or irreducible assertions", and goes on to define a metaphysical realist as "one who insists that we may call something 'true' only if it corresponds to an independent 'objective' reality" (pp.19-20).

Prior to the Copernican revolution in the sixteenth century, reality was explained in terms of the "Great Chain of Being", with the universe being organized in a hierarchical fashion "starting with God at the top and descending through the angels, human beings, and animals

to even lower life forms" (Capra, 1982, p. 71). The work of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler moved science away from teleological explanations to explanations concerning matter and mathematics. Perhaps the greatest impact on science as we know it today occurred as a result of Newton's doctrine of causality which asserted that the same causes generate the same effects. He insisted that all deductions regardless of their rigor be substantiated by observation, and this beginning of the empirical tradition remains extant today. In psychology, the bulk of the theoretical debate continues to focus on the themes of objective versus experiential knowing, behaviorism versus humanism, nomothetic versus idiographic research, et cetera, with no apparent resolution in sight. Implicit in all these debates is the question of what the nature of reality is, and how we as humans come to know that reality.

In psychology, until recently, explanatory notions of behavior have been framed in the language of Newtonian physics, with such concepts as drive, tension reduction, and energy, all of which grant priority to causal agents in a linear model of cause and effect. There is a fundamental premise that an understanding of causation of the world 'out there' will allow us to understand how we function in relation to our environment. The assumption

that reality exists outside the observer was rarely challenged in the realm of the so called "hard" (i.e. physical sciences), and in our scramble for acceptability even less so in the behavioral sciences. The advent of what Zukov (1979) calls the "New Physics" is challenging the Newtonian view of the 'great machine', which functions in a lawful and predictable manner. He cites Bohr's Principle of Complementarity, which states that the experimenter's choice of experiments determines which mutually exclusive aspect of the same phenomenon (i.e., wave or particle) will manifest itself, and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which demonstrates that we cannot observe a phenomenon without changing it as examples of the extent to which physical scientists are having to adjust their perspectives. Zukov (1979) concludes that "The physical properties which we observe of the 'external' world are enmeshed in our own perceptions not only psychologically, but ontologically as well" (p. 308). It seems that at least in physics the notion of a singular objective reality which exists independent of the observer is being challenged with increasing vigor.

The next section discusses a philosophical position that in my opinion represents a perspective for applying the findings of the "New Physics" to the problem of how we as humans define and understand our reality.

Radical Constructivism

Efran, Lukens, and Lukens (1988), in a recent review of constructivism, cite Lynn Hoffman's comment that constructivism is "the most significant shift in clinical thinking since family therapy began" (p. 27). Other therapists, including Tomm, Boscolo, and Watzlawick, are building an impressive body of literature that applies the position to individuals, families, and larger systems. It is the position of choice for therapists like me who are applying the concepts of Maturana and Varela (1988) to our own work. The intent of this section is to acquaint you the reader with my perspective on the construction of reality.

Von Glasersfeld (1984) introduced the radical constructivist view by stating "that knowledge, that is, what is 'known', cannot be the result of a passive receiving, but originates as a product of an active subject's activity" (p. 31). The perspective rejects the metaphysical realist's search for truth in a reality that is external and verifiable through the 'discovery' of a match between subject and object, with its premise being that a 'true' understanding of reality can be attained independent of the observer. In the constructivist position it is the observer who determines the nature of

reality. As Spencer-Brown (1973) suggested, "Our understanding of the universe comes not from discovering its present appearance, but in remembering what we actually did to bring it about" (p.104). In his book Laws of Form (1973) he states "that a universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart," and that "the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please" (p. v). It is not, therefore, an act of determining as close a match as is possible given the available technology, but rather an act of an individual drawing distinctions that creates an infinite series of realities.

Von Glasersfeld's (1984) distinction between 'match' and 'fit' is useful in understanding the distinction between metaphysical realism and radical constructivism. He employs the metaphor of the lock and the key to assist in his comparison. The metaphysical realist will devote an inordinate amount of time and attention to determining which key 'matches' the configuration of the lock. That is, he searches for "some kind of 'homomorphism', which is to say, an equivalence of relations, a sequence, or a characteristic structure- something, in other words, that he can consider the same, because only then could he say that his knowledge is of the world" (p. 21). When we say we are looking for something that 'fits' the focus is on a different relation. A key that opens a lock 'fits' and

the fit describes the capacity of the key not the lock, and opens up the possibility of multiple fits. Von Glasersfeld (1984) suggests that our construction of reality is limited only by the cognitive structures that we possess at the time of construction. Finally, the possibility of an observer independent reality that operates on the basis of constraint rather than causation, on fit rather with biological structures rather than match with its underlying assumption being an isomorphic relationship to 'true' reality, is negated by the fact that I as an observer cannot step outside my own structures to observe the reality in which I am participating.

In reference to the latter statement, von Foerster (1976a) commented, "How would it be possible to make a description in the first place if the observer were not to have properties that allow him to generate the descriptions?", concluding that the "claim for objectivity is just nonsense!" (p. 12) This theme was further expanded by von Foerster (1976b) when he stated:

> It is syntactically and semantically correct to say that subjective statements are made by subjects. Thus, correspondingly, we may say that objective statements are made by objects. It is only too

> bad that these damn things don't make any statements. (p. 16)

While somewhat irreverent, the above comments do point to the necessity of examining the impact of the observer on the observed, implying that the concept of 'self reference' needs to be included in the explanation of any system being observed. The focus thus shifts from a search for an isomorphic 'match' with an observer independent reality, to an examination of the observer's constructions of a reality that 'fits' the lock he is confronted with sufficiently well enough to 'open the door'.

In the context of the present study, I will be engaged with my co-researchers in a process of describing and interpreting the constructions that 'fit' their experience as child care workers. I will as well be engaged in a process of relating their constructions to my own in the realm of working with people, and more particularly to the connections between their experience and the area of cybernetics which is discussed in the following sections.

Simple Cybernetics

Gregory Bateson stated that "cybernetics is the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge

that mankind has taken in the last 2,000 years" (1972, p. 476). Keeney (1982) attributes the coining of the term 'cybernetics' to the mathematician Norbert Wiener who used it to describe "the science of information, pattern, form, and organization . . . as distinct from physics, the science of matter and energy" (p. 154). There is a necessary shift from the paradigm of things to the paradigm of pattern. As Bateson (1974) points out, "All metaphors derived from a physical world of impacts, forces, energy, etc., are unacceptable in explanations of events and processes in the biological world of information, purpose, context, and meaning" (p. 26). The outcome of the Macy Conferences (cf. Lipset, 1980) was the development of the concept of feedback in self regulating mechanisms, with the related ideas of control and information being included in the machine analogy. Wiener (1967) defined the core concept as follows:

> Feedback is a method of controlling a system by reinserting into it the results of its past performance. If these results are merely used as numerical data for the criticism of the system and its regulation, we have the simple feedback of control engineers. If, however, the information which proceeds backward from the performance is able to change the general pattern of performance, we

have a process which may be called learning. (p. 84) This basic concept has generated an impressive body of research in a number of areas, including family therapy.

The concept of the self regulating system, with its language of input-output, homeostatic mechanisms, and what Keeney (1983) calls the "black box view" led, in family systems work, to the assumption that an observer (i.e., therapist) functioning outside the 'box' could, with appropriate inputs, manipulate or control the system he was observing and interacting with to facilitate functional change. Jackson (1957) utilized the concept of homeostasis to account for dysfunctional interaction patterns in families to explain why identified patients remain sick. By 1959, Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland were describing families as error activated, self-correcting, homeostatic systems (Greenberg, 1977). Haley's First Law of Relationship, which stated that "When an organism indicates a change in relation to another, the other will act upon the first so as to diminish and modify that change" (p, 277) was indicative of the concept of negative feedback. The early work in brief or strategic therapy by the Mental Research Institute (cf. Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974) was representative of the simple cybernetic approach described by Keeney (1983).

At the time it was being done, the above cited research was on the leading edge of focussing attention on the perspective that the individual functions within a system. I am not implying that the above model has not generated a considerable body of useful approaches for working with families, but do suggest that it has not always been the case that sufficient caution has been exercised in separating useful 'explanatory concepts' from the attribution that these concepts have a reality 'out there'. For instance Bateson, (1972) refers to the use of the concept of power to enforce control as "epistemological lunacy" (p. 487), stating that "there is no area in which false premises regarding the nature of self and its relation to others can so surely productive of destruction and ugliness as this area about control" (p. 267). This reification of concepts can lead to the formation of what Bateson (1979) calls "dormitive principles" where a category error of logical typing leads from an initial usage of a concept (e.g., homeostasis), to the description of a behavior or pattern of behavior as if the concept actually exists.

Von Foerster's concept of trivial as compared to non-trivial machines (Segal, 1986) is useful in extending the analogy. In a trivial machine the input determines the output in a perfectly predictable fashion.

Non-trivial machines, on the other hand, are recursive as a function of their internal state, which changes every time the machine computes an output. The output is determined by the machine's rules of transformation (i.e., structure), which also continues to change, with the result being the possibility of predicting behavior as a function of input is virtually zero. In essence, what is being suggested is that the black box metaphor treats living systems like trivial machines who can be instructed through inputs (i.e., interventions) that are objective and independent of the observer. This "simple cybernetic" view is currently being challenged by individuals who suggest that it is necessary to include the observer, and his or her participation in the system, to work in concert with it. That is, the descriptions of the observer are a product of his or her own constructions of the system under examination, and as such must be accounted for in any description of the system. This perspective is illustrated in the work of Bateson and Maturana, and is generating a theory base that Keeney (1983) terms the "cybernetics of cybernetics".

As the above discussion indicates, there has recently been a movement away from the black box approach as a result of its theoretical limitations. Howe and von

Foerster (cited in Keeney & Ross, 1983) suggest that:

> while cybernetics began by developing the epistemology for comprehending and simulating first-order regulatory processes in the animal and machine, cybernetics today provides a conceptual framework with sufficient richness to attack successfully second-order process (e.g., cognition, dialogue, socio-cultural interaction, etc.). (p. 376)

In the area of family therapy, Keeney and Ross (1983) suggest that the therapist is no longer an independent agent, delivering interventions from outside the system and observing their effects in order to 'recalibrate' future interventions. I as a therapist, or in this case a researcher, an included as part of the larger system, and must attend to the interaction between my own, and the systems of the child care workers with whom I am conversing. The evolution of this epistemology owes much to the pioneering work of Gregory Bateson. The following section presents a brief review of his contributions.

Gregory Bateson

Bateson's two major works, Steps To An Ecology of Mind (1972), and Mind And Nature (1979) have generated both interest and controversy in a wide range of research

areas (cf. Wilder & Weakland, 1981). His work is typified by his search for the 'aesthetic', which he defined as being responsive to "patterns that connect" (1979, p. 8). His superordinate construct, both as an explanatory principle, and as a fundamental unit of analysis was "mind", which he defined as "an aggregate of interacting parts of components . . . triggered by a difference." (pp. 102-104) Bateson (1972) suggested a new approach to cybernetic epistemology in which:

> The individual mind is immanent but not only to the body. It is immanent also in the pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger mind of which the individual is only a subsystem. This larger mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by "God" but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology. (p. 461)

Bateson, like Spencer-Brown maintains that it is through tracing the distinctions that we draw as observers that we can uncover the ways in which we construct and maintain reality. The patterns which arise form these distinctions and "are as close as we can get to the ultimate truth" (1979, p. 191). For Bateson a "necessary first postulate for any understanding of the natural world" (1979, p. 191) is the realization that direct experience in regard to

subjects of inquiry is not possible. Rather, what is accessible to inquiry are our representations or maps of the territory, which when studied generate maps of maps.

In discussing humanity's understanding and relation to the world, Bateson (1972) stated:

> In the natural history of the human being, ontology and epistemology cannot be separated. His (commonly unconscious) beliefs about what sort of world it is will determine how he sees it and acts within it, and his ways of perceiving and acting will determine his beliefs about nature. The living man is thus bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises . . . which govern adaption (or maladaption) to the human and physical environment. In George Kelly's vocabulary, these are the rules by which an individual "construes" his experience. (p.314)

In a similar manner von Foerster (1972) insists on the necessity of recursion in any description of how humans know and objectify the world through their cognitive operations. He notes: "Objects and events are not representations of relations . . . the postulate of an 'external (objective) reality' disappears to give way to a reality that is determined by modes of internal computations" (p. 6).

For Bateson and von Foerster the task of the scientist becomes one of tracking 'internal computations' of the individual through his or her own language. It is a search for "patterns that connect", which allow the individual to function as a living system within and as a part of, the larger living system that Bateson identified as Creatura. As I hope this brief review indicates, Bateson's conceptions are complexly interwoven with almost every aspect for the developing field of cybernetic epistemology. His conception of people constructing maps or representations of the world that determine their functioning and interaction with it, provided the necessary trigger for researchers in diverse areas, including psychology.

In many ways his work forms a bridge between the initial simple cybernetic approach and the cybernetics of cybernetics, which the next section discusses. While often confusing and frustrating to read, his writings challenged me to continue searching for alternative methods of perceiving and understanding the work that I do. When asked who he saw carrying forward his work, Bateson stated that "the center for this study is now in Santiago, Chile under a man named Maturana" (Keeney, 1979; cited in Dell, 1985, p. 5), and it is his work that

dominates the following section.

Humberto Maturana

The following section introduces in my opinion a radical shift in conceptions regarding how human beings learn, function, interact, and communicate in the world, with themselves and each other. The perspective proposed by Maturana and Varela forms the basic network of premises for this study. The information in the preceding sections was a map which traced my personal route as a developing professional who has arrived at this point in his horizon. Efran and Lukens (1985) liken entry into Maturana's epistemology to a trip through Disney's 'Magic Kingdom', in that both men understand that "you do not change organisms- you design an environment in which organisms thrive, respond and change themselves" (p. 23). My hope is that the following information will provide the reader with sufficient information to 'appreciate the magic.'

Maturana and Varela, in their book Autopoietic Systems (1975) "claim that the notion of autopoiesis is necessary and sufficient to characterize the organization of living systems" (p. 10). They coined the term "autopoiesis" from the Greek "auto" meaning "self", and "poiesis" meaning "production", to refer to the processes

necessary to define a living system as having a closed circular organization (Maturana & Varela, 1980). From the concept of autopoiesis notions of structure, autonomy, cognition, causality, language, interaction, and reality emerge to form a radically different perspective on how humans, and other living systems, function in the medium of the environment.

The theory began with Maturana's early work on color vision (Maturana, Uribe, & Frenk, 1968), which demonstrated that no correlation could be established between the presented stimulus colors and the activities of the retinal ganglion cells of frogs, pigeons, and humans. The implication drawn from the results was that while there was internal consistency of color naming to retinal ganglion activity, this activity did not correspond or correlate to the actual external color stimuli presented. This finding suggests that the nervous system's response is not representational in terms of coding or transforming information (i.e. external stimuli). Rather, it functions as a closed and internally consistent system that represents stimuli on the basis of its own structure, and it is this structure that determines the nature of perception. If, as this research suggests, the nervous system is organizationally closed, traditional notions concerning feedback, causality, and

information can no longer be applied to living systems.

For Maturana and Varela (1980) the above results suggested that in the organization of a living system "it is the circularity of its organization that makes a living system a unit of interactions, and it is this circularity that it must maintain in order to remain a living system." (p. 9) The circularity of organization implies that the system is both closed and autonomous. Furthermore, it is the structure of an autonomous living system that specifies how the system will interact and behave. Such a system is in a continual process of interacting with itself, or framed in another manner, is an autopoietic (i.e. self producing or creating) organism. For the system to maintain its integrity, it must operate within the constraints of its own organization, or face disintegration. The living system is therefore constrained by its organization as a closed unity.

For Maturana (1975; 1978), it is the structure of the organism that determines its behavior by specifying all of the interactions and actions in which it can participate. Maturana (1975) suggests that structure is made up of the components of the unity and the relations between these components. If the concept of structural determinism is accepted, with its fundamental premise that living systems are organizationally closed, perception and behavior occur

as a result of this structure, rather than as a result of input, information, or instruction. That is, the structure of the system fully specifies how it will behave because it has no input-output mode. This leads Maturana to the conclusion that there is no such thing as information, but rather everything a living system does in terms of perception, behavior, and interaction is the product of structurally determined internal computation. We can therefore receive no 'objective' information about external reality because knowing is a function of our structurally determined reality in interaction with other structurally determined realities outside ourselves. To use von Glasersfeld's constructivist metaphor, the distinctions we impose fit our structures, rather than match the stimuli of the outside world. This in turn suggests that given the constraints of the system the attainment or discovery of objective knowledge is not possible. Maturana (1978) states:

> Knowledge implies interactions, and we cannot step out of the domain of interactions, which is closed. We live, therefore, in a domain of subject-dependent knowledge and subject-dependent reality . . . In fact, any knowledge of transcendental absolute reality is intrinsically impossible; if a supposed

> transcendental reality were to become accessible to description then it would not be transcendental because a description always implies interactions and hence, reveals only a subject-dependent reality. (p.60)

It should be noted that Maturana is not using structure to connote an invariant system. Structure is continuously undergoing alteration with every interaction with the medium in which it exists. No static structural system is capable of maintaining its organization as a living entity, because without the possibility of changes occurring in the components and the relations between the components, adaptation to the demands of the medium is not possible. The epistemological shift being suggested is that our interaction with the medium does not cause our structure to change, even though from the observer's viewpoint it may appear to do so.

