

IN SEARCH OF LOST POSTMODERN  
Descriptions of School Social Work Expertise in Official Documents.  
A Rhetorical Discourse Analytic Approach.

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## INTRODUCTION

I decided to write my thesis on school social work during my work placement which I took as a school social worker. I wanted to take the course in schools because I have a previous degree as a teacher. Thus school as a workplace (or work placement place) seemed an obvious and easy choice. However, the work placement was different from what I expected. School social work turned out to be exceptional and special in many ways. It seemed situated on the margins of social work as well as of work carried out in schools. I often felt like an outsider during the seminar discussions concerning our placement experiences as well as in the teachers' lobby or in pupil welfare meetings when discussing work related issues.

I also had problems finding further reading on the issues that intrigued me most. Not much of social work literature would discuss problems related to interprofessional work and working in a "host" environment. In addition, most of the literature discussing dilemmas related to pupil welfare would do that from the teachers' point of view in the theoretical framework of pedagogy. The literature on school social work is almost non-existent. It consists mainly of theses written in either social work departments or teacher training departments; and of official memorandums and reports, most of which focus on pupil welfare as a whole. The fact that school social work is relatively little researched was one of the reasons to stick to it as my subject.

Moreover, the few researches that exist give a rather ambiguous picture. On the basis of these studies, school social work can be described as having unclear boundaries, authorities and responsibilities. It is situated on the margins and the cross-section of social work and work carried out in schools, as school social workers can only carry out their work with respect to the values, principles and standards of both social work and education. So the question arises: How is it possible for school social workers to maintain a strong social work professional identity despite the ambiguous nature of their work? In other words, how the professional expertise of school social workers can be defined and described to make a wide variety of practice possible and yet ensure social work professional identity even in a somewhat adverse environment?

In addition to my interests as far as the subject of my thesis was concerned, I was also certain about my theoretical and methodological preferences. I have found postmodernist

and social constructionist theories being especially close to me. My previous studies in the fields of literature and linguistics have directed my interest towards issues connected with language and language use and influenced my choices as far as methodology was concerned. I became especially interested in rhetorical discourse analysis.

Even though I decided on the research subject and research method in an early phase, I had problems in narrowing down my research topic and finding the suitable research material. Luckily, while I was still considering these issues, a memorandum for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was published by a group of experts on the subject of pupil and student welfare. (Memorandum of the Working Group preparing a reform of the pupil welfare legislation. / *Oppilashuoltoon liittyvän lainsäädännön uudistamistyöryhmän muistio. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriön selvityksiä 2006: 33*) In addition, there were thirty-six official comments issued on the Memorandum by different organisations and institutions. Although these documents focus on pupil welfare as a whole, they also include an interesting discussion on the qualifications required of school social workers the main question being whether school social workers should have the same degree as social workers do. Even though I was not interested in qualification requirements as such, these texts still suited my purposes well, as they also contain detailed descriptions of school social work.

To my surprise, however, the descriptions of school social work provided by these official documents rely overwhelmingly on modernist and managerialist understandings of social work expertise, although social work theoretical literature emphasises the need for the breakthrough of reflexive practice, and it stresses the parallel features of postmodern theories and social work principles (e.g. Satka and Karvinen 1999, 120; Karvinen 1999, 279-280; Parton and O'Byrne 2000). However, I believe a rhetoric discourse analysis of these texts can explain why there is such a difference between theoretical understandings of social work expertise and its construction in official documents.

# 1. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1.1. Social Constructionism

Mason (2002, 14) in her book on qualitative research, advises the novice researcher to start out her project by asking how s/he sees reality and knowledge, that is, to define his or her ontological and epistemological presumptions. Ontological and epistemological perspectives presuppose how things are perceived and thus shape understandings and the propositions that stem from those understandings. Consequently, different perspectives might tell different stories of the same issue. Karvinen (1999, 282) in her article on social work research also stresses the importance to express our position on epistemological questions, as it will influence the methodological standpoint we take.

In line with these ideas, I have also found it useful to define my standpoint in these issues. My thesis is influenced primarily by postmodernist theories and social constructionism. I see the relationship between postmodernist theories and social constructionism as described by Parton and O'Byrne (2000) and Burr (2000, 12). They see postmodernist theories as the cultural and intellectual background against which social constructionism has taken shape, and thus postmodern theories as more fundamental in their theoretical and practical implications, while social constructionism as more concerned with a particular methodological stance. Postmodernist theories and social constructionism are nevertheless not seen as theories that could be strictly separated from each other but as interrelated and influencing one another. Consequently, social constructionism is seen here as the approach emphasising the processes through which people define themselves and their environment in interaction through linguistic and symbolic activity.

It would be inaccurate to describe social constructionism as one single stance or position, nevertheless there are certain common themes present within the different approaches grouped under this label. (Burr 2000, 14) The basic assumption of social constructionism is well illustrated in a story related by Sarbin and Kitsuse (quoted by Parton and O'Byrne, 2000):

“The story is about three baseball umpires who are reflecting on their professional practice of calling balls and strikes. The first, a self-confident realist says, 'I call 'em the way they are', to which the second, who leans towards phenomenological analysis, says, 'I call 'em as I see 'em', and the third closes the discussion with 'They ain't nothin' until I call 'em', thus alluding to her/his constructionist sympathies.”

As the story illustrates, social constructionists believe that language does not merely describe objects, events and categories existing in the social and natural world but it actively constructs a version of those things by ordering our perception. These constructs, in turn, impose constraints and possibilities on human actors themselves. The process of constructing reality is considered a rhetorical one as it involves persuading one's self and others that one rendering of social reality is more credible and legitimate than any other. Thus language and language use is given emphasis. (Parton and O'Byrne 2000)

According to Burr (2000, 2-5), several assumptions follow from the notion of the socially constructed nature of reality. Social constructionist believe that all ways of understanding are contextual in the sense that they are specific to particular cultures and periods of history as they are the products of that culture and history. Consequently, they question the view that knowledge is based upon an objective and unbiased observation of the world and thus they problematise the taken-for-granted nature of knowledge. Instead, social constructionists argue, knowledge is sustained by social processes. It is through the daily interactions between people that versions of knowledge are constructed, maintained or questioned. Therefore social interactions of all kinds, particularly language, are of great interest to social constructionism. Moreover, knowledge and social action go together: constructions of the world sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others.

Social constructionism includes radical as well as moderate versions. According to the extreme relativist position of social constructionism, nothing exists except as it exists in discourse. This approach denies that there is any material base to our lives, even those phenomena that have important effect on us such as economy, living conditions or health are reduced to being simply the effects of language.

The more pragmatic orientation of social constructionism attempts to avoid the slide into relativism. Parker (Burr 2000, 85-88), for instance, develops a notion of reality outside the text that still allows a constructionist position. He suggests the things can have one of three possible 'object statuses': ontological, epistemological and moral/political. Ontological objects exist independently of human thought and language. However, we cannot have direct knowledge of them, as what we know is always subjective. The things what we have knowledge of have a different object status: epistemological status. These objects have already entered discourse, as they are given meaning to. The third realm, that of moral/political object status, is a special category of things that have epistemological status.

These are the concepts that are actually called into being through discourse (e.g. intelligence, race, attitude) and thus given a reality which in turn can affect people. Some of the things that exist in the epistemological realm are therefore representations of the things that have ontological status, and some of them are things that have been invented through discourse and have moral/political status. The danger then is that objects having moral/political status are treated as if they had the same kind of 'reality' as ontological things. Parker's system of categorising things according to their 'object status' raises the issues of how we are to distinguish the members of one category from another, and who is in a position to make such judgements. Nevertheless, a main point of this approach is that while reality does not determine knowledge, it lays down important restrictions on the variety of ways open to us to construct the world.

According to Payne (1999, 38), an important aspect of social constructionist analysis for social work is its capacity to address the interactions between a micro- and macro-analysis. Research that operates on the micro-level helps us understand how social workers and clients interact and form their behaviour in relation to one another. Macro-level research, on the other hand, examines cycles of construction which form social constructs of greater stability and wider explanation. Applied to social work, they contribute to shared conceptions about the structure and organisation of society. Accordingly, we can identify the political and social interactions which form the context in which agencies and professions construct their activities and social workers and clients operate at the micro-level. So we can conceive of a series of social construction cycles operating with different foci in different arenas, yet interacting with each other.

Payne (1999, 39-40) reminds that the complete view of the construction of social work requires a broad focus on all these arenas and on how they interlock. Nevertheless, any particular cycle can be analysed with a more limited focus without reference to other arenas. However, a crucial element of difference is the level and type of evidence used in analyses of social construction. These are essentially different in case of focusing on the broad shared formation of social ideas, on the policy-making and political focus or on the micro-focus of interpersonal practices.

## 1.2. Research Topic

The aim of my thesis is to study school social work. I have found school social work an especially intriguing subject for several reasons. First of all, it has not been researched much, so in this sense it is quite an unknown topic. Furthermore, the few researches that exist give a rather ambiguous picture. On the basis of these studies, school social work can be described as having unclear boundaries, authorities and responsibilities. Moreover, according to these studies, it is situated at the cross-section of social work and education, based on social work principles but serving educational targets. So the question arises: What features of school social work are considered crucial to make the wide variety of practice possible, include the educational aspect of the work and yet emphasise its social work features? In other words, how the professional expertise of school social workers can be defined and described in relation to social work expertise at the same taking the special features of the work into consideration? Consequently, my topic is closely connected to more general questions of social work expertise, which I consider as the starting point of my research.

In line with the categories established by Parker, I see the concept of expertise as a moral/political objects, that is, as a concept that is called into being through discourse and thus given a reality which in turn can affect people. Nevertheless, the nature of school social work as well as the given political, social and economic circumstances set certain limits as to what can be seen as an acceptable and relevant construction.

Thus, I am interested in how the professional expertise of school social workers is constructed through language use. The construction of expertise can be studied in several ways. Pirttilä (2002, 14-16), for example, talks about micro and macro level research. He describes micro level research as focusing on what happens in experts' work, especially between experts and clients in situations of interaction. Alternatively, micro level research can also focus on expert organisations and examine what makes them special. Professional expertise can also be approached from macro level. In that case, expertise is understood as being influenced by the same changes that affect society and culture as a whole. Macro level research is especially interested in how experts achieve confidence and legitimation in public discussions despite prevailing discourses of risk, ambiguity and uncertainty of knowledge.

Consistently with the division made by Pirttilä, as well as with the arenas of construction described by Payne, I understand professional expertise as being constructed again and again in each interaction between professionals as well as between professionals and clients. However, I also see this contextual and local construction as being restricted, at least to some extent, by the frames given on the macro level.