The term "instructive interaction" which Maturana coined to describe the apparent reality that A causes B "pertains to the domain of descriptions, and as such is only relevant in the meta-domain in which the observer makes his commentaries and cannot be deemed to be operative in the phenomenal domain, the object of description." (p. xviii) Rather than instructive interaction, Maturana suggests that other autopoietic

systems can "perturb" the structure of the system in such a way as to trigger structural change. Again, it is noted that it is the structure of the organism that will determine the nature and extent of the perturbation that triggers the change in structure. To use Dell's (1985) analogy of the interaction between the cue and billiard ball, it is the structure of the ball being struck that determines if and how it can be perturbed by the action of the cue ball striking it.

As was discussed in reference to von Foerster's constructivist position, Maturana is not adopting a stance of solipsism, where the world exists only in the mind of the observer. Maturana and Varela (1988) escape the trap of solipsism by pointing to the broader context of humans functioning and interpreting the world as observers stating:

> As observers we can see a unity in different domains, depending on the distinctions we make. Thus, on the one hand, we can consider a system in that domain where its components operate, in the domain of its internal states and its structural changes. Thus considered, for the internal dynamic of the system, the environment does not exist, it is irrelevant. On the other hand, we can consider a unity that also

> interacts with its environment and describes its history of interactions with it. From this perspective in which the observer can establish relations between certain features of the environment and the behavior of the unity, the internal dynamics of the unity are irrelevant.
>
> Neither of these two possible descriptions is a problem per se: Both are necessary to complete our understanding of a unity. It is the observer who correlates them from his outside perspective. It is he who recognizes that the structure of the system determines its interactions by specifying which configurations of the environment can trigger structural changes in it. It is he who recognizes that the environment does not specify or direct the structural changes of a system. (p. 35)

To step outside the world of our own experience and interactions is to function as an observer using language that arises as a function of creating a consensual domain when organisms structurally couple with each other. If anything, Maturana's position represents a strong rejection of the solipsist's contention that we are alone with our creation of reality. Instead, our reality is created by rich interactions with other organisms, such that our structure is in a continual process of change,

while maintaining its own unique identity.

Dell (1985) describes the process of structural coupling as the basic element of "all human and animal interaction systems" (p. 13). Maturana (1982) describes it as "the relation of complementarity between a unity and its medium" and goes on to say that it "is a constitutive condition of existence of every unity" (p. 3). Maturana and Guilloff (1980) liken a system's ability to structurally couple with its medium to intelligence, in that to behave in coordination with the medium allows the system to remain in a living state, and continue its existence as an autopoietic unity.

It is possible for two (or more) structurally plastic systems to couple such that each becomes the medium of the other in a process of mutual perturbation, that creates a closed pattern of interaction which increases the richness and complexity of both systems involved. Maturana (1978) describes the process of structural coupling as follows:

> Each element of the behavior of one organism . . . acts as a trigger or perturbation for another. Thus the behavior of organism A perturbs organism B, triggering in it an internal change of state that establishes in it a new structural background for

> its further interactions and generates a behavior that, in turn in turn perturbs organism A which . . . perturbs B, which . . . and so on in a recursive manner until the process stops. (p. 52)

In this way, the organizationally closed unity of a living system can and does interact with other systems, with resulting changes to both. The critical distinction that separates this perspective from the simple cybernetic approach discussed earlier is that no unity can regulate, control, or instruct another unity. It is the plasticity of the internal structure in living systems that allows for change as a result of perturbations from other systems, which can lead to further interaction and coordinated conduct. It is this same plasticity that constrains or limits the amount of acceptable variation that can occur structurally without the organization of the unity being destroyed. As humans, our way of describing and interpreting the process of structural coupling is through the vehicle of language.

Language for Maturana (1978) arises out of the elaboration of our observations of our structural couplings with other structurally plastic organisms in our medium. Maturana and Varela (1988) state:

> Language was never invented by anyone to take in an outside world. Therefore, it cannot be used as

> tool to reveal the world. Rather, it is by languaging that the act of knowing in the behavioral coordination which is language, brings forth a world. We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others. We find ourselves in this co-ontogenic coupling, not as preexisting reference nor in reference to an origin, but as an ongoing transformation in the becoming of the linguistic world we build with other human beings. (p. 235)

It is only in language that we are observers. Like any other behavior, the distinctions that are drawn through language are determined through the organism's structural coupling with the medium. A strong consensus with the organisms coupled with leads to the naming of a behavior or interaction (e.g., learning) as if it has an existence in the objective sense. As living organisms we continually impose distinctions as observers of the world, but these distinctions are constrained by the language that arises from our structure, and our coupling with the medium in the domain of coordinated conduct. This in turn creates the social domain that we share with other

observers.

It is through language that individuals achieve consensual or what is often referred to as 'objective' reality. Maturana (1978) suggests that the structure of language is such that the validation obtained as a result of the consensus of having shared names serves to develop a community which, when recurrently coupled, embraces a shared reality for the length of the coupling. Maturana, in a conversation with Simon (1985), stated that he thinks "that human life is a continuous transcendency, because all takes place in human life as we operate in language, in co-existence, not in the solitude of the brain or body." (p. 43)

Mendez, Couddou, and Maturana (1984) suggest the notion of "objectivity in parenthesis" to allow scientists and therapists to act 'as if' objectivity were taking place, bearing in mind that what appears to be objective is something brought forth in language with a strong social consensus. In Simon's (1985) interview, Maturana states that by putting objectivity in parenthesis "all verses in the multi-verse are equally valid" (p.43). He suggests that it allows one to enter a domain of "co-inspiration", where "different ideologies become different ways of being, different ways of looking and listening, in which each person is responsible for the way

of being he becomes" (p. 43). The outcome is that each individual is completely and solely responsible for every thought, action, and behavior in which they engage.

For Maturana, the living system is an informationally closed, structurally determined unity that constructs reality on the basis of the language which arises from coupling with other unities in the medium. The possibility of perceiving a transcending reality separate from the observing system is precluded by the premise that we cannot separate from the structures that allow us to perceive and behave. Perception arises as a result of the system maintaining its internal consistency, rather than discovering iconic representations of stimuli 'out there'. Through language we can assume an observer role to interpret the interactions and patterns of behavior that arise as a function of our structural coupling. For Maturana "to be in language is to be in continuous transcendency" (Simon, 1985, p. 43).

D. Finding a Fit: Methodological Perspective

As the preceding review indicates, in the developing perspective of cybernetic epistemology the question of how best to investigate phenomena must be examined. The debate concerning whether psychology ought to align itself with the "Naturwissenschaften" (natural sciences such as

physics) or the "Geisteswissenschaften" (mental sciences such as history) has continued for over one hundred years in psychology. Historically, it appears that the natural science position, with its emphasis on objectivity, causal explanation, prediction and control has been dominant. Dallmayr and McCarthy (1977), commenting on the legacy of the natural science position state:

> While man's empirical knowledge in our century has expanded at an exponential rate, however, his sense of purpose or direction seems to have atrophied; although more knowledgeable about the world than any of his forebears, man today is more ignorant or at a loss as to what he and his accumulated knowledge are all about. Confronted with a rationally functioning but ultimately silent universe, he asks the question: what is the point? Viewed in this context, contemporary methodological issues reveal their salience and underlying agony: The concern with understanding as a type of inquiry results from a crisis of human understanding. (p. 1)

While the role of the observer in the research process, and the possibility of discovering an externally verifiable reality have been challenged by cybernetic epistemologists and natural scientists alike during the last twenty years, the question still remains as to how

best to conduct research that examines experience. Many writers (e.g., Apel, 1977; Colaizzi, 1978; Dallmayr & McCarthy, 1977; Giorgi, 1970; 1975) argue for a methodological reorientation towards understanding and interpretation.

The alternate methodology of choice that has emerged in psychology has been phenomenological investigation. In its 'pure' form, the methodology invites the researcher to engage in reflection of the phenomenon prior to the investigation, but requires him to suspend or bracket his presuppositions once the investigation begins in order to facilitate a true understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. In reading people like Giorgi (1970), I was left with a sense that while it was acknowledged that it was impossible to completely suspend one's presuppositions, success in attaining the essence was measured in the attempt to do so. Thus, while focussing on the description of experience, it appears that at least implicitly, an assumption exists in this methodology that an observer who suspends his presuppositions can discover or uncover a reality 'out there' that is independent or not contaminated by his experience.

Since the fundamental premise of both radical constructivism and cybernetic epistemology is that the observer cannot be separated from the experience being

examined, phenomenological investigation did not appear to offer me a methodology consistent with my own structure and construction of the world. However, the dialectical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975; 1976), which extended and developed the phenomenological perspective of Martin Heidegger, seemed to be sensitive to the impossibility of separating observer from observed. Gadamer (1975) states: "To try to eliminate one's own concept of interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of a text can speak truly for us" (p. 358). The solution to my dilemma came in the joining of the hermeneutic perspective with the descriptive research method developed by the phenomenological psychologist Colaizzi (1978), which will be demonstrated and applied in Chapter III.

While Gadamer is specifically addressing textual interpretation, other writers (e.g., Sullivan, 1980) contend that the same principles can be applied in the interpretation and understanding of persons. Most important for this research, the world view of Gadamer appears to fit with the cybernetic viewpoint described above.

The primacy that Maturana awards to language as the vehicle for attaining consensus and understanding has a

number of important connections with Gadamer's (1975; 1976) dialectical hermeneutics which will be presented in detail in the next chapter. Both men suggest that the notion of objectivity is not applicable or possible. For Maturana, the structure of the person is a function of his or her recurrent couplings with other systems, which blend to give each unity a unique history and reality. This is similar to Gadamer's insistence that the individual's reality is embedded in his or her own life tradition and history.

Palmer (1969) suggests that for Gadamer "language is the house of being and we live in and through language", and "that language is the reservoir and communicating medium of the tradition . . . so that the linguisticality of being is at the same time its ontology - its 'coming into being'" (p. 177). For both Maturana and Gadamer, interaction with another is not unilateral where one individual studies or instructs the other, but rather a process where the coming together of two individuals results in changes to the realities of both. While this study begins with a question that is mine, my intent is to establish a dialectical hermeneutic with my co-researchers that will allow our systems to couple in a process of mutual perturbation that will shift both my, and hopefully

their horizons.

E. Overview

The preceding chapter has traced the development of cybernetic epistemology to acquaint the reader with what I perceive to be a valid position for examining the experiences of individuals and systems. Literature was included on child care to provide an initial understanding of how the field perceives itself, and its issues. The review was intended to allow the reader to obtain a sense of the history and preunderstandings that I as researcher brought with me into the present study. In accordance with the constructivist view, it is not suggested that the approach taken is the singularly correct or 'true' method to answer the question being posed. It is, in my opinion, one key that will allow entry into the world that makes up these men and women's experience of front line child care.

III. THE HERMENEUTICAL ENCOUNTER

This research came into being as a result of a realization on my part that I did not know or understand how child care workers experience working with adolescents in group homes. With this realization came the awareness that this lack of understanding could limit the extent of my effectiveness with both children and staff I work with on a daily basis. The research started when I began to listen to the child care staff's stories and language during case conferences, over coffee, and with some, although none of them are included in this research, as their therapist. It developed further when I was asked to train staff, not to be a therapist like me, but to be child care workers. This brought me to questions of identity, boundaries, skills, joys, and frustrations, and into the literature that speaks to child care. As important, it allowed me to realize the complexity and commitment inherent in doing front line work. The six front line workers who are the heart of this research invited me into their unique realities as an equal partner, giving me the opportunity through our conversations to present you, the reader, with a picture that is a moment in their experience. The previous

chapter focussed on the theoretical and philosophical position that 'fit' for me entering this research. This chapter establishes the frame through which the conversations were carried out and interpreted.

A. Dialectical Hermeneutics

The origin of the word "hermeneutics is found in the Greek verb hermeneuein, which is commonly translated as "to interpret". It is also an allusion to the wing-footed messenger god Hermes, whose task it was to bring to human understanding that which was beyond the grasp of human intellect. The most wide spread usage of the term hermeneutics dates to the seventeenth century, where it referred to principle of biblical interpretation. Palmer (1969) observed a polarization in contemporary hermeneutical thinking between those in the tradition of Scheiermacher and Dilthey, who argue for restriction of the field to the development of methodological principles underlying interpretation, with their goal being the attainment of objective knowledge. This position argues that the text must have a meaning that exists independently of the act of interpretation. The goal of this school of hermeneutic theory is to decontextualize the text through methods that rid us of all prejudices, to

produce an objective analysis of what is 'really there'.

In opposition to this approach are Heidegger and Gadamer who suggest hermeneutics to be a philosophical exploration of the nature of understanding. The act of interpretation is primary, with understanding being seen as an interaction between the horizon presented by the text and the horizon that the interpreter brings to it. For Gadamer every hearing or reading of a text is an act of giving meaning through interpretation.

Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics (1976) opposes the objective methodological empirical approach to knowledge. It assumes an inter-connection between the event of the research, the world in which I live, and my questioning. It does not permit the questioner to assume a stance of objectivity, and questions the possibility of universally valid truth. It directs itself towards participation and openness to achieve understanding, rather than establishing goals of prediction and control. Understanding is conceived as having to do with dialectics rather than methodology, experience rather than knowledge. Hermeneutics invites the researcher to risk transforming his own horizon by placing his assumptions in the open. For Gadamer (1976), the study of hermeneutics is the ontology and phenomenology of understanding.

> Palmer (1969) describes the hermeneutical process as: (One) is not so much a knower as an experiencer; the encounter is not a conceptual grasping of something but an event in which the world opens itself up to (one). Insofar as each interpreter stands in a new horizon, the event that comes to language in the hermeneutical experience is something new that emerges, something that did not exist before. In this event, grounded in linguisticality and made possible by the dialectical encounter with the meaning of the transmitted text, the hermeneutical experience finds its fulfillment. (p. 209)

Gadamer (1975) proposed the concept of game as most indicative of his dialectical hermeneutics. Agreement to participate in a game brings it into being, but once agreement is reached the game has its own movement independent of the players. It becomes a creation through which the horizons of the individual participants are extended through immersion in the common world of game, and the dialectical interaction that occurs as a result of it. The process of game resembles Maturana's presentation of structural coupling where two organisms join in a consensual medium to create a shared reality for as long as the coupling continues.

Gadamer (1975) stresses the historicality of understanding which he suggests is intrinsically temporal, with each of us seeing the world from our own particular immersion in tradition. This in turn makes us social creatures:

> In fact history does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being. (1975, p. 245)

Meaning can therefore never be a changeless property of an event, because understanding is always in relation to the individual's context and history or tradition.

The essential historicality of our immersion into our tradition precludes the possibility of obtaining objectively valid knowledge. In fact, according to Gadamer, it is our tradition that frames our thinking, our relations, and our own historicality and prejudgements that allow us the possibility of understanding. For

Gadamer (1976), prejudice is the necessary condition of having a background for interpretation, rather than something that leads us to interpret the world falsely. He stated:

> It is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being . . . the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something-whereby what we encounter says something to us. (1976, p. 9)

Palmer (1969) describes this process as the "Hermeneutical Circle" in which one must have an assumed understanding, that is a preunderstanding, in order to have the knowledge of not knowing that leads to the formulation of a question. In a similar fashion, one must preunderstand a subject in order to enter the horizon of its meaning. Alteration of the original understanding is invited by the acceptance of the attitude of not knowing everything upon entry into the encounter. A dialogue, which takes on the characteristics and life of the concept of game described above occurs, with the horizons of the individuals

encountering each other. The hermeneutical circle is complete when the questioner's own horizon shifts as a result of the transformation of preunderstanding.

Gadamer claims that the dialectical structure of experience generally, and the hermeneutical experience in particular, reflects itself in the question-answer flow of true dialogue. In this way, the interpreter maintains an attitude of expectancy, of not knowing, of being open to the possibility that in the process of understanding through interaction with the other, he allows himself to be opened and questioned by the interaction, so that his own self understandings are broadened. Thus while a question is addressed to a 'thou', in a deeper sense the 'thou' in turn questions his interpreter in an ongoing dialectic.

For Gadamer (1975), language is the medium in which tradition and experience reveal themselves. It simultaneously provides a common ground for the meeting of two individuals, and allows for the understanding of two different worlds. It allows for the formulation of questions, but is always constrained by the essential historicity of our being that prevents the achievement of a full and explicit understanding of ourselves. Thus our being is determined by our cultural tradition, which is created by experiencing and living in language. For

Gadamer (1975), being can never be made fully explicit in language:

> To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of particular difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We are always within the situation, and to throw light on it is a task that is never entirely completed. This is also true of the hermeneutic situation, i.e., the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition we are trying to understand. The illumination of this situation-- effective-historical reflection-- can never be completely achieved, but this is not due to a lack in the reflection, but lies in the essence of the historical being which is ours. To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete. (pp. 268-269)

Ultimately Gadamer, like Maturana, suggests that while our history constrains our understanding (i.e. interpretation) and as such must be accounted for, it is our immersion in language that provides us with an entry point to encounter the experience of the other, and our relation to this experience.

It is suggested that Gadamer's (1975; 1976) theory of dialectical hermeneutics, with its emphasis on the importance of the person in the context of his or her own language and tradition, is an appropriate methodological perspective for this study. It was through my encounter in conversation with these men and women regarding their unique constructions of the reality that is their experience of child care, that my horizon changed.

B. The Co-Researchers

Co-researchers for this study contacted me as a result of a process of word of mouth. I informed agencies that I consult with that I was interested in obtaining first hand information from front line child care workers regarding the experience of the work that they do. From the fifteen volunteers, three men and three women were chosen with a view towards including as much variation as was possible concerning the type of group home, location (i.e., urban vs. rural), and clients served.

For the purpose of this study, a decision was made to restrict my conversations to individuals who were employed in group homes run by private agencies in the community that followed a staffed, rather than a parented model of service delivery. Research examining the latter model of care, or others such as institutional care, is in my

opinion also needed, but beyond the scope of the present study. Of the six participants in this study two were employed in receiving group homes in which the maximum duration of placement of the child is not supposed to exceed ninety days. Two were employed in long term group homes, which as their name suggests, have no restriction on duration of placement. The remaining two co-researchers worked in specialized group homes; one home dealing exclusively with native children, and the other with children who are classified as being in need of psychiatric care. Three of the homes had a three bed capacity, and the other three homes were six bed. In terms of setting, four of the homes were urban, and two were rural. All of the above group homes deal exclusively with a population of adolescents under the care of the Alberta Department of Family and Social Services.

Beyond the initial criterion of place of work, a second criterion employed was length of time worked in child care, with the minimum length of experience for inclusion being set at two years. As with the discussion of the above criterion, I am not suggesting that research with child care students, or beginning workers would not be valuable. However, since the emphasis in both hermeneutics and cybernetics is on experience developing as a result of recurrent patterns of interaction, the two

year criterion seemed to provide for adequate exposure to the field in which the experience was being developed. Finally only child care workers employed in a 'front line' capacity were included in the study. I would suggest that this criterion is vital in understanding and interpreting the experience of child care, in that the people on the front line are continually connected to it on a daily basis. The immediacy of this connection grounds the conversations in present experience of their work.

The co-researchers ranged in age from twenty-six to forty-one years with a mean age of thirty-four years. Their years of experience ranged from three to eight years, with the mean being four years, eight months. One co-researcher had a grade twelve education, three had college diplomas in child care, one a Bachelor of Social Work, and one a Bachelor of Education. The co-researchers all had contact with me in a professional capacity.

The exact number of participants was not determined prior to the start of the research. I had suggested that a minimum of three co-researchers was necessary to have any possibility of generating connecting themes. The final number of six was reached when, after engaging in the sixth conversation, I became aware that my interpretation of the experience of front line child care

was not changing significantly with the inclusion of further participants. Thus while there was a risk in deciding to stop at six co-researchers (i.e., what if anything have I missed?), to proceed further would not have allowed me to do justice to the complexity and wealth of experience that our encounters generated.

Finally, the conversations and my subsequent analyses of their contents brought me to the realization that my co-researchers, because of their openness, had provided me with information that if attributed to them might have consequences for their careers. The professional community that services the needs of adolescents in care is a small one in northern Alberta and I did not in any way want to risk breaching the confidentiality that they were ensured of at the beginning of the research. As a consequence, no autobiographical data was included about the co-researchers, and each of them selected a name to be used other then their own. I feel that the following chapter will allow the reader the opportunity to interpret the experience, while at the same time protecting the participants.

C. The Researcher: An Autobiographical Reflection

In the preceding chapters I identified the evolution of the theoretical constructs that brought me to this

research. The dialectical nature of hermeneutical dialogue suggests that the understanding of the question, and my interpretations, cannot be separated from my personal history and tradition. That is to say a person selects a theory and a question that 'fits', or forms a consensual reality with his unique history. The following reflection is intended to give you the reader some sense of the development of my horizon and preunderstandings. The following questions were my entry points into reflection.

1. How did I come to embrace this perspective?
2. What is my experience of working with adolescents?
3. What are my perceptions of child care workers?

In terms of the perspective, the preceding chapter traced in detail my evolution with the cybernetic approach, but excluded the context of my history. I was born and raised in Edmonton, the oldest of a family of two boys and two girls. It was a house filled with books and music, where learning was valued, but not forced. My parents supported and encouraged our interests, but rarely directed them. I have no recollection of setting a goal for myself academically, but mostly found school to be enjoyable. In particular, I loved literature for its power to transport me into alternative times and realities. My second love was and is music, which to me

is another language of expression. The recurring theme in my house was my parents asking me to close the book, and shut off the lights and music. Twenty years later it is my wife asking.

As an undergraduate, I maintained a double major in Renaissance English and psychology. The English increased my awareness of the complexity and power of language to bring to life endless realities and connect the reader to them. The psychology gave me frameworks for understanding my world. During my last three years, I worked in, and later ran a verbal learning and cognition laboratory. A strict adherence to empirical methodology in examining minute bits of verbal behavior, in either the operant or information processing tradition was the focus of the research, and it could be tedious to the extreme. It did, however, develop my fascination with models for examining reality, particularly in relation to language, and challenge me to search for alternate methodologies to examine human behavior.

The end result was a choice of counselling psychology over English, and a conviction that there had to be a way to integrate the two. My master's research applied George Kelly's work, and in his constructivist stance I thought I had found a balance between art and science. Instead, I found that most of the research generated since his death

has concentrated on empirical applications of his repertory grid methodology, rather than the clinical perspective he expressed so eloquently. Needing a change, and a fresh perspective, I left the university and moved to New Brunswick where I worked on a special education team for a school district for two years. In my work with the learning disabled children, I was again reminded that the individual's construction of reality was determined by the constraints of his system. My time with the children and the sea renewed me and I decided to return to graduate school. As important, I married, and brought with me the energy and excitement of this new beginning.

I 'discovered' a new perspective, first through the work of the Mental Research Institute, and later the broader context of systems theory and cybernetics. This perspective accounted for context, for relations between, for interaction, and most important to me, shared my fascination with language as a way to create reality. Among a small group of us there was an experience of shared learning and working as a therapy team that expanded my horizons, and provided me with a place to 'fit'. I still miss that team for its support, and its ability to challenge me to extend myself as a therapist and a researcher. The consensus that was created did disintegrate, but the experience remains very much a part

of my work as a private practice psychologist and as a researcher. How did I come to embrace this perspective? I think by persisting in searching for concepts, and the people that apply them, who fit closely enough with my own structure and reality that we could couple to allow the creation of new realities.

A significant proportion of my work as a private practice psychologist is with adolescents in care. My experience of the work can only be understood in the context in which it occurs. The majority of the 'kids' that I work with were removed form their homes for abuse, neglect, or conflict in which they may or may not have had a role. Most of them have had multiple placements, and no choice in when or where they would be moved next. Some have had as many as thirty 'homes' prior to the age of twelve when they are eligible for group home placement. Most of them are street kids who have learned to survive by hooking or 'scamming', and the extent and nature of their experiences make me feel like a protected infant. A small percentage of them return to their families, if they have one, and some of my work involves facilitating that process. For most, however, somewhere between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, they are expected to function independently, with minimal financial support from the Department. Many of these children never had the

experience of a childhood where they were allowed to develop with a sense of safety and belonging. And, though most were removed from their famili s for often valid reasons, what we as care providers can offer as a substitute in no way replaces the healthy family context in which I grew up. By the time they reach my office they have run the entire placement and therapy gamut, and can often instruct me on appropriate use of technical terminology.

For many therapists and other care providers, these kids are labelled as 'resistant' or 'hard to serve'. This has not been my experience with them. Instead, I see them as being tired of attempting to accommodate everyone else's vision of who they should be and how they should act. For me, the challenge is to connect with them so that a space is created for them to determine where they fit inside themselves, and in their environment. These kids have expanded my horizon after we figured out that no one in the office was there to be 'fixed'. The experience for me is therefore one of mutual relationship where each person is respectful enough of the other's identity that they listen to the other's constructions of reality and share their own. I can not instruct or change, I can only perturb. With those that allow the connection the process of therapy is a wonderful experience for me. I have a

'front row seat' that allows me to participate in the construction of new realities, some of which are my own. In many ways I see them as being "my kids", and they refer to me as "my shrink". They honor me by sharing their worlds, and have supported and shared my own experiences, ranging from my grief and pain over the death of my father two years ago, to the joy of the birth of my daughter last year. I am constantly reminded by them that therapy occurs within the context of relationship that both of us are responsible for nurturing and developing. With adolescents, every encounter is new because the rules will have changed since our last meeting. I don't think I will ever find another group to work with that gives me as many opportunities to stretch my own limits .

On the downside I have to observe children in pain as a result of what is often an accident of birth. I have to watch an overloaded system attempt to meet needs that it is ill equipped, if equipped at all, with which to cope. I have to watch kids, who are ready to give a placement a shot be told they will have to wait another six months, give up, and hit the streets again. My frustrations, with very few exceptions, have not been with the kids, but with the system that is supposed to service them. For me, the best compliment that one of my kids can give me is that I

don't act like 'one of them'.

As I reflected on my perceptions of child care workers, it became clear that what I don't know about them and their work overshadows what I do know. I see child care workers as the people most connected to the kid's everyday experience. The workers are the people who are expected to cope with the behavior of up to six teenagers, who come in with different realities, different family and placement backgrounds, and different patterns of behavior. They are expected to balance the needs and difficulties of all of these children in a fair and equitable manner, so that there can be 'peace in the home'. They are expected to create an environment that facilitates positive growth for each child as an individual, and to be mediators, advocates, nurturers, disciplinarians, or any other role that the child or system requires.

For the kids, the worker is often perceived as the most easily identifiable representative of the 'System', and of authority figures in general. The child's history is often replayed with, and on the worker. Somewhere along the line it was suggested that the worker was also responsible for managing and modifying the children's behavior. I see workers who have bought that 'myth' as being engaged in continual struggles for control, both with the kids, and with me. I also see them as having

learned a limited number of intervention techniques that they apply out of the context of relationship. On reflection, I would suggest that my strongest prejudice concerns persons attempting to impose their vision of what is right on others, without involving them in the process. I am not proposing anarchy as a viable alternative, and I do have limits for acceptable behavior if I am going to continue in relationship with a person. Perhaps that is the biggest difference between my role and the worker's. I have more choice as to who and how I work with someone. As a private practitioner, I work with agencies, rather than for them, and need to be sensitive to how the structure of the agency determines and constrains the options for working with the staff and kids.

For the most part, I perceive the front line child care workers who last any length of time in the job to be committed people, who care about the children that they work with. I also see them as somehow handling the near impossible expectations of the system, with very limited resources, inappropriate placements of children, and an at least perceived expectation that they are somehow supposed to "fix" the children in their care. I share with them the frustrations inherent in these expectations, and hope that by better understanding their experience I can work

and relate more effectively to their realities.

In summary, I was drawn to this perspective by my own structures and distinctions about research and the construction of reality, which I access by listening to people tell their stories. My own history is one where the individual's way of perceiving the world is valued and respected. I owe my father much for his wonderful capacity of 'turning the world inside out', his story telling, and his ability to join with me in my experience of creating reality. I owe my mother much for the respect and caring that she brought to all her dealings with me. In working with adolescents I have the privilege of observing and participating in their process of constructing reality on a daily basis. The child care workers are the people with which I share this work.

The preceding reflections were presented as a sample of my process of determining my own preunderstandings prior to encountering my co-researchers in conversation. The reflections presented above could have been more lengthy, but were intended to provide the reader with a sketch of the past and present history, tradition, and distinctions that I bring to this research, rather than an all inclusive portrait, which is still in the process of becoming. The following section outlines the process of

the conversations.

D. THE CONVERSATIONS

The question "How do you, as a front line child care worker, describe your experience of working with adolescents in a group home context?" was explored by means of a hermeneutical dialogue. The previous sections detailed the reflective process that brought to awareness the preunderstandings I brought with me to the conversations. I will now describe the process through which the conversations were carried out.

Conversations were conducted in the location of choice of the co-researchers. Three chose to be interviewed in their own homes and three in my office. In both settings the context was one of no interruptions, where it was understood that they were to have as much time as they needed to share their experience. The prelude to each conversation varied somewhat, but as a rule included refreshments, and informal dialogue. This was a time of developing a connection, of creating a consensual medium that would allow both of us to encounter the other's horizon. It was a time for me to explain what their involvement in the research process would mean in terms of time and energy commitment, and to reassure them concerning how the information that they gave me would be

used to create a balance between ensuring their confidentiality, and accurately presenting their experience. I stressed with each one of them that my question reflected a genuine interest and curiosity about how each of them would describe their experience, and my intention was to present and interpret these experiences so as to open myself, and in the final written form, others to these experiences. I explained that the audio taping was necessary to provide them and me with a complete verbatim transcript of the conversation and my commentary, which would be made available to them to review. I explained that my intention was to ensure that they had nothing further to add or change, and that my commentary was an accurate reflection of their statements of their experience. I further explained that I would then select quotations that I saw as representative of the themes that emerged from my interactions with the transcripts, and integrate them into a composite sketch of their experience that would require their review, and possibly further input on their part. When they indicated that they were clear on their involvement, and the nature of the research the CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE form (Appendix A) was signed, and the formal conversation began.

As the above description indicated, the consistent message given by me to the men and women who participated

in this research was that they were not subjects to be studied, but rather co-researchers (cf. Friere, 1970) who were engaged with me in a process of mutual understanding and interpretation of their experience. In the conversations, after posing the initial question, my task was to open myself to their lead as they described their experience. As a partner in the process, I allowed myself, and invited them, to become immersed in the consensual reality created by the conversations. My role was to clarify and facilitate what they were telling me, sometimes by requesting specific examples of concepts, or by presenting my understanding of their descriptions for further reflection and comment on their part. My role was not to demand or direct the content of the conversations. The individual meanings, connections and experiences were provided by the child care workers themselves.

My experience of the conversations was one of effortless flow, where one step in the conversation lead naturally to the next. My co-researchers reported, many with some surprise, sharing my experience of not having to work at describing, but rather allowing the conversation to dictate direction and content. I was reminded of Gadamer's concept of a game, which assumes a life of its own after the players enter its world by agreeing to participate. I was also reminded of the experience of

relating to others while in trance. There was no conscious decision on the part of any of us to end the conversations. The experience was one of consensus where all that needed to be said had been said, and that it was time to part. There was a shared attitude of completion, but also excitement and curiosity about what would emerge as a result of the conversations. Following is my method of interpreting the experience that they so freely shared. Included is an excerpt of a conversation to allow you the reader an opportunity to participate in the experience.

E. The Interpretive Process

In the hermeneutic process, it is not enough to describe experience, for to participate is to interpret. The dialectical encounter that began with the conversations brought me and my co-researchers to new horizons of understanding that did not exist before this research began. As a researcher my challenge was to find a method that would allow me to maintain my connection with the encounter, while at the same time make explicit my process of interpretation. As was suggested previously the model of descriptive research proposed by Colaizzi (1978) was used as a guide for this study.

After each conversation was completed the contents were transcribed into verbatim transcript form on disks.

Initially I had intended to complete these transcriptions myself, but time restrictions and lack of typing skills led to my employing a professional stenographer to complete the initial drafts. To balance my lack of involvement in the first step, and to fill in, where possible, content that she had missed, I repeated the process of listening to the tapes while reviewing the transcripts. Throughout the remainder of the interpretive process I found myself returning to the living sound of the tapes to recapture the nuances that were missing in the written text.

The first step involved returning repeatedly to the transcripts and tapes to acquire a feeling for them. Prior to encountering them, I again reflected on the preunderstandings I had brought into the conversations to remind myself of the horizon with which I had entered the encounters. I then immersed myself in each conversation through sound and sight to begin the process of making sense of their content and rhythms. I found myself once again engaged in the hermeneutical encounter, with its form being myself in relation to the texts.

I then returned to the transcripts and identified what I thought to be key passages that described different aspects of the experience of doing child care. This process occurred over an extended period, because I wanted

to ensure that my selections were stable over time. I was searching for what I saw as significant statements that could be woven into the completed fabric of the interpretation.

Once these statements were identified I formatted the transcripts into column form to allow me to provide a commentary of my interpretations next to the related text that my co-researchers could read. This commentary was the initial step in making explicit my understanding and interpretation of their experience as child care workers. It was explained that the selected passages and comments were the basis for the remaining analysis when I returned the transcripts for their review. Beyond examining them to determine whether a further conversation was necessary to clarify or expand on the description of the experience, the co-researchers were asked to determine whether my comments were valid interpretations of their experience. All six co-researchers reviewed the transcripts and comments, and with the exception of one request for a small change in the language of one comment, there were no requests for a second conversation or changes to the transcripts. This feedback was validating for me in two ways. First, it validated my experience that the initial conversations were complete, in and of themselves. Second, their confirmation of my comments suggested to me

that I had maintained the consensual connection that was experienced in the conversations with the co-researchers in my conversations with the transcripts.

In order to allow you the reader some sense of the conversations and commentary, the following excerpt of a transcript was included. The left column is the actual transcript of the conversation. The right hand column contains my comments. Researcher is presented with "R:", and co-researcher with "C:". This excerpt was selected because it speaks to the majority of the themes that will be described in the next step in the interpretation.

Conversation	Commentary
C: To come back to your question, as a child care worker, for me I learn like how could you teach a kid to be honest if you're not honest with yourself? If you have a problem, like I could go, like about two weeks ago I had bad news because my friend caught Aids and through just a simple	Model the behavior you are asking the kids to perform.

operation and I was scheduled to work at midnight and I show up at 8:00 . . . Everybody look at me and say what are you doing here? I feel sad today, I just came over there and plain and simple I feel sad today. I just brought that to the kid and said when you're sad what do you do? Well, I go party. But besides party? Well, when I go party I meet friends, it's my friends so I could talk and that's exactly what I do. I came here to talk with my friends. And even if you guys don't talk, just watching TV with you I feel better.