In my research, I intend to focus on the level of policy making, namely, on how the professional expertise of school social workers is constructed in public discussions. I locate my research between the macro- and micro-level, between and also related to the general questions of expertise as well as to research on social work practice. I see my topic as being connected with the level of the construction of broader social ideas through the concept of social work expertise. I also believe that the way school social work is constructed at the level of policy making has implications for the micro-level of interpersonal practice. (see also Niiranen-Linkama 2005, 13)

My research is theory inspired inasmuch as its starting point is the theories discussing professional expertise. Before setting out at the analysis of my research material, I read through the theoretical literature on expertise in general and on social work expertise in particular. Thus, my first focus is on the macro level, that is, on general questions of expertise. Only after getting acquainted with these theories did I turn to the analysis of my research material with the intention of finding out if the constructions of school social work expertise given on the level of policy making compare to theoretical discussions.

### 1.3. Research Material

My research data consists of several interrelated texts (see Appendix). In August 2006 a memorandum for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was published by a group of experts on the subject of pupil and student welfare. (Oppilashuoltoon liittyvän lainsäädännön uudistamistyöryhmän muistio. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriön selvityksiä 2006: 33) In addition, there were thirty-six official comments issued on the Memorandum by different organisations and authorities as well as an official summary of these published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The texts form a natural data inasmuch as they exist independently of my research. Moreover, they are the part of the same discussion, thus they can be considered forming one textual entity.

The Memorandum and the comments are public documents. The Memorandum is published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and is also available on the internet. The accessibility of the comments, on the other hand, has proved to be a more complicated issue. I set out to collect them by comprising a list on the basis of the Project Register of the Council of State (Valtioneuvoston hankerekisteri) and the official summary issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Lausuntoyhteenveto oppilashuollon lainsäädännön uudistamistyöryhmän muistiosta. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriön selvityksiä 2006: 67). These two lists given by these two different sources differed from each other to some extent and they both proved to be inaccurate. Nevertheless, they still provided me with a useful basis to set out collecting my data.

I could find nine of the comments on the internet from the official websites of their authors. The Department of Family and Social Affairs of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has also provided me with fourteen of the comments. I also connected all of the enlisted organisations and authorities on the lists directly and thus attained eighteen comments. The comments attained from these three sources do overlap to some extent. Thus, all in all, I obtained thirty-six comments from authorities of national and state provincial administration, municipalities as well as from trade unions, organisations of the third sector and institutions of higher education. The authors of the comments can thus be claimed to represent rather well the spectrum of those who are involved in Finnish policy making as well as in service provision concerning the welfare of children and youth. The comments are also written from different institutional, social and professional positions. As they speak from these different positions they also have different agendas to argue for. Thus, although the comments form one textual entity being parts of one well-defined discussion, they also present diversity inasmuch as they represent different interests.

I set out at my research by reading the research material through to get a general picture of the texts as well as to identify the main topics that can be understood as connected with school social work expertise. Thus my first reading of the texts can be understood as focusing on the content and being thematic in nature.

For the analysis, I have chosen those sections of the Memorandum and the comments that discuss school social work in general and those that discuss qualification requirements. It meant that I had to exclude fifteen of the comments, as they do not discuss these issues substantially (marked by asterisk in the Appendix). As for the Memorandum, I was left

with section 2.5.2. Koulukuraattorit (pp. 26-28), section 5.5. Koulukuraattorin kelpoisuus (pp. 60-65) and with some shorter sections from several pages (p. 35, 36, 40, 51). All in all, this reduced my data substantially: my original material comes to 198 pages (the 72 pages of the Memorandum and 126 pages for the comments) whereas my final material comes up to only approximately thirty pages (thirteen pages from the Memorandum and approximately twenty pages from the comments). Thus, it became much more manageable and more suitable for rhetorical discourse analyses (Eskola and Suoranta 1999, 120).

#### 1.4. Rhetorical Discourse Analysis

Fox and Miller (1995, 112) assert in their book on postmodern public administration that in line with a social constructionist perspective, public policy should not be seen as the result of the rational discovery of objective Truth to which governments then respond with solutions reliably deduced from that Truth. Instead, policy making should be understood as a struggle over meaning, over the criteria for classification, the boundaries of categories, and the definition of ideals that guide the way people behave. Language and language use thus should be seen as the key elements of policy making. It is in this sense that discourse becomes a relevant concept.

As Burr (2000, 48) asserts, discourse is difficult to define in a way that is ‘watertight’. There is, however, at least agreement on the question that it has to do with language, meaning and context. Burr (*ibid.* 50) defines discourse as follows:

“A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light. Words or sentence do not of themselves belong to any particular discourse; in fact the meaning of what we say rather depends upon the discursive context, the general conceptual framework in which our words are embedded. In this sense, a discourse can be thought of as a kind of frame of reference, a conceptual backcloth against which our utterances can be interpreted.”

Jaworsky and Coupland (2004, 3) give the following definition:

“Discourse is language use relative to social, cultural and political formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals’ interaction with society.”

Fairclough (2006, 215) describes discourse in the following way:

“‘Discourse’ is used in the general sense for language (as well as, for instance, visual images) as an element of social life which is dialectically related to other elements. ‘Discourse’ is also used more specifically: different discourses are different ways of representing aspects of the world.”

At the core of these definitions is the idea that numerous discourses can surround any object and each of these attempts to construct it in a different way bringing different aspects into focus and having different implications. Neither do discourses exist in a vacuum. On the one hand, they are influenced by the social, political and cultural circumstances in which they emerge. On the other hand, they construct and shape these circumstances through describing and defining them.

Corresponding to the above definitions of discourse, I understand discourse analysis similarly to the description given by Suoninen (1999, 17-19): It is a research method that studies language use in order to analyse how social reality is constructed in divergent social practices. The basic idea of discourse analysis is, therefore, to study language use as action, shaped by social processes on the one hand, and building social reality, on the other. Thus, in discourse analysis, attention is paid to the diverse ways different actors can and do make matters understandable through their language use. The focus, then, is on what kind of descriptions and explanations are considered comprehensible and acceptable in different situations.

In accordance with these ideas, research is viewed as just one account amongst the many possible ones. Consequently, as indicated by Jokinen and Juhila (1999, 85-87), the purpose of discourse analysis cannot be to give all-encompassing explanations. Instead, research should offer new perspectives and thus endeavour to provide a source for new discussions. Therefore, it is important what discussion the research is partaking in and what audience it is addressing. Jokinen and Juhila argue that on the basis of these questions, research can be placed on a line between the two extreme positions of analytical and critical discourse analysis. The starting point of critical discourse analysis is usually a presumption of the existence of subordination. The aim of the research is then to scrutinise those (linguistic) practices that justify and sustain these relations. Critical discourse analysis thus seeks to construct a controversial and argumentative view about the prevailing social order. In contrast, in analytical discourse analysis the starting point of the analysis is the data itself. The researcher strives to remain open and receptive to the data and analyse it without any presumptions made beforehand. Thus the aim of such analysis is to answer the question what our social reality is founded on.

Nonetheless, Jokinen and Juhila (1999, 87) add, critical and analytical orientations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, it is possible to use concepts and questions typical of the critical approach but remain open to the data and give a possibility for unexpected and unlooked for results to emerge. Alternatively, it is also possible to include critical views in analytical research, especially if the findings invoke it. Furthermore, Jaworsky and Coupland (2004, 32) argue that discourse analysis adopts a critical perspective in all its forms, except when it remains at the level of language description.

I consider my approach being in between these two extremes. It is analytical, inasmuch as I am mainly interested in how school social work expertise is constructed in these texts. I do not have any presumptions about underlying power relations, neither is the aim of my research is to find such relations. However, my research is theory inspired, and is based on pre-defined discourses of expertise whereas in a strictly analytic and text bound analysis, it would be only the end result of the study. (Vuori 2001, 373)

Approaches within discourse analysis vary also in terms of the methods they apply, although the different methodological orientations do not have clear dividing lines and they tend to interact. For the analysis, I have chosen to use rhetorical discourse analysis, as I see it especially fit for the analysis of politically oriented texts. As it has been argued before, policy making can be understood as a struggle over meaning. Thus political reasoning can be examined as strategically crafted arguments by which participants try to persuade each other that some problem or solution is like one thing rather than like another. It follows, then, that rhetorical devices can be of consequence as the determinants of policy. (Fox and Miller 1995, 112-113) Juhila (1993, 151-152) also claims that, in their accounts, officials representing political authorities attempt to construct versions of the world as factual. Accordingly, they apply certain rhetorical strategies to make their version look true, self-evident and incontestable. Jokinen (1993, 189) also argues that language use in policy making is policy making itself, as struggles on the level of language can have significant consequences to rationalising and legitimising any state of affairs.

As Jokinen (1999, 46) points out, rhetorical analysis suits discourse analytical research well, although there are some differences of emphasis between the two approaches. Rhetorical analysis focuses on the formulation of sentences and on the study of the connection with the audience. (also Vuori 2001, 99-101) In discourse analysis, on the other hand, language use is connected with the cultural and social production of meaning. Thus,

when discourse analysts use rhetorical analysis to examine texts, they focus on how accounts are produced and made argumentative: how events or entities are described and constructed and what rhetorical devices are used to justify them and present them as facts.

Correspondingly, Jokinen (1999, 126-127) describes rhetorical discourse analytic research as the study of linguistic processes through which meaning is produced with the focus on how constructions of reality are made plausible and convincing. However, rhetorical discourse analysis looks upon accounts not only as a means of achieving interactional goals but also as a form of social activity. Thus, it is also a crucial point of investigation what the account or argumentation is used for in the situation where it is produced.

It should then be emphasised that the analysis of the usage of rhetorical devices is not meaningful in itself. It should aim at increasing our awareness of the numerous ways in which language use as an activity constructs our social reality. The detailed analysis of rhetoric devices can make it possible to see how facts, identities, categories are constructed or questioned, how certain issues and events are normalised and justified or how they are made deviant and condemnable. (Jokinen 1999, 156-157; Vuori 2001, 112)

Finally, it should be mentioned that a rhetorical approach also fits in with postmodernist and social constructionist theories, as rhetoric rejects the idea of a single truth in favour of a multivocal universe: whatever the issue is, there is always something else to be said, another voice to be heard (Billig 1996, 12). Billig (*ibid.* 123), drawing on Protagoras, argues that it is always possible to argue both sides of any case. Thus, contrary statements can be equally reasonable and justified. This, in turn, suggests that an unarguable rightness and wrongness cannot be established, for critical challenges are always possible. This view has consequences to the position of the researcher. As Vuori (2001, 112) maintains, in line with the rhetorical tradition, the researcher is not in the position to introduce the final truth about which version of reality is better than the other. Instead s/he should point out which alternative is brought into play in a given text and in a given social and institutional context, and which other alternatives are consequently excluded, why these choices are made and what interests they might serve.