Sharing feelings

Using personal experience and connection with the kids to model self care.

R: And these are the kids you were telling what to do.

C: Yeah. Me, I talk to the kid

the same way I talk to an adult because I learn like I said previous to eleven, I jump between eleven and fourteen to 21 years old to be an adult. I feel the same thing that they are. Me working with a kid the first time in the program it's hard because they think they know everything, they've been been through everything because they are in the system. It's hard for me to work with them because they don't know that- like the kid we have right now or the kid we deal at the group home right now, they been in the system since they were born and everything, I could cope with that much easier than to someone who just came into the system. Because those people think they know everything. They know how to play with the system and they

These kids are old beyond their years.

Difficult work with kids new to the system.

don't know nothing. The other will look at you and say, wow, it can be done. Or they call you crazy. They come to me and say how come you're doing that? Well, who's the best to help you guys than someone who's been through that? And they do agree with that and there's quite a few come in and say I wish I could do that. I say hey. if you have a chance I could help you, go ahead. I don't mind.

Experiences of being in the system gives him credibility with the kids to try themselves.

R: There's not a much bigger compliment than that either.

C: I know , and me I don't look for compliment from my boss or anything, it's kids give me compliment, it's three times better than anything. Your boss don't understand, there's a way you could talk to him to make him understand, I learn that

Values the kids compliments and opinions.

you know the system teach you like what they want to know, but a kid, when they say something, or you say I'm going for three days off, ohhh, it feel good because you feel that they do like you, not because you are a child care worker who let them do everything. They do know I don't let them do everything. For me, I don't use and office, it could be in the kitchen. We cook, I brought my subject there.

Relationships with the kids are important.

Don't need to be without limits to be liked and respected by the kids.

R: And talk to them there rather than drag them into an office.

C: Or we could go for coffee or anything- when we go for coffee, let's say I go for coffee with a girl, we don't talk, we look. She look at the guys and I look at girls, you know, to relax. Most of the time I do my counselling it's in the kitchen

Use the context of everyday activities to work with the kids. More natural and effective.

when they cook, or in the living room, a group counselling. That's the way I work. I will not bring in the office and make too obvious because when I was young I didn't like that. And the big speech, I hate - I used to hate that when I was young, you do something just a small little thing - I don't know at the time you couldn't do anything, but you throw your dishes because the food was disgusting that day - you could have a speech of half an hour from your keyworker because why did throw the dishes. Even if you tell them because the food was disgusting he won't believe you, they don't eat the same food anyways. They don't believe you. Me, I look at the human side, like maybe because I do enjoy life and I wish everybody could enjoy it the same way but I don't try to change anybody. I try to be just a role model. Sometimes people could

Life experience determines work style.

Memory of care.

Not change but role model.

think I think life is a joke, it is a joke, because I enjoy life. For me everything is a joke. Cops come on my door and said you didn't pay your parking ticket, come to the office - it's an experience, it's a joke, it's funny. You know with my age and background, the cop car and all that, it's funny. And the most funny thing, you pay it over there and they drive you all the way back to your home. For $30.00 it doesn't even - it costs them more to do that. But that's the system and there' nothing we can do. I learned to deal with the system more for the last two years now.

Life is a joke to be enjoyed

R: So, you said you don't try to change anybody.

C: Me, it's more like - let's say a kid come - okay for the past week one of our kid took pills, our psychiatrist talk to him and he brought it up at a staff meeting and all that. I went to the kid,

okay, my main intention was not to give her the speech, what I did is I just went plain and simple because of my relation with the kid I could go directly to the point and they know. So I just said that's kind crazy, you want to kill yourself? Don't do that, just use pot. I know that drugs no good but for me when it's going to be the time, let's say she quit the pills and go to other smaller drugs like pot for instance that will be the time to use another approach to explain - in one way I don't try to change kid but I try to be more sneaky, meaning, you know, pot is much easier to deal with first of all Then I could go and say well how about a cigarette. When you feel like having pot just ask me, I give you a smoke.

Connection of relationship allows you to be straight.

Start slow and join the child before request of a change of behavior.

R: So it's gradually step it down.

C: Exactly. It's an approach, like a kid could come to me and they're really open and say well I've been drinking last night, I've been drinking like crazy and I feel my experience and I told them I said to you know, I do have more fun and I'm laughing when I'm sober than when I'm drinking. When I drink I'm sort of depressed I feel sick the next day. I don't say stop, I just say do you have fun right now for instance, and I do make face, joke all the time. They're laughing - well not all the time. Well, drink less, try to cut down instead of having ten bottles (even if most of the time it's not true) but go for eight, go for seven, just to have the buzz, or go for just one, if you have a buzz after one, try to stay there. When your buzz is gone have another one. It's a different approach I use.

Change is slow. Role of worker to provide options for change rather than attempt to control.

Give facts and positive option not a sermon.

R: Well I guess part of what I'm hearing is that it doesn't sound like you're trying to control them.

C: No, I never, all the time I never had a power struggle I never had a kid coming after me with anything to do a power struggle. I just plain and simple use my background and my intelligence. That's the way I think it is, use your head.

Avoids power struggles by using sense and background.

R: So it's not really like the four years you spent in social work is telling you how to do this?

C: No. I'm capable to work and when I work it's my work. We have child care worker . . my my job is to try to understand

Understand and translate the kids

the kid and express that to the social worker. That's the way I see my title or whatever you want to call it. If the social worker is mad at me, that's mean I'm doing my job because the kid is okay. Then we come to a compromise, the social worker is mad. I go to the kid and and tell plain and simple, she doesn't want that to happen. So with the kid, the kid tell me because when you're young, when you're 13, 14 15, what I went through I wasn't able to talk for myself and its not because even if I was feeling like I was older I was still a kid and I wasn't able to talk for myself. So those kids are the same. Sometime the system forget about that, that they are 12, 13, and 14.

needs to the social worker.

Role of advocate and spokesperson for the child to the system is crucial.

R; So don't expect them to present themselves like adults when

they're kids.

C: Yeah, and for me it's like when you have case conference. It's hard for the kids to stand for themselves. And when they do most of the time they put their feet in their mouths. They don't express themselves the same way.

R: It's like they're already coming in with all that baggage.

C: They think they know everything, they will do everything. Okay they've been through a lot but they still kid. There still stuff they don't understand and one of them is adult.

These are kids who do not have adult skills.

R; So in some ways you're almost like an interpreter, an advocate too.

C: Yeah, my role is that. That's
the way I see my role as a child
care worker. Interpreting the
feeling of the kid, interpreting
the feeling of the social worker Relay-mediator role
So I'm sort of a relay.

R: Like a mediator almost.

C: Exactly. You yell at me, one
yell, one yell, one yell It's life
it's fun and I learn through that.

As you have probably gathered, the above co-researcher's first language is not English, but this did not detract in any way from the vivid description he shared about his work.

The next step in the interpretative process was to organize significant statements into themes. Significant statements were identified for each of the transcripts. It is recognized that the identification process occurred as a function of the researcher imposing distinctions on the transcripts as a result of his interpretations of them. These statements were then separated so that each

of them was on an individual sheet of paper for each co-researcher. A sorting process followed in which all the statements were reflected on to determine whether they clustered into any meaningful form. This took the form of grouping statements into clusters according to their content and meaning. As the process evolved it became apparent that some of the clusters were interrelated in meaning content which led to their being grouped into larger, more encompassing clusters. This procedure was repeated to ensure that the meaning clusters were consistent over time. Throughout the sorting process my intention was to attend to the statements in such a way as to allow the meanings common and idiosyncratic to my co-researcher's experiences to be recognized and identified.

The next step in the process involved my reflecting and interacting with each of the meaning clusters to assign them a name which was connected to, and descriptive of their content. As a result of this process five distinct but highly interrelated themes were constructed from the conversations. They were: 1) Life Experience, 2) Relationship, 3) Change, 4) Professionalism, and 5) Frustrations. Initially, a sixth theme, View of the Child, was included, but on further reflection was so integrally connected to the theme of Relationship that I

decided to include it as part of that theme. Colaizzi's (1978) validation procedure was employed when I referred the clusters of themes back to the original transcripts to ensure that they did not propose anything not implied in the original transcripts. As the researcher I take complete responsibility for the generation of the themes which were constructed as a result of the horizon of my preunderstandings interacting with the horizons of my co-researchers.

The next step was in my opinion most critical to the interpretation and presentation of the child care worker's experience. For each co-researcher, taking each theme separately, quotations were woven into a portrait that portrayed my interpretation of their unique constructions of each theme. As with the selection of meaning statements, inclusion of quotations into the thematic portraits occurred as a result of my interpretation of what I considered to be most illustrative of the experiences of each co-researcher. I thought it important that the experiences of these men and women remain separate to emphasize that uniqueness. The results are presented in Chapter IV.

The final validating step was to present these thematic portraits of their experience to the child care workers to ensure that my interpretation fit with the

experience that they shared through the conversations. As with their comments on the transcriptions, there were no requests for major changes. As important, the co-researchers commented that the process acted to confirm and clarify their constructions of their own experience, and in some instances significantly change their horizon of understanding. The most clear example of a shift came from Fred who after the process was over made a decision to return to school to pursue training as a family therapist. For others, it was more a matter of putting their experience of child care in the context of changing priorities. For two of the women interviewed, the conversations clarified for them their choice of children and family over career. My hope is that the next chapter does justice to the wealth and depth of experience shared in the conversations.

Two steps remain to complete the circle. In the first, found in Chapter V, I take the results of the interpretative process back to the theory base from which I work. Each of the themes will be reflected on separately in relation to the areas of child care, cybernetics, and hermeneutics. With this step I speak to the new horizon that has emerged for me as a researcher and practitioner. The final step is the completion of the hermeneutic circle. It presents my personal reflections

of the process of encounter and interpretation in which this research allowed me to engage. It speaks of the transformations of my horizons into a different construction of reality as a result of the research process and the people that shared it with me. Following is the presentation of the themes.

IV. THE THEMES

This research is based on the premise that in order for me as a researcher to understand and interpret people's lived experience it is necessary to encounter them in the context of mutual consensus. The previous chapter outlined the process through which the themes emerged and were validated. As the researcher, I take responsibility for the drawing of the distinctions which lead to the sorting and naming of the themes which included: 1) Life Experience, 2) Relationship, 3) Change, 4) Professionalism, and 5) Frustrations. While they were validated by my co-researchers, the acts of interpretation and integration were mine. The intent of this chapter is to provide you with a sense of these men and women's experiences. I hope that through your encounter with these 'portraits' you gain both an appreciation for the experiences that are common to front line child care workers, and a sense of the uniqueness that each of my co-researchers bring to the experience.

A. Moe

Life Experience

For Moe his life experience provides a rich background of resources that he can draw on in his work. As a child he lived through violence and substance abuse in the home. He remembers:

> I learned a time because my dad was mad at my mom once and threw the alarm clock and I was in the rocking chair, and I didn't see it. I always like to look around, I learned now that you have to look all around . . . because I was going this way, going down, and the alarm clock hit me right in the eye. Then you go to the hospital, you have to lie. You can't say that my dad threw an alarm clock, you could be in trouble. I didn't want to move . . .

Eventually a social worker did place him outside the home and what followed was a series of runs back home and repeated removals. His placements ranged from foster care to detention, with the latter occurring as a result of him beating his father for sexually abusing his sister. In addition, he was sexually abused by both men and women in department placements. The application of experience he lived is suggested by the following example:

> When I have a girl, for instance, who are sexually abused I know how they react. I know what they

> feel even if I'm a man; I know that if I look just the expression in their face . . . let's say if they've been raped by a guy looking like me I will not get close to them because I know the hate . . . you feel like you could kill them, so I will try to send another worker to talk with them and try to be away from them. . . . for me all the child care I use my past, my background like I was raped.

Moe's experiences of being a child in care, and on the run, seemed to give him a unique understanding and connection with the kids he worked with. He ties his use of experience to credibility and trust saying:

> You see, I use my experience and I use myself as an example, ok? But before the kid is able to take as an example, he's got to trust me . . . Who you going to send your past to someone or you going to say anything to someone if you don't trust the person because you've been burned out all your life . . .

Life experience is used as a guide to understanding and connecting with the child, and is offered where appropriate. The focus is on the child's unique experience.

For Moe the experience of being abused, removed from home, living on the street, defying the system, and

raising a daughter while going to school, working, and hiding from his social worker, are all useful experiences that he brings to his work with children in care. His view of life gives me hope for the children I work with:

> Because life it's beautiful, I love the challenge of life and when people say it's hell well I don't agree, it's a great thing. I love life. Every day, every minute it's something different, I don't know it's hard to explain . . . I do believe in their future and I do think they will do something. I'm not saying everybody will do good but some of them will be real interesting to talk to . . . I know when I was young nobody believe in me when I was those age and I think I turn out pretty good. That's life. Make me happy.

Relationship

For Moe the development of the relationship with the child is the basis for working. He see it as a gradual process that he describes as:

> You start at a low level, then it's like a new job you have to climb the ladder. Well it's the same thing when you deal with a teenager or anybody, you have to climb the ladder slowly and earn their trust.

He questions the expectation that a child will begin trusting and talking immediately saying:

> It takes at least that long so the kid trust you as an adult because he's been in the system for so long, never trust nobody . . . he have to learn to trust you before you are capable of doing anything. . . Maybe it's me I'm wrong but I do think every kid is like that . . . they can't do anything if they don't trust and most of the time the kid we have there been so many time they're not used to trust adult and that takes time because I am an adult, even if I don't act like one.

Concerning his role in the relationship, he says:

> I'm just a mediator and plain and simple a normal person. I'm not trying to be their Dad, I'm not trying to be their Mom, I'm trying to be a brother. There's some stuff you will tell your brother that he will yell at you but it will not be the same that when you tell your Mom or your Dad and he will yell at you, maybe the same way your brother, but you will take it from your brother but won't take it from Mom.

For Moe the relationship is between equals, who have taken the time to connect and learn trust. He has a clear view of the child and is sensitive to his own impact:

> There's one thing working with kids, you're not dealing with a computer, and you're not dealing with a radio, you're dealing with a human life. You make one mistake and you could make that life really miserable . . .

His way of approaching the kids can be summed up by:

> You approach me the same way I approach the kid. For you you don't understand which way I was doing something but you're going on the approach that I do have an answer. Some child care workers will go to their kid and say the answer he's going to give me is not true, he's lying, before he talk to the kid. Me, when I go, I say he does have a pretty good answer . . . and that's the way I work with my kid. And for me that's the way I think child care workers should see that. Not take it for granted that the kid will bullshit you. Think that the kid is telling the truth. The first time it's the truth. If he comes the second time then you have a tool to help you, like hey you bullshit me the last time, don't give me the same answer. Be honest.

There is an assumption that the relationship is based on the history shared by the people in it, rather than assumptions of what might happen. This shared history

forms the basis for working with the kids. As Moe said, "There's no way the kid could do anything if they don't connect."

In terms of the benefits he obtains from the relationships, Moe stated:

> Those kid give you a lot. For me as child care worker I learn every day. I learn the expression of every kid going and talking . . . they give me lots of teaching. I'm not talking only about the language but I do learn everything from them. It's our future.

In the transcript excerpt included in the last chapter Moe also commented on how he used a personal experience of sadness to connect with the kids. His relationships with the kids were described as honest, open, and respectful with Moe focussing on the potential of the child to create a future for himself. He saw nothing negative in his experience of relationship with the kids, and seemed to constantly renew himself from his contact with them.

Change

It goes without saying that Moe's view of the child, his own life experience, and his relationships with the children to a large extent determine his perception of the

change process. Again, the already quoted excerpt contains a clear example of how Moe approaches change with the kids. In the example of the girl taking the pills, he did not demand that she stop 'or else'. His approach was "sneakier" where he encouraged and supported a gradual process of change by encouraging her to wean herself through a series of less damaging drugs towards healthier behavior. As with the relationship context, there appears to be no element of power or control where Moe is the change agent, parent, or boss of the change process. Change, is therefore, a mutual process that starts with where the child is, rather than where the worker thinks she should be. I think Moe's comments on caring and responsibility included below sum up his perceptions of change:

> Specially for me, there's one part of me saying yes I care. I care about them. Take care of them? No . . . Care for, yeah. But taking care, no. I'm not there to tell them what to do, I'm there to give my feedback, to tell my past, a good joke, anything. I care for them but not take care of them. And if there's one thing, I don't want to be responsible for anybody's life because I do have the same problem with my life and I don't go to no one. You can't take responsibility for everybody's life. You can't

> change nobody, You have a mind of your own. Nobody's got the same mind, but there's nothing you can do.

For Moe the focus is on integrating his counselling into daily activities. Rather than attempting to change the kids, he seems to try to create contexts (be sneaky) through which with his support, the kids are in control of their own change process, with him along as a partner.

Professionalism

Moe entered child care as a result of attending an interview with his former wife. He was unemployed at the time and thought working with kids "might be fun". I found it interesting that while I had worked with Moe for a number of years, I never knew that he had a degree until our conversation. I feel that this to a large extent illustrates his attitude towards perceiving himself as a professional. He claims that his early experiences with professional care givers made him lose respect for the title, and sees it as a label that interferes when he is working with a child. He says:

> For me, tell you the truth, a child care worker it's plain and simple, it's not a job. It's just be yourself. When new worker start they say what should I do? . . . just be yourself. If you

> feel like crying, you cry, you feel like laughing, you laugh. You're not in a good mood, you tell them. So when they are not in a good mood or they feel like crying they won't be ashamed or they won't be scared to do that in front of you . . . Yeah, That's the way I see it, be yourself. And don't forget that you were young . . . I don't know why they say child care worker, just call you anything or nothing.

Taken out of context a reader might infer that Moe is saying "anything goes". As the preceding sections have indicated, this is not the case. He approaches children with caring, and respect for their dignity as individuals. The conversation suggested that he invested a significant proportion of his time in developing relationships with the children he was working with. For Moe it appeared that he wanted to be perceived as an individual, rather than as a role or title.

Frustrations

Moe identified very few frustrations concerning his experience as a child care worker. He does become frustrated by helping professionals who use language and concepts the kids don't understand, which places him in the role of translator, and as an earlier quote indicated

With fellow workers who assume the worst about the kids before even approaching them. For the most part, he seems to maintain an attitude of excitement and curiosity about life, its challenge and its beauty. When he does become frustrated or upset he states:

> I'm not the type, since my incidents when I was young in lock-up I said I'm not fighting no more, I prefer wife walked out or shut up. And then after I go home put a good heavy metal full blast in my ear and I relax. Another thing I learn by doing chess I was able to go out with staying inside, but my mind was able to go out. That's the way I learn to cope with everything.

For Moe it appears to be more important to involve himself in his work with the kids and outside activities that he enjoys, than to place himself in conflict situations. Although as his description of the mediator role indicated, he is prepared to become involved when the situation is important to a child with whom he is working.

B. June

Life Experience

June described her family of origin as dysfunctional because of her father's alcoholism, but clearly values it

as her home:

> Family's family and like I have my home and even the structure, the building is my parents' home, I know that I would feel a loss if they moved into another home because that's my home, so regardless of what goes on inside it, that's my turf.

When considering the impact of her history on the experience of her work she stated:

> I was always sort of a compliant kid, there were never many issues between my parents and me so there wasn't a lot of discipline . . . there was a lot of power struggles, there was power there but it didn't bother me; there were times when it would bother me, like "I don't care, I'm not discussing it and that's that" used to bother me a lot. I always think about the power and do I come from a power background and is that an influence and I don't find that it is, I tend to model more after other workers and the way that they handle things. I don't know, I'm not so sure that I drag a lot but obviously I relate on my experience.

There was a sensitivity to issues of power and control. Models selecting for developing a working style were drawn from colleagues rather than her parents.

The use of life experience was most clear for June

when she was dealing with a child of alcoholic parents. There was a recognition that the child's experience was different than her own, but also a connection that she uses in her work:

> Like, that sounds familiar and where does that come from and yeah, I know what she's talking about. It's the drinking, and using it as information that, now here's something that I know about and I can relate to that feeling, and I can help you with that.

She also struggles balancing her desire to use her experience to the child's benefit without imposing her beliefs:

> Do they learn that it is a disease . . . I'm wondering should we be tying that in more and always being hesitant to mention it because of the feeling it's just because it's a personal bias for me and I don't want to be one of those crusaders that gets into Al Anon or AA and pushes it onto everybody, I don't want to do that because I don't want to turn people off these programs.

June also sees the value of using personal experience to demonstrate positive relationships for the kids. She uses examples drawn from her experience of relationship with her husband to model "what a relationship can be

like" because she feels it important that they be exposed to healthy marital and family relationships outside the context of the group home.

Relationship

For June the relationships are the most precious part of her work:

> Interactions with people. When I decided to become a teacher it was because I wanted to be with people and I wanted to sit at a desk and wanted to have relationships with people, to do things with people. That's what I get from here. People experiences, that's important to me . . . Because being in a small town a lot of people are aware I took the job here instead of teaching and they are quite surprised when I say no, I would much rather work with six kids on a full-time basis than thirty kids every forty minutes. I enjoy the true, real relationships with the kids instead of being acquainted with one hundred and thirty or whatever.

June stresses the necessity of caring and developing a relationship to form a working connection:

> You've got to have a relationship because who am

> I to tell somebody that I don't know my experiences, what do they care? Or to give them information, who am I to give them information? If they don't have a relationship they don't care about me, they're not feeling that I care about them, then why are they going to take me at my word? Especially when you have kids coming through who are suspicious of adults, who aren't trusting of adults. If they don't know me and feel that I care about them then they're not going to accept any of the information I have for them.

For June if the connection and caring of the relationship is not present communication and sharing of information is not possible.

She describes her role as a child care worker in the context of relationship, as opposed to power and control:

> I can remember these kids at school talking . . . allowing kids to get away with things, trying to be their buddy instead of being their teacher and how it doesn't work. They don't need another buddy they need someone to give them more structure , and that sort of goes here too. They need someone to help them know what the structure is, but they also need a friend telling them what the structure is and not somebody saying this is the way it is and I don't

> want to talk about it any more. And something that I think is different between a relationship and an authority figure is this is the rule, but if you don't think you can handle it maybe you can negotiate it. And if I'm saying it that way then the relationship is coming into play whereas if I just say this is the rule, there's nothing you can do about it, then that's an authority figure.

There is a basic difference between involving the children in the process, and imposing on them. June suggested that attempts to use power end in frustration, with no positive changes occurring for anyone. This belief leads into her description of the change process.

Change

For June the attempted imposition of power is not effective and leads to frustration and feelings of failure for all involved. She says:

> If you're going to make them do it your way you're not allowing them the experience and it's not going to be a learning, it's going to be a coping. Then they're frustrated because even if they do do it your way you're not going to get the satisfaction that you're looking for, they're not going to have

> learned it for themselves. I suppose if you're expecting them to do it your way and be happy then maybe you're thinking failure, so I would think it would cause a lot of frustration. If you assume your way is right and you're finding it's not working for somebody else, it must be telling you that your way is wrong.

Thus, in the power relationship with the child, coping or compliance rather than learning occurs. The expectation that the child should enjoy this type of experience leads to further frustration on the part of the worker. For June, the appropriate approach to change is described as:

> It's like when you say a teacher isn't there to teach, a teacher is there to facilitate learning, and I think I'm here to facilitate learning. I'm here to give them information and make it available. . . . Give them the information they never had, give them the opportunity to learn, and don't let them throw out the problem for somebody else to solve.

The change process is one of facilitation, where the child accepts responsibility for his own learning, with the worker encouraging the process.

There is no expectation that change will occur, but June maintains an attitude of hope stating:

> To keep me from being frustrated I have to remember

that I may not see it right now, might not ever see it, but I can always hope it's going to click later. The responsibility for change, and the timing of it, is in the hands of the child. While June expressed excitement regarding times when she was able to witness it, she clearly felt a respect for the rights and needs of the child.

Professionalism

June entered child care as a result of being encouraged by one of the group home's board members, who she baby-sat for when his wife was ill. She said she "just kind of fell into it" which in turn lead to her decision to select child care over teaching. For June, the birth of her daughter one year ago, has meant a shifting of priorities from work to family. There is a sense of frustration regarding the lack of time she has to continue her development as a professional balanced by a feeling of joy that her child has brought into her life. She is finding it difficult to manage the shift work with baby-sitters and still have time to maintain some semblance of a marital relationship. When I was talking to her she was in the process of deciding when to have another child. She clearly does not see this as a way to leave the job: "It's interesting because it's not that I

don't like being here and it's not that I have too much to do when I get home, it's just that I want to spend time with her." In part, the decision meant for her either leaving child care temporarily, or drastically cutting down her hours. For June, the latter option did not seem viable because she could not see the possibility of the limited hours allowing her to maintain the relationships with the kids that are so vital to her style of working.

Although she already has a university degree, June is completing her certification requirements for child care:

> I feel about child care if you want to become a child care worker, you should have to go to school to become a child care worker, and that way you're doing something you wanted to do, not something that you fell into, like I did.

Concerning the application of the information learned through the certification process she said:

> I think it's useful but a lot of it is stuff you already do. A lot of it I'm reading and I find, oh gee, I did that last night, isn't that interesting, how did I know that? I don't know how I knew it, I've learned it from somebody else or I used common sense, which is my own learning , right? I wasn't aware of it and I

> think it really helps to be aware of it, because then you can plan it next time rather than just grabbing at straws . . . if I know about it and I'm aware of it I can use it before I have to scramble.

The learning in the certification process is often confirmation and organization of experiential learning that serves to increase June's effectiveness as a worker.

While her child and plans for a larger family were clearly June's priority at this point, she stated that she saw child care work as a long term career for her, although not necessarily on the front line. Her comment for the future:

> The way I'm thinking about pursuing it is I'm thinking rather than existing in the job, finding out, working at things like development of organizations, to lobby instead of . . . to me it's we have to do the old story about pulling people out of the river. Go and find out where they jumped in, that's what I'm talking about.

Frustrations

For June, the downsides of child care work are system issues, not the work with the children. It is frustrating and confusing for her to watch how the system often

targets the child as the sole focus for intervention, with little accountability or involvement on the part of the parents.

> I suppose the downside is I get frustrated with the dysfunction multiplying . . . two parents, four kids become eight parents when they get married and have kids etc. I was talking about people throwing out their problems for the rest of us to solve: I have baby and I don't know how to take care of this baby, and I'd rather be wherever, and it was fine but now I'm tired of it, and I can't handle it and you take care of it and I'll just go away and I won't contribute any money and I won't contribute any emotional support either . . . I get angry at the way its multiplying and the way I see as us dragging these kids out of the river instead of going and seeing where they're getting pushed off the bridge . . . If you've got a kid that winds up in care then both parents should have to go for counselling or go to jail. Make these people accountable for their actions.

She sees family involvement and accountability as being critical if the cycle of creating ever increasing numbers of dysfunctional children is to be interrupted, and is actively involved in the family contact program run in the

group home where she works . The basis of June's frustration is in watching the system she works in participate in the creation of dysfunction by always assuming a reactive stance, rather than investing some of its resources and energy into identifying where the problem begins.

C. Bea

Life Experience

Bea came into child care with no specific training in child care, but a love for, and interest in working with people. For her, much of the way she works with kids comes out of the values she learned in her adoptive family. She recalled her initial experience:

> I had no experience, green as the day is long, and I went in and I just used logic. They asked me what I would do in certain situations and I told them. All I had to do was think logical, and a lot of that had to do with the way I was raised. I was raised to never lie, too, if you have an issue with someone you dealt with them, you discussed it, if you found you were getting angry, leave the room, cool off, come back and finish it. Nobody ever went to bed mad in my home and I use the same

methods in the receiving home.

For her the value of honesty, and of managing anger in a way that allows for the business to be finished are central to her style, and come from her experience of family.

Asked whether any of her life experience helped her in her work with the kids she said:

> Some of it, especially with the adoption issue with me in my past, has helped me with the kids who are adopted. . . . The kids that have been adopted are the ones I enjoy working with the most because I was adopted so I know exactly what kind of feelings they're going through, what kind of questions they want to ask, and I know exactly what times of the year they're going to be feeling lousy. . . . they're insecure . . . you're not my parent, you can't tell me what to do, I don't know you, you're not a part of me, I'm not apart of you.

That whole process of having some grounding in experience, of knowing something of the world the kids bring to the home, and using to connect with them is also essential to Bea's style of working. She shares her personal beliefs with the kids:

> I always tell them to be proud of yourself, be proud

> of your name, because you are the only one you can count on. Your parents have proven that maybe things aren't so good, so you know you can always count on yourself. That doesn't mean count on yourself to run away all the time or even run away inside yourself. Sit down, deal with the issue, no matter who its with. Think for yourself, because if you don't Lord knows no one else is going to. That's the bottom line kiddo. And I tell them that.. . . I ask them I try to teach the kids to think for themselves, to learn for themselves, and do for themselves.

Bea's belief in the child's ability to care for themselves, to be self-reliant and responsible, and the sense of pride she encourages in them for being who they are as individuals carries forward into the next theme.

Relationship

Bea cherishes her relationships with the kids and her co-workers. She speaks of how she approaches them:

> I like the kids. The way I see it if I can help one kid even remember me or something I taught them, say twenty years from now then I'll be happy. And I've had kids prove it time and again. They come over, they visit all the time, they come back, they'll phone me up and ask me, but you also

> have to give a little bit of yourself. You have to let them know that you're a human being. That's one mistake I've seen staff do, if they're feeling depressed they will not cry in front of the kids. They will walk away, they will hide it. So you're robbing, actually, that kid of knowing you're a human being with feelings. I've cried in front of the kids and they sat there and I'll tell you, all three kids have come up and surrounded me, put their arms around me. What's wrong . . . do you need help? We'll do anything. And they've done it, they've proved it time and time again. And it's not always the same kids.

Bea's words speak to the extent to which she shares her experience of the world in an honest and open way with the children she works with. She feels that we should not 'rob' children of our experience of being human, and that the kids should be allowed a chance to nurture, and give of themselves to the staff. This perception is reflected in her view of the kids:

> They're people. they have brains, they have formed their own opinions already. If you don't respect their opinions, they'll be damned if they're going to respect yours. They won't.. . . They're mixed

> up, they're scared, they're confused. They've been receiving mixed messages all their lives from their parents. We're going to be looking after their kids when they start having babies. . . . kids that are raised on the street do not listen to dear and you're so sweet and cute. they don't listen to that. They listen to: will you quit fuckin' around, now stop it!

The kids are entitled to respect. It's necessary to know something of their feelings, world, and language to connect with them.

Bea's final comment included in this section addresses the qualities she believes are important to do the job, and the meaning of support:

> Integrity, honesty, and friendship. Be friends with the kids and be friends with your staff who you're working with, because you only have each other to count on. . . . So you support each other, you have to. And when the kids see you're supporting each other as adults, then they start supporting you, and then they see you're supporting them. What goes around comes around. If you give you're going to receive. You don't give, you don't get a thing.

The experience is reciprocal, but until the child can observe and participate in it, they can not even recognize

when they are engaged in a supportive relationship.

Change

For Bea working with the kids takes place in the context of everyday activities. As was mentioned above, a connection has to be established prior to attempting any work with the child. She cites the following examples:

> I read body language, postures. I watch the kids; if they don't want to talk about something right away the legs are crossed, the arms are crossed, they don't want to talk about nothing. So you mirror them, you sit down and you cross your legs and you cross your arms and next thing you know they're feeling comfortable with you because you're showing them you're on the same level as them. You don't make it obvious but you do it eventually. Next thing you know they're talking to you like crazy and telling you everything. Or even if you're just cooking a meal, the kids will come up and you're frying meat, next thing you know they're spilling everything that happened to them during the day. And you go, yeah okay, because it's safe for them because they don't have to look you in the eye. But I've seen a lot of staff

> sit the kids right down and look them right in the eye and say okay, what happened to you today. . . did you have a good day? And the kid . . . what is this, twenty questions? . . . I don't need it, and they won't tell them a thing, or they'll lie to them.

It is important to be sensitive to the space of the child, to connect with it, and to allow them to express themselves in a manner that is comfortable for them. It is possible to facilitate the communication, but never by forcing it. Other members of the home are included in the process. Bea has found that a child will often talk to her cat or dog when a human is out of the question. She comments further on her style of connecting:

> For myself I use some tough love and I use a lot of jokes, I use a lot of humor, I use a lot of logic. You have to use logic. Three quarters of the time you have to stop and catch yourself and quit thinking like an adult and think like a teenager and then you catch the kids at what they're doing.

Her final comment on change:

> If you have enough time, not so much change but you can teach them how to use what they have to their best, It's not changing them.

Professionalism

Bea entered child care after seeing an ad in the newspaper and thinking that the people skills she had developed in other jobs would be applicable to working with kids. She has no direct educational training in child care but for Bea:

> Child care workers should be treated as professionals because they're the ones that are with the clients 24 hours a day. They're the ones that are the role models and they're the ones trying to teach, and a lot of times what they say is discounted. . . . I think though that some child care workers feel that once they do have that amount of say, that they should have more and more say, and a lot of them are wrong . . . and go too far with it, which wrecks it for the others.

The continuous contact with the child should make the worker's perceptions valued but this is not the case. A balance must be maintained where the worker is also aware of the limitations of her training. Concerning these limitations and new workers just out of school, Bea states:

> What amazes me is a lot of times, like staff who are just coming out of school, they're looking

> at these kids, they're trying to pick them apart and trying to assess these kids. Like leave it up to the professionals, you are just a child care worker. You are the parent figure for these kids, you are their role model.

Thus, while Bea sees the worker as a professional for role modeling and teaching the kids, she sees the role as being closer to parental than clinical.

She does not discount the value of education, but certainly leans more towards experiential over book learning. She is also coming to the realization that continuing in the field and advancing out of line jobs will require her return to school, which is not her preferred option. After five years of front line work, she is feeling that the system is wearing her down and while Bea wishes to remain in a job that involves direct contact with kids, she doesn't see herself as remaining in this job much longer.