The gamut of rhetorical devices introduced in the research literature is rather broad. On the basis of the literature I got acquainted with (Billig 1996; Potter 1996; Jokinen 1999; Vuori

2001; Kääriäinen 2003; Saurama 2002; Fairclough 2006), I have attempted to construct an analytical apparatus that fits my data, purposes and research style the best.

I have found the concept of 'argumentative context' useful for my textual analysis. Billig (1996, 120-121) argues that accounts do not exist in a vacuum, but they are always part of a broader context. He calls it 'argumentative context' or the 'context of argumentation'. He claims that arguments, justification as well as criticism, should be seen in terms of the argumentative context. Each account, either implicitly or explicitly, exists in relation to other accounts challenging it. Thus each account aims at defending and strengthening the position it represents, while weakening and criticising the position of its adversaries. In line with a rhetorical approach, one must understand words, sentences or discourses, in relation to the contexts in which they are being used. Following from this, it could be suggested that the meaning of discourse must be examined in terms of the contest between different accounts. Therefore, to understand the meaning of a sentence or whole discourse in an argumentative context, one should also consider the positions which are being criticized, or against which a justification is being mounted. Without knowing these counter-positions, the argumentative meaning will be lost.

Jokinen (1999, 128) also describes the 'context of argumentation' as a sort of strategic context, where speakers present their claims and propositions, criticise or justify various issues. She also reminds that arguments should always be studied in the context of the discussion they are part of and in relation to what is attempted to be achieved through them. (see also Kääriäinen 2003, 59) Vuori (2001, 97-98) also reminds that texts by themselves should not be the focus for research. Instead, attention should also be paid to the context where the text is brought into play. Moreover, Vuori claims, contexts do not necessarily exist readily, but are also constructed through the questions of the researcher.

Another concept that has proved useful for me is that of focalisation. Texts are always produced from a certain point of view: they have a focaliser, whose perspective gives meaning to certain events. According to Vuori (2001, 116), focalisation can be understood as a means to guide the reader towards a certain way of reading by directing his or her empathies. Nevertheless, Vuori emphasises, the reader does not necessarily have to accept the perspective given by the text, s/he might as well discard it. Vuori also argues that the focalisation of any text can change even from one sentence to another.

According to Saurama (2002, 67), the author of the text (who speaks?) and the focaliser (who sees?) are not necessarily the same, however they might as well be. Moreover, Vuori (2001, 116) adds, it is not always easy to distinguish the author from the focaliser. She (ibid. 117-119) also reminds that focalisation always has two sides: it has a subject as well as an object, that is, a focaliser, who focalises, and a focalised or focus, who is focalised at. (see also Saurama 2002, 67) The focalised, however, can be the same as the focaliser of the text.

The texts forming my data are written mostly from expert positions. Their authors do not write as individuals but as representatives of different institutions, disciplinary and administrative fields. I assume that in these texts the authors write from the perspective of the institutions, disciplinary and administrative fields they represent. Consequently, these become the focalisers of these texts. However, the focalised of the text can show some variety no matter what perspective the text takes. Thus, I am also interested in examining who the focalised of these texts is: whether it is the clients (the children and young), the school social workers or the employers; in which texts the focaliser and the focalised are possibly the same actors; and what consequences this might have for the argumentation. (see also Saurama 2002, 64; Vuori 2001, 118)

The volume of my research data makes the close reading of the texts possible. For that end, I have constructed a list of more particular rhetorical devices based on the above mentioned literature. Rhetorical devices can be grouped in several ways. Vuori (2001, 100), for instance, in her analysis, groups rhetorical devices according to the three basic types of persuasion defined by Aristotle: ethos, logos and pathos. Ethos refers to the credibility of the author, pathos - to the relationship between the author and the readers, and logos - to the factual or rational content of the argumentation presented. Jokinen (1999) and Kääriäinen (2003), on the other hand, divides rhetorical devices on the basis whether they focus on the author or on the argumentation.

I have decided to use Potter's (1996) classification of rhetorical devices. Potter (ibid. 120-121) understands the analysis of descriptions as focusing both on the sorts of action they are performing or contributing to, and as focusing on fact construction, that is, on the processes by which descriptions are built up into accepted facts. He calls these the action orientation and the epistemological orientation of the description, respectively. However,

he adds, this distinction is more heuristic than actual. In many cases it is precisely through fact construction that actions get done.

Relying on Potter's (1996) and Jokinen's (1999) grouping, I have constructed the following list. (v. Kääriäinen 2003, 59-60)

A. Action orientation of descriptions

1. categorisation: the practices that are used to constitute an object, event, person or group as having a specific and distinctive character (Potter 1996, 176)
2. ontological gerrymandering: the way particular realms of entities or arguments are made relevant or ignored (ibid. 176)
3. extrematization and minimization: common descriptive practices that are used to strengthen the case by using extreme points on relevant descriptive dimensions (ibid. 188)
4. normalization and abnormalization: how descriptions present some actions as normal or abnormal (ibid. 194)

B. Epistemological orientation of description

1. interest management: stake inoculation and stake confession: descriptions are constructed to head off the accusation of interest (ibid. 125) or salient issues of interest are openly confessed (ibid. 128).
2. category entitlement: certain categories of people on certain contexts are treated as knowledgeable (ibid. 133)
3. footing: how far speakers are presenting a certain account as their own (ibid. 142)
4. corroboration and consensus: strengthens the factuality of the account (ibid. 152)
5. describing detail: makes accounts look more factual (Kääriäinen 2003, 60)
6. quantification: creates an image of measurability (ibid. 60)

In addition to this list, for the analysis of the logical structures of arguments, I have borrowed the terminology presented by Fairclough (2006, 81-83). According to him, arguments generally combine three primary moves: grounds, warrants and claim. The grounds are the premises of the argument and the warrant justifies the inference from the grounds to the claim. We can also distinguish backing, which gives support for warrants. However, Fairclough reminds, it is always useful to supplement such an abstract formulation with the analysis of their textual elaboration, as these three moves do not

necessarily occur in the text in this order. Moreover, elements of arguments might be implicit or assumed rather than explicitly stated. Texts can also include several arguments at the same time and arguments can also have a ‘protagonist-antagonist’ organisation.

### 1.5. Research Questions

I intend to analyse my data in accordance with the principles of rhetorical discourse analysis outlined above. I do not, however, aim at finding and naming the discourses emerging from the data (see also Vuori 2001, 68-69; 373). Instead, I intend to set out at my analysis with ready concepts concerning social work expertise identified on the basis of the literature addressing the topic. Thus my first questions concern the theoretical literature on professional expertise and whether the discourses identified are also present in the research material. I am also interested in why a certain position of describing school social work expertise is chosen and what interests it might serve. For that purpose, I am going to examine the argumentative context(s) of these texts as well as their focalisation. In addition, I am also interested in the different rhetorical strategies used to establish the action and epistemological orientation of these texts. Thus, my research questions are the following:

1. What different discourses can be identified on social work expertise in the literature discussing the topic?
2. Are these different discourses present in the research material? In what terms is school social work expertise described in relation to social work expertise in general?
3. What interests might these different descriptions serve?

To answer the last two questions I intend to examine the following issues:

1. What is the context of argumentation of the different accounts?
2. What perspective do the texts speak from? Who are the focaliser and the focalised in the texts?
3. How can the action orientation of these texts be described, that is, what actions do these texts perform?
4. How is the epistemological orientation of these texts constructed, that is, how are these accounts made factual?

## **2. THE INTRICATE ISSUE OF SOCIAL WORK EXPERTISE**

As Ulla Mutka (1998, 9) reminds, the definitions of social work expertise have always been bound to their own time and society. In the changing historical and social circumstances, social workers have incessantly been ordained to reconstruct their work. According to Mutka (ibid. 11), currently, the expertise of modern social work as a whole is going under changes: its targets, its guiding principles, its legitimacy, its credibility and its relationship with the future is under pressure from many different directions and thus it needs redefinition and reconstruction. This present reconstruction, however, can only be understood if it is scrutinised in its own context to which I turn next.

On the basis of the literature concerning social work expertise, I see two elements being of major importance. One is the general discussion on professional expertise related to postmodernist theories on the one hand, and to managerialism, on the other. Secondly, I also understand the issue of the professionalisation of social work as relevant. In the discussion about this latter topic I intend to focus mainly on Finnish social work. (e.g. Mutka 1998; Raunio 2000, 2004; Fook, 2002; Juhila 2006)

### **2.1. Changing Views of Professional Expertise**

As Fook (2002, 25) reminds, professions are a feature of modernist times. They are legitimised by the monopoly they claim over a separate and well-defined body of knowledge arrived at through rationalist means. This knowledge tends to be technical, rational and objective, since it is developed in accordance with the scientific paradigm. Expertise in this sense is seen as based on attaining this body of knowledge. This can be achieved through education and work experience: the better (and more) education as well as the more work experience one has, the better expert s/he is. Consequently, in its modernist sense, professional expertise is seen as linear and cumulative. It is also seen as the property of the individual, as it is argued to be developing through individual achievement. Moreover, experts' knowledge is seen as universally reliable, valid and applicable and as superior to lay knowledge. In this sense, expertise is understood as vertical: it is generalisable and applicable by experts to lay people. (Isoherranen 2004, 77; Fook 2000, 108; Fook 2002, 11, 34; Juhila 2006, 84)

However, the modernist understanding of expertise seems to be losing its relevance. It is considered, on the one hand, outdated and ineffective in a postmodern world. On the other hand, it is also criticised from postmodernist theoretical perspectives. (e.g. Raunio 2000; Fook 2002; Isoherranen 2004; Karila and Nummenmaa 2001)

Some accounts of professional expertise criticise the modernist understanding of the concept as being ineffective in a globalising and rapidly changing world. Karila and Nummenmaa (2001, 23), for example, claim that expertise should not be understood as individuals' competent activity, but as the skills of networks and organisations to solve new and varying problems collectively. They (*ibid.* 25-26; 33) do not deny the relevance of specialised professional knowledge. They argue, however, that professional knowledge base in itself does not guarantee efficiency. In the changed context of work there are several skills that are needed in addition to it. First of all, theoretical professional knowledge should be translated into practical solutions, that is, knowledge should be contextualised. In addition, in an interprofessional context, employees should be able to communicate their own perspective, as well as to listen to and appreciate other possible approaches to the same problem. So communication skills are also seen as relevant to professional expertise.

Moreover, in today's changing working environments, skills related to lifelong learning, such as that of information acquisition, are also seen as crucial. Lifelong learning also requires the ability to evaluate one's own knowledge and activity constantly. Thus when describing professional expertise, besides emphasising specialised professional knowledge, Karila and Nummenmaa stress the importance of skills connected to contextualisation of knowledge, to interprofessional teamwork and to lifelong learning. Thus, it becomes also important how knowledge is applied to practice, how it is communicated, how information is acquired and managed, and last but not least, how one evaluates his/her own achievement.

Niiranen-Linkama (2005, 44-45), in her dissertation, also claims that expertise is not defined anymore in terms of professional knowledge, but of inter- and even superprofessional skills, such as entrepreneurship, social skills, language skills, innovativeness and readiness to change. She also draws attention to the consequences of these processes, namely traditional professions becoming weaker due to the growing significance assigned to flexibility, creativity and lifelong learning in working life. She

connects this rupture in the modernist project of professionalisation with those new policies through which market ethos has been gaining new grounds. She also claims that this process shows itself on the micro level of professions as the submission of distinct professional language to that of economic theory and of efficiency.

Others describe these same processes in terms of de-professionalisation or as the proletarianization of the professional and link it with the ideology of managerialism and globalisation. Globalisation, especially its economic aspect, is often seen as the grounds for the growing significance of managerialism, that is, of the belief that effective management can resolve a range of economic, social and political problems (e.g. Lyon 1999, Fook 2002, Smart 2005). Lyon (1999, 51), for instance, argues that as a result of economic globalisation, competitive market forces are unleashed also in various sectors of social and political life. Within a market-led world, generic management theories and skills are applied to optimize the performance of any organisation (profit or non-profit) regardless of the specificity of the sphere in which they operate. Generic management, in turn, can be described as being instrumentally oriented, that is focusing on achieving goals efficiently through coherent and well-defined strategies and by using managerial techniques for controlling the use of such organisational resources as finance, personnel, materials and information. (Alam 1997, 15)

Dominelli (quoted by Fook 2002, 20-21), also argues that under the economic pressures brought about by globalisation, everything should be defined in terms easy-to-market and –sell. Thus, professional knowledge is conceptualised (and thus devalued) in concrete, easy-to-market terms rather than in terms of more generic professional orientations. In this process, expertise is replaced by a list of fragmented, standardised and routine procedures and concrete skills. These processes of fragmentation and standardisation in turn make it possible to distance the power for decision making from the site of service provision. Thus practising professionals are alienated from policy and decision making and lose even more autonomy.

Howe (1991, 210-214) describes this process as the “proletarianization of the professional”. He differentiates between two levels, the “technical” and the “ideological”. “Technical proletarianization” stands for the loss of control over the process of work. It denotes those processes through which generic professional orientations are fragmented and defined as concrete skills. This, in turn, makes the standardisation and routinisation of the process of

work possible. “Ideological proletarianization”, on the other hand, is the loss of control over the goals and social purpose of work. These two processes are interrelated, as knowledge and skills should first be codified and prescribed as routine practice to make the occupation liable to external control and design.

Traditional understandings of expertise are also questioned from a more theoretical point of view, namely, from postmodernist and social constructionist perspectives. Postmodernism is not one theory but rather a set of theoretical positions, which, however, share some common grounds. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that it would be impossible to find any author who would agree with all the assumptions listed below. Yet, the main tenets of postmodernism could be brusquely summed up as follows: Postmodernists reject totalizing and universal schemes in favor of emphases on difference, plurality and fragmentation. They deny the existence of fixed meaning and rigid order in favor of indeterminacy, uncertainty and ambiguity. They also abandon the idea of objectivity and truth in favor of perspectivism and relativism. Consequently, the postmodernist recognition of multiple ways of knowing questions the superiority of the traditional rationalist way of knowing. Postmodernist perspectives question the reliability or validity of scientific knowledge while also validating new perspectives which are relatively unknown or unvalued, such as the perspectives of ‘ordinary’ people. Social constructionist theories in particular draw attention to the perspectives of the knower, and how it influences what is known and how it is known. (Parton and Marshall 1998, 244; Fook 2002, 12, 33; Burr 2000, 41)

In a postmodern context, professional expertise is also described in new ways. According to Karvinen (1996, 63) postmodern expertise is almost paradoxical. On the one hand, it is something that everybody has. On the other hand, it is something that nobody has. As a consequence of this uncertainty, the relation of experts to each other is also changing. On the one hand, answers are sought together cooperatively while on the other hand competition is also emphasised. Nonetheless, it is clear that new practices related to expertise are being created.

According to Fook (2000, 116) contextuality becomes a main feature of postmodern expertise. This refers to the ability to work in and with the whole context instead of paying attention only to specific aspects or players within that context. For Fook (*ibid.*) contextuality also means appreciating the different perspectives which are part of that

context. This in turn implies that the knower recognises the need to connect with the perspectives of others. Knowledge creation thus should involve the ability to generate knowledge which is relevant to the whole context.

Moreover, contexts are changing constantly. Experts thus should be able to modify their knowledge and even create new knowledge which is relevant to these new experiences. So instead of creating knowledge that is generalisable, experts should create knowledge that is relevant in a certain context. In a modernist context, abstract generalisable theories were applied deductively in different situations, thus existing meanings were imposed on new situations. In a postmodern context, meaning is created inductively from the experience at hand. The skill to create such knowledge, however, is transferable from one situation to another. Thus, generalisability is replaced by transferability. (Fook 2000, 116)

As knowledge creation is an integral feature of expertise, skills of reflexivity are also involved (Fook 2000, 117). If we accept that knowledge is interactional and shaped by historical and structural contexts, one important component of professional expertise should be the ability to recognise how all aspects of ourselves and our contexts influence the way we create knowledge. This ability is the skill of reflexivity. Fook (2004, 27) defines it as the capability “to look both inwards and outwards to recognize the connections with social and cultural understandings”. In other words, reflexivity is an approach to analysing professional practice and experience, based on the identification of the assumptions embedded in that practice or experience.

Thus, on the basis of the literature it can be claimed that expertise is discussed from three different perspectives: the modernist, the managerialist and the postmodernist. The modernist approach emphasises the importance of a well-defined theoretical knowledge base. Modernist expertise is also described as the property of the individual as well as cumulative and linearly developing inasmuch as it is seen as growing with education and experience. It is also described as vertical and universal inasmuch as expert knowledge is seen as superior to lay knowledge and as reliable, valid and applicable in any situation. However, understandings of expertise are changing.

On the one hand, in the name of effectiveness, general professional orientations and professional knowledge is replaced with focus on outputs, routinised procedures and concrete skills. Thus professional expertise is re-defined in accordance with these skills.

This process can clearly be connected with the growing significance given to market ethos and consequently to managerialism, and is often described as the process of deprofessionalization.

On the other hand, postmodernist (and social constructionist) theories question the universal validity and reliability of any knowledge thus also questioning the modernist understanding of expertise based on such a knowledge. Postmodernists also question the monopoly claimed by experts over a certain field of knowledge. Therefore one important component of postmodernist professional expertise is the ability to recognise how any knowledge is relative, partial and is influenced by all aspects of ourselves and our contexts. This ability is referred to as reflexivity.

Next I turn to discussions of social work expertise with the aim of looking at how these above defined three discourses influence it.

## 2.2. Social Work Expertise

It is yet another question how well the modernist understanding of expertise fits social work in general. As discussed above, the modernist understanding of expertise emphasises the significance of a well-defined knowledge base. By developing such a systematic theoretical knowledge base, professions attempt to control their professional activity as well as achieve the monopoly of a given field and, consequently, professional autonomy.

As Mutka (1998, 38) reminds, the dispute over the scientific nature (or to be more exact, over the lack of it) of social work as well as its professional status is almost as old as the occupation itself. Moreover, discussions about social work as a profession have always been very diverse and even controversial. Their emphasis has been changing from time to time and depending on whether the discussion was professional, administrative or academic by nature. The same controversy is typical of the discussions about the status of social work in research on professions. Different pieces of research describe the professional status of social work in very different ways. Most typically, the difference between social work and traditional professions is emphasised drawing attention to the ambivalent relation of science and vocation, as well as of theory and practice.

Raunio (2004, 37-38), for instance, argues that social work does not have a special enough knowledge base necessary for claiming professional or expert status in the traditional sense of the word. As social work is a diverse profession, so are the expectations that are directed at the knowledge required of social workers. Specialised scientific knowledge is only one of the knowledge bases of social work activity. Other types of knowledge required of social workers are shared with other professions which in turn reduces the professional autonomy of social workers. Charles and Butler (2004, 59) also claim that social work has a contested and fluctuating knowledge base. It is the hallmark of other professions as well as it is pluralistic as a result of the continual reshaping of social work's role.

However, as Juhila (2006, 87) points out, social work has aspired to the status of professions through searching for and attempting to construct such theoretical knowledge that would unify the social work profession. Such a theory has been believed to turn social work into a more scholarly discipline as well as to aggregate the diverse practices and thus provide a more clear-cut picture of what social work is about. She describes the compiling of international and national social work ethical principles as an example of such an attempt at mastering diversity within social work.

Moreover, Juhila (2006, 84-86, 89) claims, social workers often act as representatives of a modernist profession. They can claim monopoly of knowledge (or at least the superiority of their knowledge over the client's knowledge) which is seen necessary to analyze the client's situation, to define the changes the client should make and the measures to be taken. According to such an understanding, the social worker also has the authority to make statements, evaluations and decisions on behalf of the client. Such a status also involves the possibility of control. If clients are not willing to collaborate, the worker is entitled (by law) to use different coercive means or sanctions. Social work appears in this role in many instances, one of Juhila's examples being child protection, where parents unwillingness to act as prescribed by the social worker can lead to taking children into care.

Nonetheless, challenges to modernist expertise have distinctive consequences also for social work. Managerialistic ideas as well as postmodernist and social constructionist considerations are also shaping the way social work expertise is being described. (Fook 2002; Raunio 2000 & 2004; Juhila 2006)

Raunio (2004, 75-77) describes the influence of managerialism in regard to social work as the depletion of the content of social work. He argues that it means a shift towards concentration only on short-term surface phenomena. According to him, in such a social work the focus is not on finding explanations for the client's behaviour, but on the evident and observable aspects of his or her behaviour. Social workers do not ask why the client does what s/he does, instead they only react to the client's concrete actions. Raunio (ibid. 76-77) claims that this view of social work practice has important consequences for social work professional activity. As each intervention is seen as short-term as well as having no connections to earlier ones, competent social workers are not required to analyse the processes and mechanisms working in the background of a given case. Instead, they are only required to perform pre-given, standardised and routinised procedures. Thus, it is believed that generic professional skills can be replaced by competencies as work becomes routinised.