Frustrations

For Bea, the frustrations are system rather than child related. In particular she focussed on the paucity of resources that are available to service the children that she works with. For instance, she's given $18.00 every two weeks to buy fresh fruit and vegetables for

three kids and a staff. She finds that the tasks demanded of the child care worker increase in response to other parts of the system being overloaded. For instance, social work case loads are so high that children are coming in to the home with minimal background information, and the child care workers are "flying blind". Whereas outside professional and school contacts were once handled by the social worker, this is becoming increasingly the responsibility of line staff in addition to their other tasks. She sees agencies placing inadequately trained child care workers in positions of responsibility with children because the shifts have to be covered, and management becoming less and less sensitive to the needs of the worker's because they are attempting to meet the system's needs with resources inadequate for the demands.

For Bea, the outcome is that the kids lose and the patterns that brought them into care are maintained because a significant portion of the energy and resources that could be devoted to assisting them and their families is instead directed to "keeping the lid on". She states:

> That's the sad part because it carries on for generations. And what they were taught by their parents, they're going to turn around and teach their kids, and their kids are going to teach their kids, and it just goes on. And that line

never changes.

There is a sense of anger and frustration that in some ways the system has become part of the problem, and a sense of sadness and helplessness that kids and families are being'lost' because no one can devote the time and resources required to interrupt the patterns. For Bea, the system is losing its integrity, and unless something changes quickly her time as a front line child care worker is almost over. She cares too much to deliver service that she sees as not being effective.

D. Albert

Life Experience

Albert grew up in an armed services family. His father was a drill instructor in the Marine Corps who "hated the Service and how dehumanizing it was but never seemed to have lost it." He remembers his dad as a perfectionist who drilled perfection and honesty into his children, and who was intolerant of mistakes and extremely punitive. Discipline took the form of:

> There was the lecture, there was the paper with the consequences of what could have happened because of an action, and then there was the yellow knife --

> go out and cut a switch, and the switch had to be . . . . had to be long enough 'cause if it broke too soon then I had to go and get another one. If I cut one that lasted too long, well that's too bad for me. And that's hard to do.

The above quote is an example of the impossibility of text conveying the intensity and emotion of living sound. Albert feels that his experience of growing up is useful because:

> I've got something to offer because of my feelings of inadequacies and rage and all that and I know what that's all about. And it really pulled together that I worked best with kids that are really angry and act out that anger . . . I guess it comes around to you've got to be grounded enough to take your experiences even if you're only twenty years old and apply those experiences in a therapeutic way . . . you don't go into it to be buddies, you don't go into it to use kids to meet your needs of feeling important, loved, or belonging someplace . . .So my background ties in with the particular type of kid I've been successful with developing a relationship quickly.

Experience is useful if it is grounded and not used as a way of meeting personal needs. Albert finds it easier to

connect with kids who express themselves in a manner that is part of his own history. He stressed the importance of separating issues of personal history and experience from those that the children present. Experience represents a possibility rather than a guarantee of connection.

Relationship

Albert suggests that relationships with the kids will develop on the basis of shared experience and communication. The worker does not have to assume a 'buddy' role, and may in fact occasionally need to assume an aversive position in extreme situations. For Albert,

> Relationships develop over time, through communication. You become some type of social reinforcer and you're modeling the behaviors but you can't be a social reinforcer for x amount of time . . . the kid has got to learn to trust that when you say you're going to do this it's going to happen.

He stresses consistency, the importance of trust, and allowing time for the connection to develop.

For him the benefits of being in relationship with the children are summed up by:

> I get a lot back in the sense of little things that

> happen that are somehow . . . I can relate partially or I can say I'm partly responsible for that growth, that positive reaction or behavior, that we've had discussions about, a whole area, and the kid has had some type of partial insight about that so it's neat to see it happening. It's neat to sit down and have the kids treat you almost as an equal, and sit around and talk about wide ranging topics and feel, judging from what they're saying, feeling safe with me.

Albert sees the results of his interaction with the kids in their responses to situations. The kids honor him by allowing him to be 'almost an equal', by sharing their ideas, and by feeling safe with him. He makes a distinction between being included in their worlds as a 'staff', and as a person who enters the relationship with something to offer and in turn receives.

Change

Albert does not see himself as the 'change agent' for the kids. He sees his role as:

> Putting more of the onus on them if they've got the problem, for them to solve it rather than us. So they walk away not feeling that an adult has crammed the rules down their throat. They're the ones with the problem, they're the ones with the

> support and facilitation from the staff. Work the problem out, come up with a solution, They've owned the problem and they've solved the problem. Everybody's happy, majority are happy with what the consequence is.

He adds:

> I feel in the house is a real subtle role . . . it is to be pretty low key, and to facilitate them making their decisions . . . It's like I'm not letting them know that hey this is what I want to happen, It's like I want this to happen . . . move it along without them being aware of it. So they really have a sense of accomplishment.

Albert's role is to subtly facilitate change by establishing a context through which the child works out solutions and strategies. The change is then grounded in the child's experience, with the result being a positive sense of competence and accomplishment.

Professionalism

Albert describes his entry into child care as "strictly accidental", with his initial exposure to the field coming as a result of the setting his wife worked in needing emergency relief staff. He found he enjoyed the work and returned to college, obtaining a diploma in child

care. He has also recently been certified as a child care worker. In relation to the value of his education to his work he says:

> If we're dealing strictly with myself, what was useful for me in college was the experiential things that were set up in family dynamics classes. But I think the information is important to the younger kids. For the people that have a lot of life experience, have a pretty good grip on things, that are well grounded, a lot of that isn't necessary.

Albert seems to be suggesting that the education can provide a space for workers to develop if they haven't had the life experience which would give them that.

He speaks directly to his frustration with the development of child care as a profession:

> Until child care workers become a profession with legislation, with a national association or organization, we're not going to be taken seriously, we're going to be looked upon as people basically hired off the streets to take care of kids so "they" can fix them . . . the lack of progress that child care workers have made . . . I look in the paper,

> and looking through child care worker jobs and it's all baby-sitting.

When Albert talks of this his passion and commitment to his profession is evident. He experiences daily a perception from the public, and from other helping professionals that he is a custodian and says:

> Where I'm coming for me personally, ohhhh . . . I've got a tremendous amount to offer. I don't have the education that these professionals do, I don't have the theory base, but what I've got to offer has got to be important. And continuity of service for that child can't flow smoothly if there's not cooperation between the professions.

Albert sees himself as more than a custodian. He sees himself as a member of a team that has resources to bring that will assist in meeting the child's needs. He also sees it as being the responsibility of child care workers to present themselves as being professionals, so that they can be recognized as such. He stresses the importance of child care as a field becoming more organized in order to allow for recognition of professional status.

Frustrations

As was the case with the preceding co-researchers, Albert stated:

> My stress is not with the kids. My stress is more with my co-workers and frustration with other professionals I've got to deal with, or the parents . . . everything but the kids.

For the most part he experiences his contribution to the treatment of the child as being de-valued by professionals like psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. He says:

> My services are de-valued. And I think I speak for a lot of other front line workers when I say that. . . . And yet, because they've got a title, as a treatment team, I don't know how it boils down to their viewpoints and their perspectives is more important than mine and I'm with the kid all the time. . . . Doesn't matter to me what the background is, I should have an opportunity to sit there and say hey, I'm not real comfortable with this, my reasons and everything should have a certain amount of bearing and a certain amount of weight, that needs to be happening.

Albert clearly feels that his knowledge of, and contact with the child are important information that need to be included in any treatment formulation.

His final area of frustration, like June's, refers to the treatment of the child without inclusion of the

family. He describes his perception as:

> It's like a kid has done all they can do, and given the right set of people to be with, he's going to be a productive member of society. But you get caught up in family rights and that type of thing, being as unobtrusive as possible. You give this kid all kinds of new problem solving tools and different ways of looking at things and handling themselves. And well, we've done what we can do and this is the best place for him and we return him back to the scene of the crime and all that stuff goes right out the window, because the rest of that family hasn't grown with the kid. So within months its a reversion.

Albert is caught in the bind that his work with a child to learn positive skills may in fact be "setting the kid up" when he returns home. The importance of working with the entire system was stressed by him. However, an additional source of frustrations is in convincing superiors that it relates directly to the child's treatment, and being allowed the time to do the work.

Albert sees child care as a long term career option for himself and wants to become more active in organizations committed to advancing child care as a profession. He stated that regardless of his future role,

it would always be necessary for him to maintain front line contact with the kids to stay in touch with the people for whom he does the work.

E. Sue

Life Experience

Sue grew up in a single parent home after her mother decided to leave her alcoholic father when she was four. She remembers:

> Growing up without a father but with a very independent mother who really ingrained in me to be independent, to think for yourself, to do for yourself . . . Just getting a real respect, a real basis from her, in that you're okay no matter where you come from or who you are, it's up to you to make your own way, and if you choose to do that you can do that. That was just ingrained in me, is that you can do anything you want to as long as you want to, or as long as you're willing to go out and get it.

For Sue this history does have a strong impact on the way she relates to the children she works with:

> I think having that when you see these kids coming

> in, sob story this, sob story that, . . . okay fine but what can you do for yourself now, what can you do to change that, to make it so you don't feel that way, it's up to you. I can't do it for you, you have to do it for yourself. Whatever you need to do I'll help you in anything that you want . . . I can't do it for you because it'll be the decision that I want, not the one that's right for you because it's not your decision.

From these comments Sue emphasized her values of self-reliance, belief in the capacity of the child and herself to find or create what is needed, and her belief that she can't provide the child with solutions.

She also stressed the necessity of the child care worker being aware of her own personal issues and dealing with them so they do not get in the way of the work:

> In terms of things in your own past, you're always dealing with stuff that will come up. However there's really nothing you can do to change what has happened to you in the past, it's done . . . Otherwise you're cluttered and you go in and you're not really there. So when you're dealing with these kids if things come up for you then there's something that isn't clear for you and you need to go back and look at something within yourself,

whether you want to or not.

For Sue her family values have a significant impact on the way that she works in child care.

Relationship

Relationship is the context and basis for children to develop their resources:

> Use that relationship to help them build on their strengths. Build that basis whether it's just little things that you do and that's so they can trust you. But don't ever let that trust down. Always tell the kid why you're doing something. I use please and thank you all the time, I find it goes a long way as opposed to do it now or else. One of my things is you be straight with me, you tell me the truth and we'll work something out.

With Sue the child is always involved in the decision making process. She treats them with honesty and trust and feels that it is reciprocated. For her the basis of relationship is respect:

> You give these kids respect and they'll turn around and go one hundred percent for you because they know you really care, that if they need something or get in trouble you're going to be there to help

> them out. They'll give that back to you; it may not come back for a while but it will come back in some way . . . whether it's a picture, like I have all kinds of little pictures and drawings that kids just give me. You keep them, and put them away, but they're always there . . . I think it changes their opinion too if they see that this person is really taking an interest and really cares enough to let them see that part of you. That's going back to being able to build your relationship, it's built on mutual trust and respect. And showing them that you are human.

Sue does not hide her humanity behind her role as a child care worker. She attempts to develop caring relationships where the child is trusted on respected, and has an opportunity to develop his or her own resources in this context. What the children give her back is precious to her, although not expected.

Change

The interwoven nature of the themes is evidenced by the extent to which Sue's preceding sections have already addressed her perspective on change. In order for the child to make any changes, Sue believes:

> You have to connect with this kid. I find for me

in order to have any effect on these kids I have to connect with them in some way . . . There's just a sense of respect, okay I'm here to help you, you're not here to satisfy my needs and make me feel powerful, I'm here to help you. Let's work together on your life and get you out of here and get you moving.

She feels:

You can't control anybody. Once again you're going back to power and you're going to give yourself a heart attack trying to control someone because you're always going to be stressed out because they are not going to do what you want . . . With these kids you have to help them realize they can change their lives. It's like I'm stuck here in an institution for the rest of my life- no you're not, it's up to you to build yourself up enough to get out. I can tell you that you're great but until you start believing it nothing happens. It's the little things that you give them too, little responsibilities to go out there and try for themselves. Then they go out and say, yeah, it wasn't so bad it was pretty easy. I've always come from if you want it, you go out and

> get it yourself. You do it yourself but I'll be there to support you whatever you do.

For Sue, the process of change does not involve power or control. It takes place through hands on experience and the role of the child care worker is to assist the child in believing in their own capabilities. It is a gradual process that is nutured and supported but not controlled by the worker.

Professionalism

Child care was a deliberate choice of career for Sue. After leaving high school she completed a child care college diploma. When asked how important the information that she acquired at school was for her work she recalled an interaction with a supervisor who put the learning into this context:

> What you've learned is great and it's going to give you a basis for what you're doing but this is not textbook work. This is on the spot, on the fly, it's all intuition and common sense, being right there . . . It's there as a basis, it's good for when you write reports. It's good when you have certain problems with certain kids, you can think back, okay I read something about this somewhere. . . . So you can have all the textbook stuff and

> you need that, for psychologists, and psychiatrists. For child care if you have common sense, a lot of common sense, a lot of intuition and a genuine need to see these kids be a success and an interest in seeing that happen, then that's what you need. . . . And just your own experience, getting yourself a style that works for you; never be afraid to change it, to add or delete something from it because you always have to grow. So as for school, nothing I can say, just my bias. A lot of it is from having good supervisors, having good people that I've worked with, and learning from kids, they'll always teach you something.

For Sue the education provided a basis on which to build experience. Being professional means having an openness to new learning, a willingness to change, and a genuine investment and interest in working with the children. She sums up her feelings of child care saying:

> I don't think I'll ever leave this because I feel I have a lot to offer to the kids in many ways. I just really like it. It makes me feel I'm doing something. Like when I smoke I'm putting something bad in the environment. It makes me feel like I'm

> putting something good out there or I'm doing something that can help.

Sue did comment that she did not see herself working in an institution or group home for much longer because of the frustrations of dealing with a system that places its own needs before those of the child. She is planning to take time off to have a family and then create a job for herself where she can work independently with children.

Frustrations

Frustrations are system based and focus on lack of resources to meet the children's needs, workers that no longer are invested in their jobs, and the lack of acknowledgment that the kids receive for making positive changes. Sue described her struggles with the bureaucracy by saying: "It's like standing and pushing but there's always something holding you back, something holding on to you that you can't do your job." The impact on the children was described as:

> If there's chaos the kids will be in chaos, if there's harmony, stability, consistency, your kids will be that way, they'll be just fine. As long as you're not getting hassled your kids are great.

The end result of the system overload is:

> People that don't care anymore, people that are

> burned out, and it's just like oh these kids are all just little bastards, lock them in their rooms tonight . . . You'll find that a lot of the front line workers that come in get disillusioned real fast because what they see is there's no ambition here and this is not where I want to be, I need to go out and do something. . To me it isn't child care like it used to be. Like when the kids came in and you were allowed to do you job, you were allowed to work with these kids, and whatever you needed was okay. Whether you needed back up support, resources, you name it, you were able to access that. It didn't always cost a lot of money but now it's gotten to the point where you can't get that for any of the kids.

In Sue's perception, the system is breaking down and children and workers are both becoming casualties. It is not possible to do the job effectively, and as a result many good workers are leaving, and kids are being lost.

F. Fred

Life Experience

Fred described his family background as dysfunctional with his mother abusing him physically, emotionally and mentally from two to twelve years of age. His father

refused to acknowledge the abuse, and his older brother modeled his mother by beating him. As a result of his background Fred feels that:

> I've really had to address it and say to myself yes, I know at times Fred that you will bring this out-- this the inner conscience talking to me-- what father and mother have said to you and at times you'll feel like you're the mother or you'll feel like you're the father. That is inappropriate in this setting remember that. Then I move into the rational thing or into establishing why it's inappropriate, so that's part of the background coming into the setting. So I've learned to work around myself and coming to an understanding within myself that what happened in my family may not apply here.

This process of coming to an understanding came about for Fred through undergoing therapy himself because he "didn't want to enter a helping profession carrying my old stuff with me". He feels that anyone wishing to pursue a career in child care "should be put through a lot of in-depth stuff" prior to entering the field to ensure that they do not work through their own issues using the kids.

Fred feels that care should be taken in using personal experience or assuming that you understand

someone else's reality. He gives an example of working with an abused child:

> I don't understand, okay because I'm not walking a mile in your shoes. I've not gone through your experience, but something I want to share with you is that I've gone through a similar experience. So I put a lot of emphasis on choice of words, expression, differentiating between understanding and appreciate. And I've heard the word understand many times from workers . . . I understand how you feel being in this center . . . excuse me, you don't. If you've never been in a foster care home or a group home setting you don't understand what this child is going through. Understanding to me is, when somebody says I understand how you feel, that's coming from a logic base, you know, based on theory, which distances the person from the kid.

Personal experience can give the worker an appreciation, rather than an understanding of the experience of the child. While the worker's life experiences can be valid reference points, the assumption should never be made that anyone elses experience is the same.

Relationships

Fred sees the relationships he develops with kids as being "person centered and humanistic" in that:

> The individual that I am working with requires my attention most of the time. I am interested in working with that particular person because not only has that person become sort of a subject, if you look at it from a therapeutic point of view, but as well he's a human being, so that's the humanistic approach I have. In the sense of caring and being a human being. I can't separate myself from that, that I'm a human being, so that's where the humanistic approach comes in. And my work with the kids has a very humanistic base.

He goes on to say:

> I feel that for me I have to develop a working relationship with the child. But as well I need to develop a relationship as a human being to that individual. All too often children perceive the world as being, there's no people out there to care about me. Now I put limitations on that, I put boundaries on that caring . . . I will not replace the child's parents, I will not become the child's parents because I believe that if the environment is

> appropriate for the child to return to, that's where the child belongs. We are to provide a safe and nuturing environment, therapeutic yes, let's get on with the work and get this child back to the family.