This approach to social work is, however, strongly criticised by social work practitioners. Lymbery and Butler (2004, 4), for instance, remind that it is often tempting for organisations to construct the practices that are required of social workers as if the problems which social workers face could be resolved through mechanistic and bureaucratised procedures. However, the professional decision making of social workers takes place where problems are inherently messy, confusing and not necessarily open to technical solutions. Howe (1991, 214) also claims, that in the case of social work, standardisation and routinisation threatens to deny expression and relevance to the body of social work knowledge which emphasises the importance of respecting other perspectives and thus uncertainty.

However, Raunio (2000, 78) reminds, this above description of social work is mainly characteristic of the British scene, and thus can be interpreted as adaptation to the ideology of New Liberalism. The Finnish context in which social work operates is unlike the British one. As indicated by Raunio (ibid. 11), Finnish social work as a professional activity relies primarily on the welfare state. Nonetheless, Raunio (ibid. 17) claims, the political and economical changes had noticeable effects even in Finland. According to him, the belief that people's problems related to their subsistence and livelihood can be controlled through political decision making has been replaced with a new focus on problem solving on the level of individuals, families and communities. Consequently, the expertise of social workers has gained more emphasis. Moreover, the economic depression of the early 1990s

had clear effects for social work inasmuch as the need for services has increased meanwhile resources stagnated or even decreased. Thus, the most crucial challenge to the development of social work has been to answer the growing need for services, which in turn directed the attention to special know-how, methodical preparedness, as well as to the need for flexibility and an investigative stand. (ibid. 38)

Juhila (2006, 71-74) also argues that managerialistic ideas have increasingly been gaining place also in Finland in the field of public administration. Economic efficiency has become the key word in the context of stagnating or decreasing resources. Along with efficiency, quality and client centeredness of services is emphasised, as efficient service provision is argued to be in the best interests of the client. Nonetheless, emphasis on economic efficiency in practice means strict budget control resulting in the planning of activities with rigid standards as well as rigid indicators for evaluating results.

The introduction of postmodernist theories into social work has also opened up new perspectives to discuss social work expertise. Nonetheless, there are some distinctions concerning postmodernist theories that should be made. There is a considerable diversity within postmodernist theories in regard to how far they go in accepting relativism and perspectivism. On this basis, Rosenau (1992, 14-17; Parton and O'Byrne 2000) differentiates between two broad, general orientations, the skeptical and the affirmative post-modernism. She argues that skeptical postmodernists see postmodern as the age of fragmentation, disintegration and meaninglessness, they speak of the demise of the subject, the end of the author and the impossibility of truth. However, affirmative post-modernists have a more optimistic view of the postmodern age. They are as likely as the skeptics to reject the idea of a universal truth waiting to be discovered. Nevertheless, they do accept the existence of specific local or personal forms of truth. Consequently, they claim that different, even conflicting descriptions of our reality should not be seen as problematic as each one can be true – in a different context. The affirmatives also believe that truth depends on and is restrained by language, but they take a more moderate view than the skeptics. They believe that there can be certain consensus about meaning, even though they agree that meaning is always invented and shaped through social interaction. (Rosenau 1992, 14-17; 79-81)

As Parton and O'Byrne (2000) state, it would be difficult to accommodate skeptical postmodernism with social work. Perspectives offered by affirmative postmodernists,

however, can enable us to open up constructive approaches to social work, emphasising receptivity, dialogue and interpretation. These theories place the individual at the centre of reality: individuals invent options and make them real, thus they have the possibilities of positive freedom and positive choices and the ability to re-invent their personal and social worlds.

Parton and Marshall (1998, 246) also claim that affirmative postmodern perspectives can provide creative insights to social work, as probably many social workers can identify with approaches that take the view that what an individual experiences as his or her reality is the reality but a reality that can change in infinite ways. They also argue that social work can be reinterpreted as postmodern all along. They see the acknowledgement of uncertainty as a central element of social work, as a position of uncertainty can ensure that social workers will approach each situation respectful of difference, complexity and ambiguity. A commitment to uncertainty, indeterminacy and unpredictability, and consequently to reflexivity, can reinforce social workers to consider continuously what they are doing, why and with what possible outcomes.

Karvinen (1999, 279-280), also argues that the introduction of postmodernist ideas can be seen as facilitating for social work inasmuch as it opens up new perspectives to discuss social work expertise. These perspectives make it possible to talk about profession and expertise without having to promote a universal and superior theory and knowledge. Postmodern perspectives also make it possible to recognise the significance of reflexivity as the crucial component of social work expertise. This understanding of social work expertise is in line with the change from modern professionalism towards the concept of postmodern expertise. Social work expertise is now seen as being tied to specific time, place and context of action, rather than to some previously structured universal knowledge base. It is also seen as dialogueic, discursive and reflexive emphasising the critical awareness of how and why our presumptions have come to influence and limit the way we perceive and understand our world.

As Fook (2002, 37) points out, these are important issues for social workers, who in many ways like to have it both ways: to protect professional boundaries and at the same time to be open to other perspectives. Moving the concept of reflexivity into the centre of social work expertise can make it possible to claim professional status for social work while also maintaining the recognition of other perspectives.

In the next chapter I turn to the topic of school social work and school social work expertise and examine how school social work relates to social work in general.

### **3. SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND EXPERTISE**

So what is it then that school social workers do?

Finnish school work is described as follows by the Ministry of Labour ([www.ammattinetti.fi](http://www.ammattinetti.fi)):

“School social workers are social workers specialised in preventive child protection work. They help students who have difficulties related to school attendance, social relations, or personal growth and development. In addition, school social workers’ responsibilities include supporting the well-being and the activities of the school community as well as supporting the cooperation between school and home. School social workers are required open-mindedness, a positive attitude, and tolerance to stress.

School social workers are the social welfare experts of the pupil welfare team. The aim of their work is to arrange enough support and guidance as well as other necessary measures to eliminate or reduce students’ social or psychic difficulties influencing school attendance as well as to develop cooperation between home and school.

School social workers’ services are usually needed in problem situations concerning classroom peace, disagreement between students and teachers, school bullying, domestic problems, or transitional stages related to transferring from one school or class to another. School social workers discuss problems confidentially with the student and contact his or her family, teachers, and other officials whenever necessary.

School social workers are members of the pupil welfare team, which assesses and evaluates concerns of single students as well as of the whole school community. School social workers also participate in teachers’ meetings and parents’ evenings.”

On the basis of this description, it can be said that school social workers address a wide range of problems and consequently they must be able to assume a number of roles. In addition, they often become responsible for negotiating between different interests represented by different parties, such as students, families and school staff. The preventive and supportive nature of the work is also emphasised and it is clearly defined as social welfare work. However, the range of the issues school social workers deal with are rather limited as they are connected to education and to the educational institute they work in.

Official or semi-official descriptions, however, do not tell everything about the work. Next, I will turn to research on the history and present situation of school social work to attain a more precise picture.

### 3.1. The History of Finnish School Social Work

The history of Finnish pupil welfare is summed up briefly by Jauhiainen (2001) in his article. He divides the history of pupil welfare into three main phases: the hunger and disease –policy phase from 1865 till 1920; the phase of constructing pupil welfare services from 1920 till 1960; and the psychosocial phase from 1960 onwards. Jauhiainen (2001, 75-76) considers the sixties as a turning point in the history of pupil welfare as it was the time when the psychosocial aspect of welfare was given more attention for the first time. The first school psychologists and school social workers were appointed in the mid-sixties and in 1974 the pupil welfare committee in its memorandum proposed the further development of these services. As a result of the memorandum, school social work and psychology activity started to become more common all over Finland. By the beginning of the 1990s, there were approximately a hundred school psychologists and two hundred school social workers employed by the municipalities. All in all, in Finland there were approximately 450 posts whose office-holders were involved in psychosocial pupil welfare work. However, all was not well: this number was below the appointed targets and most of these posts were based in Southern Finland.

A survey on psychosocial services conducted by the state provincial offices shows that the situation in 2002-2003 was still far from ideal. Although 80 % of primary schools had psychosocial pupil welfare services, they were still seen as insufficient. 61 % of the respondents to the survey were unsatisfied with the availability of school social work services and 59 % with the availability of school psychology services. (Etelä-Suomen lääninhallitus 2005, 16-18)

Peltonen and Säävälä (2001, 182-183) also remind that the development of pupil welfare is not without problems. They draw attention to the absence of a generally approved definition of pupil welfare as well as to the absence of a coherent legislation of the field. This has led to a situation where pupil welfare is developed diversely in the administrative sectors of education, health care and child protection. School social work has traditionally belonged under child protection legislation, however, laws on education have also influenced its practice, authority and remits.

This lack of coherent and articulate guidelines has also influenced the way school social work has been and is carried out. However, there is very little information available on the

actual state of affairs. Most of the literature on school social work consists of master's theses or reports written for administrative purposes with a wider scope on pupil welfare. This scarcity of literature on the subject can be interpreted as a result of the marginal position of school social work within social work as well as within work carried out in schools.

In 2004, the first (and so far, the only) dissertation on Finnish school social work was written by Sipilä-Lähdekorpi. She used a multi-methodological strategy to build a picture of the development of school social workers' work in Finland using the framework of developmental work research. She acquired information on the history of Finnish school social work by conducting theme interviews with eight experts. She also researched the present situation of school social work in upper elementary schools using questionnaires answered by one hundred and seven school social workers. The aim of the second part of her study was to deliver an aggregate study that could be generalized. (Sipilä-Lähdekorpi 2004, 7) As Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's book is the only study of its sort I intend to rely on it overwhelmingly in this section (see also Sipilä-Lähdekorpi 2004, 42-48). Nevertheless, even in this study school social work is not separated clearly from school psychosocial work.

Sipilä-Lähdekorpi divides the history of Finnish school social work into three phases: the pioneering period, the justification period and the professional period (2004, 7). She defines the creation of the first school social work posts in Kotka and in Helsinki in 1966 as the starting point for the pioneering period (ibid. 84). Thus she places this starting point to the period that Jauhiainen has defined as the psychosocial phase of pupil welfare. She (ibid. 90) then describes the nineteen-seventies and -eighties as the justification period. Finally, she (ibid. 96-97) sees the period after nineteen-ninety as the period of professionalisation. Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 84-97) indicates that school social work in the early times of its history was faced with unreal expectations: the number of pupils per social worker was far too high neither did the circumstances and possibilities of the work match these expectations. Moreover, the description of the job was very vague: school social workers were expected to work with those children and young whose behaviour was defined as disturbing and/or who neglected school attendance. The aim of the work was to help these pupils finish their education. In practice, the quality and quantity of the work carried out by school social workers depended much on the actual worker and on the municipality where

the work was done. Consequently, Sipilä-Lähdekorpi claims, it would be impossible to give a coherent general picture of the school social work of the pioneering period.

Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 97-100) describes the nineteen-seventies and –eighties as the period of the justification of school social workers' and school psychologists' activity. This justification took place on several fronts simultaneously. From an economic point of view it was claimed that in the long run it is much more expensive to patch up the disadvantages caused by students repeating grades or dropping out of school than to provide preventive psychosocial services in schools. Sipilä-Lähdekorpi also writes about justification based on the content of the work. Psychosocial work was seen as the means for developing school communities as well as for developing the co-operation between the school and the home, both of which were seen as crucial for achieving educational targets set for schools.

These two decades can also be claimed to provide school psychosocial work with theoretical justifications through the development of a special theoretical base. However, Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 100-101) claims, within school psychosocial work, school psychologists have achieved a much stronger status. Even though the seventies and eighties can be seen as the professionalisation phase for social work, psychologists had the advantage of having a longer tradition of academic training as well as a more specific and 'secretive' theoretical and methodological knowledge base.

Lastly, Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 102-106) defines the period since 1990 as the professionalisation period. She sees 1990 as a turning point as it was the year when school psychosocial work has been made statutory. In 1990 the Finnish Parliament has accepted a bill which made it possible for municipalities to apply for state subsidy for already existing school psychosocial activities. However, this bill did not oblige municipalities to provide such services. It took another thirteen years to reach that goal. In 2003 the Basic Education Act has been altered so that it now ensures pupils' rights to pupil welfare services through obliging municipalities to provide such services.

### 3.2. The Present State of Affairs – On the Margins

In this section I intend to sum up the results of Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's research as well as of three master's theses written recently at the University of Helsinki. I will also rely on more

theoretical texts, namely on two school social work textbooks, an American and a Finnish one written by Dupper (2003) and Kurki (2006), respectively.

In 2004, Jutta Jääskeläinen wrote her thesis on school social work with the aim of providing a general picture. The targets as well as the results of her thesis are quite similar to those of Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's dissertation, even if the work is naturally of a much smaller scale. Jääskeläinen starts out with providing the history of Finnish school social work and continues with procuring a general description of the present of school social work. For this latter purpose, she interviewed eight school social workers working in primary schools in Helsinki.

Both of the other two theses to be discussed here concentrate on networks within school social work. Although networks as such are not closely connected to my subject, these theses also present some general points, which I introduce here. In 2002 Maarit Varvikko wrote her thesis with the title 'Koulukuraattorin verkostoituminen. "Me ollaan samassa suossa täällä ja kannattaa tehdä tätä yhdessä"'. She interviewed primary school school social workers from Helsinki to collect her data. Her aim was to describe those networks in which school social workers partake as well as the school social workers' activity within these networks. In 2006, Henrik Laine chose school social work as the topic of his thesis. As he has been working as a school social worker, he decided to use his own documentation as his research material. Since his was a case study, the results are not generalisable. Nonetheless, most of his thoughts concerning school social work are in line with the other studies.

Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's findings (2004, 163) reveal that school social work is still quite heterogeneous as it is defined locally by the school social worker's personality as well as by local needs and circumstances, just like in the early days of its history. School social workers are employed by different administrative sectors, their working conditions show great variety, they use different working methods and they experience their role and position diversely. (see also Kurki 2006, 93)

Jääskeläinen's interviewees also claim that school social work is carried out in very diverse ways depending mainly on the personality of the worker as school social workers' role and responsibility are not defined clearly (2004, 59). In addition, in Jääskeläinen's study (ibid. 49) the educational background of school social workers seemed also quite varied, social

work qualification being only one of several possibilities. Varvikko (2002, 37) also found that school social work activity is in practice defined by the personality of the worker; and Laine (2006, 35) also describes school social work as being shaped by the worker's personality as well as by the culture of the school where it is carried out.

Nonetheless, Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 104) claims, most school social workers would agree that the basic content of the work has not changed much since the early days, although, they also claim that their work methods have become more varied and they are now increasingly working in interprofessional networks.

Work has also moved from pedagogism toward social work. Nevertheless, school social workers still tend to see themselves both as social workers and as educators. When the respondents to the questionnaire were asked to identify the theoretical knowledge they see most relevant to their practice, in addition to social work and social policy, they also identified psychology and pedagogy. Sipilä-Lähdekorpi argues that school social workers can be seen as having a double identity of a social worker and an educator. Thus school social work can be understood as supporting educational targets using the ethics and methods of social work. (Sipilä-Lähdekorpi 2004, 166, 184)

Kurki (2006, 78) in her article on social pedagogy, also argues that school social workers should combine different perspectives in their work. Besides the above mentioned social and pedagogical dimensions she also talks about the cultural dimension of the work. According to her, practitioners should combine all these three perspectives to succeed in their work.

Jääskeläinen's (2004, 63) results also give support to the assumption that schools are a very defining working environment and that school social work differs from the social work of other fields in some respects. First of all, social worker colleagues are absent from every day work. This makes the work quite lonely, but on the other hand, it also makes it more autonomous and independent. However, this loneliness is somewhat balanced by the great significance of networks. (ibid. 51) Varvikko's (2004, 39) findings also indicate that schools are a very defining environment. The school social workers she interviewed also emphasised the independent but lonely nature of the work requiring strong professional self-confidence.

According to Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's (2004, 146) findings, school social workers do not only have a double (or according to Kurki, triple) role, but they also have a double function. On the one hand, the primary target of their work is to advance the well-being of pupils and students. On the other hand, they are also expected to be loyal to and support the targets of the school system. Consequently, they might end up zigzagging between students' needs and teachers' wishes. This double function is coupled with a double position, too, as many school social workers criticise the school system within which they work. They claim that schools are often conservative and inflexible institutions that do not necessarily consider pupils' advantage as their main targets. (ibid. 115)

Some of Jääskeläinen's (2004, 56) and Varvikko's (2002, 46) interviewees also drew attention to the possible conflict between understanding and supporting students and acting according to social work norms while also complying with the norms of educational organisations.

Dupper (2003, 5-6) on the other hand, talks about dually focused intervention and an ecological perspective. According to him each student should be viewed as an inseparable part of the various social systems (family, school, peer group etc) within which s/he must function. Thus school social workers must address environmental stressors as well as enhance the coping skills of students. In other words, on the one hand, practitioners must strengthen students' coping patterns and growth potential, and on the other hand, they should also improve the quality of the environment. This dual focus enables school social workers to assist students as well as to target detrimental conditions in schools. Thus the double function and double position of school social workers described by Sipilä-Lähdekorpi can actually be considered an essential part of school social work.

Interestingly enough, these studies do not pay much attention to those features of the work that make it social work. Instead, they stress the differences between school social work and "mainstream" social work. Still, most of these authors do not question the appropriateness of social work as the theoretical and methodological base for this occupation. Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 166-167) and Kurki (2006, 38-98), on the other hand, writes about social pedagogy as the adequate theoretical base for school social work. In Finland, Sipilä-Lähdekorpi argues, school social workers are not involved in delivering and allocating social benefits, neither they are equipped to employ control over their clients. (see also Laine 2006, 68-69; Jääskeläinen 2004, 59) Consequently, school social workers

are not carrying out par excellence social work. Instead, they can be seen as being mainly involved in socialisation work. Therefore, instead of relying only on social work theories and methods, school social workers should also incorporate other fields in their work. Sipilä-Lähdekorpi sees social pedagogy as a suitable field to provide the necessary knowledge.

Kurki (2006, 92-98) also argues for the relevance of social pedagogy in school social work. According to her, social pedagogy can provide the two crucial bases for this work: the educational as well as the social dimension. Such a theory base could enable the worker to approach clients both as individuals and as members of their community. Kurki also reminds that social pedagogy is used in Finland already in youth work, which is very similar to school social work as far as its targets, clientele and the problems faced are considered.

On the basis of the above studies it can be claimed that school social work is situated on the margins for several reasons. On the one hand, it is clearly different from mainstream social work and on the other hand it is clearly different from the mainstream work carried out in schools.

As Raunio (2000, 42-43) indicates, in the Finnish research, social work is generally understood as work carried out in social offices and in child welfare services. Nevertheless, social work is a broad and diversified profession, which is carried out in many different sites and organisations. In Finland social workers also work in special agencies, such as health care centres, hospitals, family counselling centres or schools. The particular organisation in which social work is performed does have a crucial influence on what and how is done. However, the work carried out in these agencies is similar inasmuch as social workers work there as members of interprofessional teams. Moreover, they are hardly ever the most important experts in such teams. This also means that they can easily be caught up in negotiations with other professionals of the same organisation about the borders of their expertise as well as about their authority. School social work is not different in this respect.

As Dupper (2003, 30) reminds school social workers carry out their work in a “host” setting where the focus is on education rather than social work. It has a great influence on actual practice, as school personnel do not necessarily understand or appreciate social work services. School social work is part of pupil and student welfare work which can be at least

partly separated from actual teaching. Nevertheless, pupil and student welfare work is still complex as it is comprised of diverse activities supporting the physical, psychical and social requirements of school attendance. (Jauhiainen 2001, 67)

### 3.3. School Social Work and Expertise

Sipilä-Lähdekorpi (2004, 164) argues that school social work can be perceived as a postmodern occupation. School social workers could never rely on ready models for their work. Instead, they are driven (or given the possibility) to develop their own activity. This obviously has required an investigating stance towards theory and practice. Thus, as she indicates, it can be claimed that reflexivity has always been a crucial component of school social work expertise.

On the basis of the studies presented above, it would be quite difficult to describe school social work expertise in strictly modernist terms. First of all, it seems to lack an accepted and well-defined theoretical and methodological knowledge base. Practitioners tend to combine knowledge from several fields, such as social work, psychology and pedagogy. Moreover, school social workers rely on interprofessional networks, which downgrades the importance assigned to individual achievement. In the above studies, school social work is also often described as negotiating between different views or different versions of reality.

Kurki's (2006, 98) description of social pedagogy principles also reiterates postmodernist understandings of social work expertise. She also stresses the uniqueness and dignity of every person as well as the importance of genuine dialogue between workers and clients as the means to bring about change. She regards empathy, empowerment and reflexivity as central principles both in social pedagogy and school social work.

However, Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's (2004, 148) study also implies that school social workers have not completely rejected the modernist approach to expertise. For instance, in the questionnaires school social workers did not name pupils or their parents as their partners in cooperation. This can be interpreted as the denial of the relevance of their clients' knowledge, that is, of lay knowledge. Although it should also be mentioned that Jääskeläinen's (2004, 85) results at this point show significant difference: her interviewees thought of the parents as the most important partners in their work.

Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's (2004, 168) results on networking and interprofessional work are also ambivalent. On the one hand, school social workers consider networking and interprofessional work as necessary, but, on the other hand, they also tend to complain about its negative side, about overlapping and unclear authorities. This then could be interpreted as an attempt to protect professional boundaries and the monopoly over a certain field. However, it might as well be simply the sign of frustration felt over the waste of already scarce resources.

Another clear indication of attempts to protect professional boundaries and the status of the profession is the fact that the Finnish trade union of school social workers accepts only those school social workers as its members, who have a master's degree in social work (<http://www.talentia.fi/koulukuraattorit/>). In reality, however, school social workers do have other degrees, for instance in education or social psychology.

It can also be claimed that managerialistic ideas are also gaining place within school social work (Sipilä-Lähdekorpi 2004, 171). The majority of school social workers complain about the scarcity of resources. They argue that the too large number of pupils per worker makes it difficult to maintain the high quality of the work. (ibid. 115; Jääskeläinen 2004, 71) In such a situation, it is somewhat understandable if workers turn to approaches that lessen their workload. However, school social workers have never had such clear guidelines that would make it possible to completely standardise and routinise work. Thus, in the present circumstances, a completely managerialistic approach to school social work seems more or less impossible.

In the next section, I turn to the analysis of my research material to examine constructions of school social work expertise. I am especially interested in whether school social work expertise is described in modernist, postmodernist or managerialist terms in these texts, and in what interests certain descriptions might serve. For that purpose, I examine the argumentative context, the focalisation and the action orientation of these texts and the possible connections between them.

## **4. PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS VERSUS EFFECTIVE SERVICE PROVISION**

### **4.1. Establishing the Contexts of Argumentation: Service Provision versus the Content of the Work**

I decided to analyse the Memorandum first and only then turn to the comments. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the texts have a certain chronological order, which I see relevant. The Memorandum is the first document, on which the other ones comment. Thus it forms the bases of argumentation in the dispute. Secondly, the Memorandum is the longest of all the texts, thus it is worth paying more attention to.

I grouped the already chosen sections of the Memorandum on a thematic basis. Some of the sections focus on descriptions of school social work, while others discuss qualification requirements. In this section I intend to focus on the former topic.

As for the descriptions of school social work, I was able to identify two different contexts. Firstly, school social work is described in a section of its own focusing on the content of school social work. Secondly, school social work is described on the basis of administrative reports, where it is constructed as unavailable services. I will discuss these in more detail below starting with the formerly mentioned description of the content of school social work.

In the Memorandum, school social work is described in detail on pages 26-28. Here school social work is defined as social work and described as demanding through the usage of different rhetorical strategies. However, I also claim that rhetorical devices are also used to shift the responsibility of producing such an account from the authors to the reader.

The section starts with providing the historical and legal context of school social work. First, an earlier memorandum is referred to, which defines school social work as social work. Quoting an earlier official document, that is, appealing to expert opinion, can be understood as using category entitlement in establishing factual status. There are certain categories of people in any context, who can be treated as more knowledgeable than others. Their opinion, therefore, carries more importance and more weight. Here, experts are referred to in order to establish school social work as social work. (Potter 1996, 133; Jokinen 1999, 135) This categorisation of school social work as social work is further

strengthened by quoting a legal (albeit rather vague) definition of social work. Thus, I argue, this section starts out with the categorisation of school social work as social work.

Next, the content of school social work is described in detail. The most prevalent rhetorical device used in this description is enumeration: different aspects of the work are listed. (E.g. who the clients are; what the main reasons for using school social workers' services are; what working methods are used; what networks school social workers are part of; the fields school social workers should be familiar with etc.) One interesting feature of this description is that it concentrates on very concrete features of the work. School social work is described from a practical point of view, as a practical activity. Any mentioning of meta-skills or more general knowledge base necessary for the work is avoided.

Consequently, it can be argued that in this description, school social work expertise is divided up into small pieces. Professional knowledge expected of school social workers is conceptualised in concrete terms rather than in terms of more generic professional orientations. In this process, expertise is replaced by a list of concrete procedures and skills, which is typical to the managerialist discourse. Efficiency, however, is not a crucial aspect of this description. It is mentioned only with respect to preventive work and early prevention which are seen as decisive features of the work.

In this description, the school social worker is perceived as the subject of the work, whereas clients are seen mainly as objects: school social workers identify problems, support students and their families, prevent the negative effects of different risk factors and assess social risks. It must also be mentioned here that managerialist descriptions of social work also rely on the concept of vertical expertise. In line with the ideas of New Liberalism, social work is often seen as some kind of a "responsibilisation training", which aim is to help the client to become an independent citizen who is in control of his or her life and can cope without any institutional help. According to this understanding, the social worker knows what is best for the client, thus the worker defines the aim of his or her work as well as the best, that is, most effective way to achieve it. Risk assessment, prevention and early intervention are crucial concepts of such a work especially in case of children and the young. (Juhila 2006, 73-77)

On the other hand, using lists of different, although practical, features of the work gives the reader the impression that school social work is rather complex and demanding. Thus, I

argue, enumeration of details is used here to evoke some set larger than any of the components: the enumeration of different aspects of the work is also used to construct the demanding nature of school social work.

The introduction of the different aspects of school social work can serve other purposes as well. Giving ample details can serve to build up the facticity of an account. It can provide an impression of being there and thus really knowing. If the authors can provide so many details about the work, they must know it really well. Thus their description of school social work is most likely to be valid. More importantly, however, descriptions using details often work with an implied distinction between observation and evaluation. They provide the details but the role of evaluation is seemingly passed on to the reader. Consequently, the authors' responsibility for the consequences of his/her description is reduced. (Potter 1996, 117, 165; Jokinen 1999, 145)

Another interesting feature of this description is its footing, that is, whether the authors present this account as their own or distance themselves from it. In this case, the account appears to be completely independent of the authors. In this section, there are no implications of who the producer of the account is. This kind of distanced footing as a rhetorical device can have two purposes. On the one hand, distancing the author from the account can be understood as a factualising strategy aiming at making the description look neutral and objective. On the other hand, this kind of footing has implications also for the accountability of the authors. Again, the authors' responsibility is reduced. (Potter 1996, 143; Jokinen 1999, 137-138; Vuori 2001, 115)

Thus, I argue that in this section school social work is constructed in ambivalent terms. The section starts with openly categorising school social work as social work by appealing to expert opinion. Furthermore, it is implied throughout this part that school social work is demanding and complex by using enumeration and details. However, giving ample details of the practical features of the work, while avoiding more general descriptions of professional knowledge, also downgrades the expertise of school social workers. Moreover, some of the rhetorical devices (details and distanced footing) serve the purpose of shifting responsibility from the author to the reader in drawing any conclusions.

As I pointed out earlier, administrative reports are also used to produce a picture of school social work. These reports are characteristic of section 3, which evaluates the present state

of pupil welfare services as well as its established effective practices. School social work here is only described in terms of availability (“*saatavuus*”), or to be more exact, in terms of unavailability.

In these sections, category entitlement is used again to establish the factual status of the account. On the basis of the assumed expert status of the producers of these administrative reports, the results are constructed as facts. Moreover, this time category entitlement is coupled with consensus and corroboration, as several independent reports are referred to. These rhetorical strategies increase the truth value of the account substantially. (Potter 1996, 117; Jokinen 1999, 139)

Other rhetorical devices used in these sections are quantification, extrematization, and contrasting. Quantification is often thought of as a clear-cut form of description, thus it substantially increases the facticity of any description. However, calculation practices, especially when used with particular sets of descriptive categories, allow some flexibility in producing certain versions. (Potter 1996, 190-191; Jokinen 1999 147-148) For example, on page 36, relational quantities are contrasted to describe the unavailability of services. Extrematization is also used here, as the ratio of only those municipalities are counted which are *completely* without (“*ei ole lainkaan*”) services. It is claimed that 30 % of municipalities is without school social work services as opposed to 12 % having no school psychology services and 3 % having no school physicians. These numbers give a picture of school social work being the most unavailable of the above mentioned services. Nonetheless, only a few sentences before it is stated that the results of the assessment quoted here are not reliable as the questions were interpreted, and consequently answered, in different ways by different municipalities providing the data. Furthermore, at the end of the same paragraph it is also claimed that school physician services were the most scarcely available of all pupil welfare services.

Thus, I argue, in these sections of the Memorandum school social work is constructed as an unavailable service. This construction, however, is produced mainly through ontological gerrymandering: the reader’s attention is drawn to the unavailability of school social work services and away from the unavailability of other pupil and student welfare services. By using quantification and extrematization the account is made look factual and is also strengthened.

It must, nonetheless, be mentioned that only four such quotations (p. 35, 36, 40 and 51) occur in the text. Moreover, all of them discuss the availability of several of pupil welfare services and do not solely concentrate on school social work. In addition, all of these references are rather short. Even together they would make up only for a negligible section of the text. The reason for the lengthier discussion here is that they become an important point of reference in the dispute over qualification requirements.

Overall, I argue that in the Memorandum school social work is discussed from two major points of view: from the perspective of the content of the work as well as from the perspective of service provision. Thus, the Memorandum establishes these two different argumentative contexts which then are referred to in the dispute over qualifications. Moreover, I also claim that both of these contexts are established in controversial ways. As for the content of school social work, it leaves the interpretation of details largely to the reader. As for the issue of service provision, it includes the discussion of other pupil welfare services which makes it rather problematic to use it as a reference when focusing only on school social work.

#### 4.2. Establishing the Claims: Is School Social Work Social Work?

Before setting out at the analysis of the qualification requirements introduced in the Memorandum, three remarks should be made. First, it should be mentioned that the Finnish occupational title for school social workers is ‘koulukuraattori’, which does not include any explicit reference to social work. Second, social workers in Finland should have a masters’s degree earned at university level including social work studies equivalent of major subject studies, or in addition to which such studies are completed ([www.finnlex.fi](http://www.finnlex.fi)). Third, Finnish social work education is special inasmuch as it also includes polytechnic education. Thus, the field can be divided into social workers (*sosiaalityöntekijä*) and into social services workers (*sosionomi*), the former requiring university education and the latter polytechnic education. Moreover, polytechnic education includes a lower as well as a higher academic degree.