Fred sees the workers role to develop a caring relationship in which the worker does not attempt to replace the parent. He is sensitive to what the child must deal with by being in care:

> I came to appreciate that children who are in care have all these people in their lives. like the psychologist, the social worker, the parents, the teachers, the ministers, the aunts and uncles, and holy smokes. And it can be somewhat overwhelming for the child.

He suggests that the worker need not be the primary focus of relationship, but should establish a nuturing context in which the child can develop:

> Not only nuturing the environment for that person so that it becomes a comfortable environment, but at the same time focussing on the individual and looking at their strengths and weaknesses and attempting to nurture the growth, putting emphasis on the strengths and work on the positive, and work on the weaknesses at the same time.

Thus, for Fred, the relationship has clear boundaries which the worker establishes in conjunction with the child that in no way present a message that it's nature is parent-child. The role of the worker is to establish a context in which the individual child can do the work necessary to return home.

Change

The conversation with Fred in regards to change suggested an ongoing struggle on his part to balance what he sees as appropriate in the change process and what others define his role as being:

> The emphasis as you know in the training of child care workers is to control that person's behavior and to change them. There's been a lot of emphasis put on the behavior management role. The rationale being that we want to change the inappropriate behaviors and because they're not conducive to society's norms. . . . I've seen people, child care workers come basically from an up here level, like I'm the person on top, I am the person with the education and the titles behind my name. You are the kid, you're the one that's in trouble, therefore I'm going to develop stuff for you

> that you are going to follow through with. That becomes control; so who's got the power at that point? The kid certainly doesn't because there's no choice on the part of the child.

When the power relationship is imposed, Fred sees the result as being:

> Distancing between the child and the worker. Interruption in the therapy, in the treatment, in other words, the child shuts down, refuses to move on in the therapy.

In opposition to the control model of change, Fred suggests:

> I can only offer alternatives of which I attempt to engage the person to contribute to the alternatives. I believe that the person that we're working with is not only that we're working with them, but that individual's working with us. . . . My philosophy is that it can't be a one sided street, it's got to be two ways. I mean we can provide the model and work within the model but the ultimate decision is theirs, I attempt to engage the kids to contribute. . . . What I do believe is that, as to whether the decision of change, to change rather, is really that individual's choice.

The recurrent theme in Fred's conception of the change process is one of engaging the child to be an active contributor in his or her own treatment. Decisions are made within the give and take of the worker- child relationship, rather than imposed from above.

Professionalism

Fred has a diploma in social work from a college. He sees his work in child care as another step in his professional development. He looks on it as an opportunity to learn about children in care, and feels that this learning will be useful to him when he becomes a family therapist. He is currently pursuing his certification as a child care worker. Child care for Fred is therefore another step in the development of his skills. He sees child care workers being relegated to a caretaker role:

> Although I know within child care the whole scenario around education of child care workers is simply to be caretaker, that's the emphasis, and to focus on or rather utilize the behavior model.

For Fred this role is not enough:

> I would see myself moving beyond the surrogate parent role and being involved in the treatment

> of the child, although I believe the provisions of food, clothing, and shelter are all part of the treatment, and providing a safe and nuturing environment is part of the treatment. But, for myself, I would like to get more involved in the counselling segment of it. . . . And that's an issue for me because I feel so many times that I'm excluded from it. Like I feel at times here's the child care worker, which is myself, there's the helping professionals, i.e., social worker or whatever, and there doesn't seem to be that melding. This thought goes back to being included in the therapeutic model, in other words being able to, well being offered or invited to contribute to the development of the therapeutic model. . . . But not given that opportunity outside of caretaking, it shuts me down and I say to myself, well fuck it, what's the point.

Fred's greatest professional concern was the identification of the child care worker as caretaker, which results in exclusion from the treatment team. I am not sure for Fred whether this concern was implying that child care workers are therapists and should be treated as such, or whether it was more a case of him needing to find

a position better suited to his skills and interests.

Frustrations

As was the case in the above section, Fred's frustrations are a function of the limitations on the role of child care worker imposed by the administration. They are also a result of his perception that the information he has to share is discounted by helping professionals on the treatment team. He feels:

> Stuck, like I know I've got these abilities I guess is the word. I know I've got the abilities and the skills, but I know I would like to, I want to use my skills more, but because of the limitations that have been set on me by the administration I can't, and that creates frustration in me . . . I feel that there has been barriers set on, limits, set on my skills and if I move beyond the skills, beyond that barrier of behavior modification, sorry, you're not a child care worker . . . And it's more like what I see happening now is that I give my observations, that's it. Then it's somebody else's turn to develop the therapeutic model and to assess whether the therapy is working. Well, what about the child care worker? Like hey,

> I feel strongly that most of us have something to offer beyond observation.

The result for Fred is that:

> I've felt that, that I've not been appreciated for what I do, by either the parents or the other helping professionals involved. I've seen it with other people, so therefore that leads to people wanting to leave. The average time that child care workers spend in child care is anywhere from two to three years and then they move on . . . So I've often thought maybe some of my frustration is that I've maybe basically outgrown the whole child care aspect, maybe it's time to move on and pursue something else in the helping professions. But I don't want to move on too quickly because I do want the knowledge as well as the experience because I feel in order for me to be an effective family therapist I need to know for myself what it's like to be a child and to rely on my past experiences, but as well to understand what it's like for a child to be in care.

The dilemma for Fred is to remain in the role long enough to complete his learning, but not so long that the frustrations resulting from the limits imposed interfere with his effectiveness with the children.

G. Overview

The preceding sections contained the lived experiences of the six men and women who shared with me their constructions of being front line child care workers. The format of extensive quotations was selected to allow them to speak of the experience for themselves. I hope that through this format the reader obtained a sense of the complexity and depth of their experiences. The process of separating their conversations into the themes was the first level of interpretation. The second level, contained in the next chapter draws together the individuals and the themes into patterns of interpretation in which I will integrate their experience into my horizon of research and experience.

V. THEMATIC DISCUSSION

The themes of Life Experience, Relationship, Change, Professionalism, and Frustrations will be examined in this chapter in relation to my preunderstandings of hermeneutics, constructivism, and the cybernetic epistemology of Maturana. In this, the second level of interpretation, my horizon as the researcher will encounter and interpret the horizons of the co-researchers. The themes will be discussed separately, with each integrating the lived experiences of all the co-researchers. A final section will present my conclusions.

A. Life Experience

Gadamer (1975) stated "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live." (p. 245) In the theme of Life Experience each of the six co-researchers talks of family in detail. With the exception of Bea everyone described their families as being dysfunctional. For Moe, June, and Sue, this meant coming from a background of alcoholism, and for Albert and Fred, physical and emotional abuse. For Bea it wasn't abuse,

but the trauma of being told by her aunt at the age of twelve, without her parents consent, that she was adopted. All six stress the importance of 'finishing old business' so personal issues are not worked through on the children, but the conversations made it evident that for each of them the past was an integral part of their working styles.

Moe says he "knows how they react", knows the feelings of children in care because he was one. For Sue the values and beliefs that she brings into her work of independence, self-reliance, and a belief in the possibilities of the individual creating solutions for themselves are attributed to her mother, and transfer directly to her work with children. Bea brings in family values of honesty, pride in self, self-reliance, and conflict resolution strategies. She enjoys working with children that have been adopted the most because she knows "exactly what kind of feelings they're going through". In a similar fashion Albert feels that he connects most quickly with angry acting out kids because of his own "rage and inadequacies". For June the connection is strongest with issues of power, control, and the children of alcoholics. Fred uses his personal history of abuse to 'appreciate' children's experience.

The common thread is that these men and women's perceptions and behaviors are grounded in the tradition of their experience. Gadamer (1975) stated that "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being" (p. 245) and, that " the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience" (1976, p. 9). Their life experiences constitute their way of seeing and interacting with themselves and others. For each of them, there is a sense of being connected with their own historicity to which, with varying degrees of explicitness, they attribute their style of working with the children.

The history and prejudices of my co-researchers also seemed to play a role in their selection of the client population with which they work. For them, working with adolescents represented a conscious choice. In Moe's' case, working with teenagers is "more like you could talk like an adult" as compared to younger children to whom he feels no connection: "I didn't pass through that in my own life. I have no experience of that." Both June and Sue suggest that with teenagers they are able to interact as equals, whereas with younger children they feel that the desire to nuture them in a parental role, to

have to "take them all home with me", would decrease their effectiveness as workers. In a like manner the choice of group home over institution reflected their own prejudices with the common themes being the degree of comfort was greater in a 'home' environment, and that there was less emphasis on regimentation and control, and more possibilities to develop "real relationships" in the homes.

Maturana's (1975; 1978) concept of structural determinism is relevant to this theme. He suggests the system to be organizationally closed, with its structure fully determining its perceptions, behavior and the interactions in which it can participate. This structure changes as a result of recurrent patterns of interaction (coupling) with other structurally determined organisms, through patterns of mutual perturbation. However, another person's ability to perturb my system is determined by the degree of fit between the structures of the two systems that are attempting to interact.

When the child care workers are talking about "knowing", or "understanding", or "connecting" with a child's experience, I would suggest that they are indicating that they recognize the possibility of developing a consensual reality with the child. The structure or history of the life experience of these men

and women are the "lenses" (cf. Kelly, 1955) through which they construct their worlds. The fact that each, in a different way, speaks to their history as creating their realities or horizons, and their possibilities for connecting with those of others, points to the impossibility of separating (or objectifying) the individual's immersion in their own history or structures from their interpretation of their own experience.

B. Relationship

Maturana and Varela (1988) stated: "We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others" (p. 235). For my co-researchers this "continuous becoming" is described in the theme of Relationship, which all indicated to be their basis and medium for working with the children.

Moe stated "There's no way the kid could do anything if they don't connect", and all the other workers echoed this belief in different ways. Common to all their interpretations of this theme is the importance of caring, respect and trust of the other, genuineness in the expression of feelings, belief in the competence of the children, and the awareness that relationships develop

gradually as a result of shared experience. For Sue, relationship is the context for developing the personal resources of the child, and Fred frames it as nuturing to promote growth. June points to the necessity of the connection to allow information to be shared, and Albert stresses that without shared experience communication is not possible. For Bea and Moe the reciprocal nature of the relationship allows both them and the children a context for new structures to emerge, and they both stress the importance of 'speaking the child's language' in the process of engagement.

The roles that they ascribe to themselves are different for each of the co-researchers. Bea sees herself as a surrogate parent, Sue an equal partner. Albert and June a blend of peer when possible, and when necessary, as an authority figure; the latter role being assumed when the child's safety is at issue. For Moe the relationship is that of a brother, and while Fred feels forced into the role of caretaker by the system, his preference would be to assume the role of therapist. Regardless of how they interpret their roles with the children, all of them suggest the connection which is formed within the context of relationship to be the necessary, although not sufficient, condition for working

with children.

Maturana and Varela (1988) interpret the process of relationship as one of structural coupling where "there is a history of recurrent interactions leading to the structural congruence between two (or more) systems" (p. 75). When speaking of the importance of shared experiences and the gradual process of developing a relationship, the co-researchers are suggesting the necessity of this history of recurrent interactions, so that each person functions as the medium that creates the perturbations that 'trigger' structural change. As the above discussion indicated, it is the structure of the person that determines the possibility, nature, and extent of the structural changes undergone, rather than the actions or structure of the other. The respect the workers expressed for the reality of the children that they worked with, and their emphasis on the relationship facilitating the child's generation of his or her own solutions, was an illustration of their appreciation that the person uniquely determines their reality.

For Maturana and Varela (1988) it is through language that distinct unities enter the "realm of coordinated conduct", an observation which Gadamer (1976) endorses when he refers to "the essential linguisticality of our beings" determining our experience of the world. Maturana

(1970) stated:

> The linguistic domain as a domain of orienting behavior requires at least two interacting organisms with comparable domains of interactions, so that a cooperative system of consensual interactions may be developed in which the emerging conduct of the two organisms is relevant for both . . . The central feature of human existence is its occurrence in a linguistic cognitive domain. This domain is constitutively social. (pp. 41, xxiv)

I am reminded of Moe's comment that the child and worker can do nothing without a connection being established first. Maturana (1978) would use the term "consensual domain" rather than connection to describe the medium in which we can perturb each other, but the thought remains the same.

Through the process of languaging we create the possibility for consensus, a shared reality. For as long as the mutual perturbations of the individuals on each other, are within the limits of their own structurally determined systems, a social domain is created that allows for the people that are coupled to function in coordinated conduct. In this way, the relationship that all of my co-researchers identified as being vital to their work, creates the possibility for them to join with the children

in a mutual process of elaborating and changing their structures. Without the consensus that is embodied in relationship, we are indeed "islands unto ourselves" with no possibility for interaction or change.

C. Change

Maturana and Varela (1988) stated that "every ontogeny as an individual history of structural change is a structural drift that occurs with conservation of organization and adaptation" (pp. 102-103). Thus, a system's prime directive is to conserve itself as a living unity, and adaptation and structural change occur as a function of this directive. In no way is it possible for the actions of another to cause or instruct changes to occur to my structure. In this the theme of Change my co-researcher's presented a mixture of interpretations of the change process.

Bateson (1972) refers to the use of power to enforce control as "epistemological lunacy" (p. 487). My co-researchers are in agreement with his perception in that none of them perceive themselves to be 'change agents'. There was consensus regarding the impossibility of forcing a child to change, and the necessity of the relationship context to facilitate change. For June the use of power and control results in compliance with no

learning on the part of the child. Fred sees power as distancing the worker from the child, and stopping the change process. All see change as being the responsibility of the child. Instead of attempting to force change, they speak of establishing contexts where change is possible. Moe, Bea, Albert, and Sue utilize the experience of everyday activities to facilitate the change process. June sees herself as a provider of information, and Fred suggests that he provides the model of change for the child. Each stresses the necessity of joining with the child, of establishing consensus prior to attempting to facilitate change.

Upon reflecting on my co-researchers' description of the change process, I observed an implicit assumption on all of their parts, with the exception of Moe. Bea stated that while not a change agent, she saw herself as being able to teach the kids to use their own resources. This perception was echoed by June who described herself as a facilitator of learning, who provides the children with information, and by the others with various descriptions. The implicit assumption seemed to be, that given the existence of a caring and nuturing relationship between themselves and the kids, they could provide instruction or in some way teach the children so that functioning would

be increased.

Maturana and Varela (1975; 1980; 1988) challenge the above assumption, calling it "the myth of instructive interaction". They refer back to the perceptual experiments discussed earlier to demonstrate that our internal representations are the product of the internal computations, as defined by our structure, rather than coded isomorphic representations of a reality that exists 'out there'. Because the system is organizationally closed to information, no other system can instruct it or cause a particular behavior to occur. They consider concepts like causality and learning to be category errors, where the observer's process of drawing distinctions attributes a linear cause and effect relationship to the interaction being observed. Maturana (1980) stated:

> The notion of causality is a notion that pertains to the domain of descriptions, and as such it is relevant only in the metadomain in which the observer makes his commentaries and cannot be deemed operative in the phenomenal domain, the object of description. (p. xviii)

As observers functioning in the domain of description, we can with our language create an illusion of control, or cause and effect. The process of consensus that arises as

a result of our sharing the names of our distinctions with those we are coupled with, is for Maturana the genesis of the notion of objectivity.

> Maturana (1975) extends his premise stating:
>
> the semantic value of an interaction . . . is not a property of the interaction, but a feature of the description that the observer makes by referring to it as if changes of state of the interacting systems were determined by their mutual perturbations, and not by their respective individual structures. (p. 330)

It must therefore be remembered that any semantic contextual description "which is not intended as a mere metaphor, is intrinsically inadequate and fallacious" (Maturana, 1975, p. 322).

This is not to suggest that we should cease to engage in the process of describing interactions, but rather that care should be taken to remember that the descriptions are metaphors that arise as a function of our drawing distinctions on the world. Gadamer would say that these distinctions come from our history, Maturana our structure. Although my co-researchers all stated clearly their belief that they could not control or change the children with whom they worked, I continued to wonder. I have been unable to resolve for myself as to whether they

were presenting a position of 'benevolent instruction', which to me suggested an implicit belief that one organism could determine the behavior of the other (albeit with caring and respect), or that my reaction was a function of my own preunderstandings preventing me from hearing what they were saying.

My tendency is to lean towards the former interpretation, and to suggest that at least for these men and women, they embrace the simple cybernetic or 'black box' viewpoint (Keeney, 1983) where instruction can be 'inputted' to the child leading to a modification of behavior. Their bridge seems to be that they allow the children to contribute to the process of determining the nature of the input. As a consequence, they view themselves and the children as being organizationally open to information. The sole exception to this viewpoint is Moe who clearly stated that "everybody's minds is different." His role is one of sharing his experience and perceptions with no expectation that change will occur as a result of his actions, which is congruent with Maturana's view of organizational closure and structural determinism.

D. Professionalism

Neither Maturana nor Gadamer speak directly to the theme of Professionalism, but my co-researchers did in

many different voices. Four of the six co-researchers described their entry into child care as being "accidental". For Moe and Albert, entry into the field occurred as a result of their wives being employed in child care, for June it was a family friend who encouraged her to try it. Bea responded to a newspaper advertisement thinking that she might "like to work with kids." Fred and Sue's entry was deliberate with Fred seeing it as a transition job where he can acquire experience in working with children in care that will be valuable to him when he reaches his goal of becoming a family therapist, as compared to Sue who sees child care, in some form, being her lifetime career.

As a sample in comparison to the literature (e.g., Berube, 1984) my co-researchers were significantly better educated. Their training included two college diplomas in child care, one diploma in social work, a degree in social work, one in education, and a grade twelve diploma. In a effort to determine whether my findings in terms of amount of education was unusual, I contacted a number of agencies and institutions in Edmonton and area to obtain their hiring standards. The information that I received suggested that there is a shift since Berube's article was published in 1984 with many of the agencies now making the child care diploma or its equivalent a

preferred, if not required, condition for obtaining employment. Phelan and Weisman (1988) suggest that by 1998 the child care worker will have spent two to four years in college as preparation for entry into the field. On the basis of the above information I would suggest that my co-researcher's amount of education is no longer the 'exception to the rule' in child care.

Three of my co-researchers were not certified as child care workers, two were in the process of obtaining certification, and one had his credential. Again this reflects Phelan's (1988) review of certification where she comments that while education of child care workers is increasing, there still exists some difficulties convincing front line staff that the training will be of benefit to them. Sue commented that she found the content of the training process for certification to be a repeat of her diploma content.

With the exception of Fred, none of the co-researchers saw any direct connection between the content that they had acquired at school and their day to day functioning on the front line. Sue indicated that her education had provided a basis or foundation, but her skills were acquired through direct experience and interaction with colleagues. June was in agreement with this perception. Moe, Albert, and Bea suggested that

background and experience were as, if not more, important than educational content. Of the six, only Fred was actively pursuing further education.

Their perceptions of what it meant to be a professional child care worker were varied. For Moe it meant "to just be yourself." Sue saw being professional as being open, willing to change, and as having a genuine investment and interest in the children. June saw it as having a commitment to change the system so that the current dysfunction is not multiplied. For Bea, the critical element was in caring for the children, and in acting as a surrogate parent rather than as a clinician. Fred spoke of recognition from other helping professionals that child care workers are an integral part of the treatment team, and therefore therapists. Only Albert spoke directly to the need for child care workers to become better organized at all levels to move towards recognition as a profession.

The above views are consistent with Phelan and Wiesman's (1988) review of the status of child care as a profession in Alberta in that there does not as yet appear to be any coherent vision or definition of what the profession of child care is, or if it is a profession at all. Also consistent with the literature reviewed in chapter II, is the myriad of roles and tasks that my

co-researchers are responsible for in their work. Roles included surrogate parent, caretaker, brother, therapist, teacher, nurse, mediator, and friend. Tasks ranged from mundane chores regarding maintenance of the home, to crisis intervention with a child that had been sexually assaulted. It was clear to me that the child care worker had little choice but to assume a generalist role which was responsive to the demands of the moment. There seems to have been little change since Ricks and Charlesworth (1982) did their review of the roles and functions of the child care worker. Thus, while this research was no more successful at determining the 'who and what' of child care, that was not its intention. What it did describe in relation to this theme was the extent of the caring, commitment, and integrity that all my co-researchers possessed in their approaches towards the children they served.

E. Frustrations

Without exception, the men and women I conversed with identified their frustrations as being system rather than child based. At the most basic level the frustrations are related to this provinces economic downturn, which has resulted in funding and resources being either cut back or frozen. Potentially more damaging is the reality that as

resources become more restricted, more demands are placed on the workers to fulfill additional roles and functions. Sue suggested that this puts experienced workers in the position of covering both their own responsibilities and those of relief workers who are inadequately trained to fulfill the requirements of the job. The end result can be the "lock the little bastards up" mentality that Sue described as illustrative of 'burnout' from too many demands. It can also mean, as Fred commented, that the duration of people's stay as child care workers will shorten, resulting in increasing numbers of inexperienced workers attempting to service the needs of children in care.

A repeated frustration expressed by June, Albert, and Bea was that the system's focus of distinction in treating the child outside of the family system ensured that dysfunction would be maintained and multiplied. In addition (in Maturana's language), if the structure of the composite unity that we call family is not coupled with the child as his or her structure changes, a loss of consensus is experienced, and future recurrent patterns of interaction are jeopardized. The composite unity that is family adapts to the loss of one of its unities, and formulates a new domain of coordinated conduct that does not include the child in care. Albert wonders if we may

not be 'setting kids up' by facilitating changes that no longer make them part of their families consensual reality, and so do I.

As a group, my co-researchers stressed the importance of engaging and involving the family in the treatment process so that the structure of the composite unity of the family can change, rather than only that of the isolated member. Ferguson and Anglis (1985) suggest that as a profession child care is in the process of broadening its scope to include possibilities like family and community based treatment work. Again, however, the system was constrained by its structure, and for a great many years the social service system was focussed on 'child welfare' rather than 'family welfare.' While this focus is shifting both in terms of legislation and programs to more system sensitive models of service delivery, the pace of the change is very slow. In the meantime, both I and my co-researchers deal with the children and families who become the casualties.

Ferguson and Anglis (1985) suggest that among child care workers there is decreased concern over issues of credibility and competence. This was not the case with my co-researchers. They described themselves as being ascribed a custodial role by other helping professionals. They spoke of themselves as being de-valued, discounted,

and excluded from the treatment team. In my perception, these feelings arose more as a result of a genuine belief on their part that their constant contact with the children placed them in a position of making a valid contribution to the child's treatment, than as 'sour grapes' that no one appreciated their work.

After reflecting on this theme, I was left with a sense that each of these men and women were deeply committed to ensuring that the children in their care had the best possible chance for creating safe and fulfilling lives for themselves. The theme of frustration seemed to be more of a comment or reaction to obstacles interfering with them providing the best possible service than to the job of child care worker itself. In Sue's words:

> It's like standing and pushing but there's always something holding you back, something holding on to you so you can't do your job.

F. Conclusions

This research evolved as a result of my curiosity about the experiences of front line child care workers. In part, this curiosity was a consequence of having to work with these men and women on a daily basis to serve the needs of children in care. As my contact with them increased, so did my realization that, rather than make an

assumption that my interpretation of their reality was sufficient to create consensus, I should seek it directly from them. An examination of the child care literature suggested that their voices or experiences had not been heard directly, and other researchers (e.g., Rathbun, Webster, & Taylor, 1983) shared this concern. My search for a method of inquiry beyond the standard survey or structured interview format was a long one. I required a perspective that was congruent with my own prejudices concerning notions of objectivity and the role of the observer in the research process. Gadamer's (1975; 1976) dialectical hermeneutics provided this perspective, and was used as a guide throughout the research process.

I began with the question "How do you as a front-line child care worker describe your experience of working with adolescents in a group home context?". In keeping with Gadamer's premise that all interpretation is bound by immersion in tradition, which closely resembles Maturana's concept of structural determinism, I engaged in an examination of the preunderstandings that I brought to the question. In particular, the philosophical position of radical constructivism and the cybernetic epistemology of Humberto Maturana formed the basis of the preunderstandings with which I entered the conversations.

The responses of the men and women, who were my co-researchers, to the question generated a wealth of information regarding the experience of the child care worker. To sort and present this information meant that I as the researcher had to impose distinctions on the experience. The process of drawing distinctions was, like the conversations themselves, an encounter of two horizons meeting through the vehicle of language. Chapter IV allowed you the reader to share with me my encounter of the experiences of the child care workers through their own descriptions in language. While the individuals and themes were presented as being distinct from one another, it is hoped that they retained a sense of the commonalties as well as the differences in the experiences of the co-researchers.

In this chapter, I proceeded to the second level of understanding, which consisted of me interpreting the experiences of my co-researchers in relation to my preunderstandings of Gadamer's hermeneutics and Maturana's cybernetic epistemology. As with the rest of the hermeneutical encounter, the process was a recursive one embedded in my own historicity and the language that expresses it. It was an encounter between my process of drawing distinctions and those of my co-researchers. Most important, it was an encounter between my own horizon and

the rich and varied experiences of my co-researchers, in which a consensual reality was created that allowed each of us to grow. We began with a shared interest in working with adolescents. We ended with a shared interest in working with each other.

In this chapter, I related Gadamer's thesis that we as human beings are determined by our immersion in our history to the themes of Life Experience and Relationship. The co-researchers sharing of their stories suggested to me that their experiences did in fact determine their perceptions and behavior in relationship. What they brought into each encounter with a child was the sum total of their lives, and their openness and sharing with the children and myself speaks of their integrity and wholeness. Each man and women in their own language validated the existence of the hermeneutical circle by their awareness of the expansion of their horizons as a result of their desire to join in the game of encounter.

To varying degrees the concepts of Maturana and Varela were used to interpret all the themes. In Life Experience, the concept of structural determinism was related to the worker's awareness of understanding or knowing the experiences of the child. The process of structural coupling was employed to interpret their experience of Relationship. The organizational closure of

the system to information, the myth of instructive interaction, and the role of language to create an 'as if' objectivity in the domain of description were employed to question the co-researchers interpretation of the change process.

The themes of Professionalism and Frustration were more directly related to the child care literature. My co-researchers echoed their colleague's concerns in regard to a lack of clear identity, the expectation of multiple roles and functions, and the frustration of being joined to a system that seemed as efficient at creating dysfunction as it was at resolving it. The latter observation was briefly reinterpreted in a cybernetic context to demonstrate the consequence of failure to include the composite unity (i.e., the family) in the treatment of the child. Most important for me was the interpretation that we as the service providers need to shift our focus of distinction to examine how and where the children 'jumped or were pushed into the river,' rather than engaging in a continuous cycle of pulling out the next generation after the first one jumps (or is dropped) back in. In consensus with my co-researchers, I would suggest that the system that is the environment that we work in, is focussed at the present time in attempting to preserve its own organization and integrity. As a

result of the diminishing resource base, it is experiencing difficulty servicing the people that it was created to serve, the children.

As a radical constructivist I find it impossible to 'objectively' evaluate the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge which we call psychology. Assuming Maturana's position of "objectivity in parenthesis" I can suggest that it contributes an appreciation and validation of the direct experience of six men and women who are front line child care workers, which others have suggested needed to be done. The study demonstrated one of many possible applications of Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective for interpreting lived experience in the social sciences. It explored what I consider to be the most important shift in epistemology to occur in the biological and social sciences to date, the autopoietic theory of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, and demonstrated one of its possible uses as an interpretive framework for understanding human behavior and interaction.

I would suggest that the application and demonstration of the epistemological shift from framing experience as an open system that is subject to prediction and control, to one where experience is viewed as being determined and closed, is the most important contribution

of this study to psychology. While certainly not the sole true or right approach to understanding human behavior, Maturana's living systems theory provides a framework that allows the researcher to clearly distinguish his position in relation to the phenomena being studied. It also provides a language to describe the experience of the interpretive process of research. Specifically, this study, through its application of the model, provides an interpretation of the experience of child care workers that was obtained directly from them. It also provides a possible style of engaging with, and interpreting the experience of interacting with fellow service providers that I am suggesting is useful in effectively providing consultation.

In terms of the study's implications for future research, I would suggest that the focus be broadened to examine the experiences of child care workers in institutional settings. My own reactions to the workers' constructions of the process of change lead me to suggest that this area be explored in greater depth, particularly in regards to their constructions of the concept of control. In a similar fashion, the history of these workers and its impact on their styles of working with, and relating to the children requires further exploration. Finally, virtually no research has been done examining the

experience of the people we service, the adolescents in care.

This study's strengths are also its limitations. The research focussed on a specific population of child care workers and as such can not be generalized to the profession as a whole. Implicit in the research model is the concept that the uniqueness of the individual's history and structures can in no way be generalized to any other individual. Acceptance of the model entails the adoption of the perspective of autopoiesis, which suggests that all we will ever 'know' is what our own structures determine in consensus with others through language.

In the final analysis, the relevance of this study will be determined by its ability to perturb the structures of you the reader. It will be through your encounter with and interpretation of this text that the lived experiences of these men and women who are called front line child care workers will be validated. The final chapter will complete the circle by describing how the process of this research has resulted in a change in the horizons of the researcher.

VI. COMPLETION OF THE CIRCLE

The image of a circle has served as a guide throughout the process of this research. The circle suggests recursion, closure, a tracing of experience that ends up where it began, to begin anew. The circle image also relates directly to the "Hermeneutical Circle" Palmer (1969) described in which an examination of my preunderstandings led to an awareness of not knowing the experience of child care workers. This awareness of not knowing in turn led to the formulation of my question "How do you as a front line child care worker describe your experience of working with adolescents in a group home context?" Not knowing allowed for an attitude of expectancy, an openness to the possibility that my encounter with these men and women would broaden my horizon of self understanding.

Following the image of the circle I return to the quotation with which I began this dissertation. Bateson (1972) implores scientists to be moved by "curiosity about the world of which we are a part," suggesting that the "rewards of such work are not power but beauty" (p. 269). The hermeneutical encounter, with its intrinsic quality of curiosity, and its denial of objectivity which leads to control, seems ideally suited for this type of

exploration. Like any other venture into new territory there is also risk attached, in that the distinctions that I bring into the encounter will be transformed by the experience.

My tradition of preunderstanding includes a strong connection to family, a love of learning and language, respect for the individuality and rights of the person, a belief in the possibility of multiple realities, and a passion for my work with teenagers. I did not search for a philosophical position, I tripped over it. In radical constructivism my own preunderstandings found a home, a 'fit' that resembled the chance encounter of two old friends picking up the conversation where they left off. With it I found a frame in which to place my notions of the importance of language, the nature of the scientific method, and the creation of reality. Most important, I experienced consensus and the validation that arises as a result of it.

As I have outlined in the previous chapters, Maturana's view of the world is also one of circularity and recursion. My initial encounters with his writings were maddening. There was a sense of importance without understanding that challenged me to persist. As I became more familiar with his language, my horizons expanded. Adopting his theory base caused me to re-think every

concept I had ever learned (including learning) in psychology, and my own perspective in how to work as a therapist in a systems context, which led to the present research.

As I indicated previously, I have a private practice whose focus is mainly working with adolescents in care. In searching for a research question, I wanted to find one that would be of some interest to psychology, and also have applications to my own work. A significant portion of my time is spent working in conjunction with child care staff in group homes. It made sense to me that by encountering and interpreting the child care worker's constructions of their own experience I would be more effective with them.

For the most part, this research was an experience of consensus for me, where it was possible to fit my structures with those of my co-researchers into a domain of shared distinctions. There is, however, a final step in the Hermeneutical Circle which involves the transformation of the horizon that I brought to the encounter. For me the transformation or shift was a jarring but useful one, which occurred while reflecting on the theme of Change. The interpretation on my part that the co-researchers were espousing a simple cybernetic or black box view of change caused significant perturbations to my system, and a

resulting shift in my horizon. For me to speak of prejudices arising as a result of my own history, the most clear and strongest is my belief that attempts to control or change another are "epistemological lunacy" that result in destructive interactions for all parties concerned. My experience is that without an intrusive violation of the person, that gives the individual a choice between compliance and aversive consequence, this type of intervention or interaction is not possible.

For years I have struggled to include child care workers in the treatment process because I believe they can make important contributions. I have been amazed by the ease of connecting and establishing consensus with some of the workers, and frustrated and confused by my inability to couple with others. Upon reflection, it appears to me that my attempts at connection with those that espouse the control or black box model were very close to a return to that model myself, in that I would find myself attempting to "instruct" them on the impossibility of instruction. Thus my perception that I had made the 'jump' from first to second order cybernetics was transformed. I had forgotten one of the fundamental premises of the latter model, which suggested that a realm of coordinated conduct (i.e., working together) is not possible without coupling. My own structure enjoined me

to avoid any semblance of the control model, and yet I was attempting to impose it. My inability to connect with workers who were asking me to join them in exercising control over the children 'for their own good' was the result of me pacing their reality, rather than sharing my own.

The shift in my horizon is thus one where I am once again aware of the seductiveness of language to describe interactions as if they are purposeful. To return to Dell's (1985) analogy of the cue and billiard ball, it is not my action that determines the behavior of the other but his or her own unique structure. In this context my engagement in the research process has served to emphasize both Maturana's and my belief that I must accept complete responsibility for my own perceptions and views on change. I must attempt to offer rather than 'sell' these constructions to the people with whom I work.

This research was both the most effortless and difficult process I have ever been involved in. My encounters with the workers who shared their experiences with me, and my interactions with their texts allowed me to become immersed in an interesting and enjoyable game. Their comments suggested that they shared this experience with me and were as excited as I was to see the text in final form. The process was difficult because the

necessity of my immersion into the game distanced me from my wife and daughter. I welcome this process of ending which allows me to create and recreate new circles in which to play. I thank you the reader for sharing in this experience and hope that this work does justice to the experiences of the men and women who assisted me in its creation.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

in a research study concerned with understanding the experience of men and women who do front line child care work.

This research study, conducted by Michael Reynolds of the University of Alberta, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Department of Educational Psychology has been explained to me. I have agreed to be interviewed and to describe my experiences as a child care worker. I understand that the interviews will be recorded on audio tape, and that the information given by me will be used solely for research purposes in the form of a dissertation or otherwise. I agree that this information, in the form of selected quotations from the transcripts may be included in the description of the experience. I further understand that every effort will be made to remove all information that might identify me personally, or identify the agency and colleagues I am involved with in my work. Finally I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I can discontinue it at any time.

Signed _____ Date _____

Witnessed _____ Date _____