One possible interpretation of this situation is to talk about social work in the strict sense referring only to social workers graduating from universities, and social work in the broader sense referring also to those who graduate from polytechnics. As far as the labour

market positions of the university and the polytechnic educated is considered, the division between them is made clear through legislation. Nevertheless, as polytechnic education is a relatively new thing in Finland, situations that make different interpretations of qualification requirements possible can still occur. (Niiranen-Linkama 2005, 15-17)

The suggestions for qualification requirements are discussed in the Memorandum in section 5.5. on pages 60-62. The first three paragraphs of this section introduce the legal history of qualifications required of school social workers. It is established that in the past school social workers were required to have the same qualifications as social workers. However, eventually it is concluded that, at the present, the definition of qualifications required of school social workers is rather informative (*“lähinnä informaatio-ohjauksen varassa”*). This is further strengthened by quoting the committee of social affairs and health of the Finnish Parliament: until this Memorandum is completed and the issue of qualification requirements is settled, school social workers are required to have a vocational qualification appropriate for the job or other suitable education (*“soveltuva ammattitutkinto tai muu soveltuva koulutus” p.60*).

Thus, in these paragraphs school social work is first categorised as social work referring to past legislation. However, in the latter paragraphs the present indefiniteness of qualification requirements is emphasised. These paragraphs can thus be seen as establishing the grounds for the general claim arguing for the need to define qualification requirements in the Memorandum.

Section 5.5. contains other arguments as well, namely about the nature of the required qualifications. On page 61, three different alternatives are introduced. According to these, school social work qualifications can be defined as one of the following options:

1. the same education as for social workers;
2. the same education as for social workers or a higher polytechnic degree including studies in child, youth and family work;
3. suitable academic degree.

These different claims can be interpreted as different categorisations of school social work. Categorisation is one of the most fundamental rhetoric devices. It takes place whenever descriptions are used where some thing or entity is specified. Descriptions and categories can be constructed and understood in various ways, and as having various consequences.

Thus categorisation is the focus of many contests of argumentation. (Potter 1996, 177; Jokinen 1999, 141; Kääriäinen 2003, 76)

Consequently, I argue that the Memorandum as well as the comments can be read as argumentations for certain descriptions of school social work, that is, as argumentations for categorising school social work in certain ways. Thus, I understand the action orientation of the texts as focusing on the categorisation of school social work. Accordingly, I interpret the different alternatives for qualifications as establishing alternative categories for school social work. I named these categories based on the description of social work and social services work given by Niiranen-Linkama (2005, 15-17). However, I have modified her terms to fit the division introduced in the Memorandum:

- 1) social work in the strict sense;
- 2) social work in the broader sense (also a compromise between the two extreme positions);
- 3) not social work.

(However, it must be added here, that the last of the suggestions leaves room for various interpretations and is understood in quite different ways in the Memorandum as well as in different comments.)

The working group suggests that the qualification requirements for school social workers should be the same as for social workers or higher polytechnic degree including studies in child, youth and family work. Thus they categorise school social work as social work in the broader sense. The argumentation to establish this claim sets out from both of the argumentative contexts established before: the content of school social work as well as the question of service provision. Interestingly enough, the description of the content of school social work is rather lengthy while the issue of service provision is mentioned only in a short sentence.

The relatively lengthy and detailed description of school social work naturally relies on the previous account given in the Memorandum. Thus, it can be understood as an attempt to construct school social work as a rather complex, and consequently, demanding activity. This description then can be understood as the basis to argue against option three, that is, as the justification against categorising school social work as not social work.

However, as it was discussed before, this account leaves more general questions of expertise open and consequently makes it possible to downgrade the professional knowledge required of school social workers. Consequently, it is also less elaborated why the first option is rejected in favour of the second one. There are only two sentences within the four paragraphs describing social work that can be interpreted as the justification for the claim established at the end of the section. A characteristic of school social work is mentioned here which is not discussed before. Namely, the preventative nature of the work is turned around here, and it is argued that school social workers' tasks do not include such decision making that would interfere with the rights and responsibilities of their clients. The lack of such responsibility is only mentioned in one sentence, but due to its being the only negative sentence in the whole section, it is given extra emphasis and it acts as a more pronounced way of expressing the authors' opinion. (Vuori 2001, 115)

This sentence can be understood as part of the argument, namely the warrant, according to which school social work is less demanding than social work in general as school social workers do not have legal entitlement to use control or coercion over their clients. Moreover, this sentence can be understood also as constructing social work as an activity that intrinsically includes control (the grounds). This sentence thus implies the following argumentation: (1) social workers make decisions concerning individuals' rights and responsibilities that interfere with the private life of families (grounds); (2) school social workers do not make such decisions (warrant); (3) therefore school social work is not par excellence social work (claim).

The argumentative context of service provision is introduced at the end of the section. The authors argue that defining school social workers' qualifications in accordance with the second option would also ensure the availability of school social workers. It is interesting that in the original Finnish text the authors talk about extending qualification requirements, whereas in the first paragraphs they described present qualification requirements as mainly informative and then quoted the valid regulation according to which school social workers are required to have a vocational qualification appropriate for the job or other suitable education. Thus, compared with the present legislation, the option introduced by the working group is in fact a tightening and even upgrading of qualification requirements. From a legal point of view, it could only be viewed as an extension if it is compared with the situation before 1993. Thus, this "slip of a tongue" can be seen to reveal that despite the

current legislation, school social work is still generally considered one area of social work in the strict sense, not in the broader sense.

The argumentation relying on issues of service provision can be opened up as follows: (1) there are not enough school social workers to provide appropriate services (grounds); (2) lowering / extending qualification requirements makes it possible to find more qualified employers (warrant); (3) therefore school social workers' qualification requirements should be extended (claim).

An interesting feature of this section is the relative length of the different argumentations used to support the final claim. Although school social work is described at considerable lengths, the grounds supporting the claim that school social work qualifications should also include higher polytechnic degree are introduced rather shortly. Both the argument referring to the aspect of control in social work as well as the one referring to the present unavailability of school social work services is touched on only in one sentence each.

However, these comments imply several assumptions that might as well be questioned. First of all, it is assumed that social work essentially includes control. Secondly, it is also assumed that work that is mainly preventive and based on care rather than control is not social work and consequently requires less education. This argumentation also relies on the assumption that accepting higher polytechnic degree as suitable qualifications for school social workers would help increase the availability of services. Thus, it is also implied here that the reason for the unavailability of these services is the lack of adequately educated workforce.

Nonetheless, the argumentation produced by the working group is not completely convincing, as it seems to leave too many questions open. This relative unsuccessfulness can be perceived in the dissenting opinions included in the Memorandum as well as in the comments.

#### 4.3. Setting the Tone of the Dispute: The Dissenting Opinions

The section on the suggestions for qualification requirements also contains four dissenting opinions. These opinions can be grouped on different bases: on the basis of how they

categorise school social work as well as on the basis of the argumentative context they argue from. Here, I analyse the texts according to the categorisation of school social work they argue for.

Only one of the four opinions argues for the categorisation of school social work as not social work. In this case appropriate education is interpreted as social services education. The argumentative context is that of service provision and the claim is established through what Potter (1996, 107) calls defensive rhetoric and reifying discourse. It is argued that too high qualification requirements would make it difficult to find qualified staff. The facticity of this argument is achieved partly by using devices that make the account look neutral and objective: present tense, third person, affirmative sentences and distanced footing. The argument is also supported by using statistics from unspecified reports to point out the impossibility of training enough school social workers who have a higher academic degree. (*"Tulevaisuudessa ei ole edes teoriassa mahdollista saada lähelläkään 650 soveltuvan ylemmän korkeakoulututkinnon omaavaa koulukuraattoria lisää". p.62*) Thus, the facticity of the argument is strengthened by using quantification as well as consensus and corroboration. In addition, extrematization (underlined above) is used to make the argument more effective.

One interesting characteristic of this opinion is its focalisation. The text is clearly written from the point of view of employers. School social workers are only present in this text as the focalised, that is, as the objects of employers' actions. Moreover, other focalisers as well as other focalised are completely missing from the argument.

I argue that due to this focus on employers, recruitment and its efficiency become the key issues. The emphasis on providing and organising sufficient and functioning public services efficiently is one aspect of managerialist discourse. (Juhila 2006, 72) Thus, in this argument, the question of qualification requirements becomes one means for increasing the efficiency of service provision.

Nonetheless, it must also be added, that managerialist ideas are not applied to the description of school social work. It is only the issue of service provision that is discussed from the value base of efficiency. The nature of the work is not an issue here. Thus, school social work as such is not constructed in managerialist terms, only service provision is. Nevertheless, it leads to the categorisation of school social work as not social work or to be

more exact as social services work, which in turn can be interpreted as the devaluation of school social work.

The other three dissenting opinions claim that school social workers should be required the same qualifications as social workers have. Thus the action orientation of these texts can be identified as the categorisation of school social work as social work in the strict sense. A common strategy all three opinions use is attacking the argumentation for accepting polytechnic degree in order to improve service provision. They all use what Potter (1996, 107) calls an ironising discourse and offensive rhetoric. They point out the ontological gerrymandering used in the previous argument by presenting other possible ways to solve the problem of the scarcity of workforce, such as improving salaries and working conditions, or improving the esteem of school social work. One of the texts also uses contrasting and extrematization to point out the flaws of this argumentation when compares the situation to that of the lack of physicians' services: "*Lääkäripulaa ei ole ratkottu pätevyysvaatimuksia alentamalla*" (p.63)

Besides criticising the opposite standpoint, all three texts justify their own position by using reifying discourse and defensive rhetoric. For this, they speak from the argumentative context of the content of school social work. All of these opinions describe school social work and contrast it to mainstream social work to point out the similarities. At the same time, school social work expertise is also described in more general terms as opposed to the rather practice oriented previous descriptions provided in the Memorandum. The following characteristics of school social work are listed here as making university education a necessary requirement for the job: the importance of the knowledge of social work methodologies as well as of social work and social science theories; the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice as well as to produce such knowledge; and the ability to work alone and independently as well as in an interprofessional context.

In these descriptions, the importance of theoretical and methodological knowledge base is given the most emphasis. In this sense, these descriptions rely rather heavily on the modernist understanding of expertise. Moreover, the stress on the independent and lonely nature of the work can be interpreted as understanding expertise as individuals' competent activity, which is also a feature of the modernist discourse. Thus, it can be argued that, all in all, these texts describe school social work expertise in rather modernist terms. In addition, however, certain skills are mentioned: the ability to translate knowledge into

practice and also to produce knowledge, as well as creativity in the application of social work methodology.

Clients are also presented in these texts in line with modernist understandings of social work expertise as the passive receivers of school social work services not as active partners. It can also be argued that school social work here is described along the lines of the concept of vertical expertise. The worker is seen as having such a knowledge which clients have not, and by which s/he can analyse clients' situation, define the changes needed as well as prescribe the necessary measures. (Juhila 2006, 84-85) Although clients here are seen as the objects of intervention, they are still constructed as deserving help not as targets of control. Thus, it can be argued that school social work is described here in terms of care. According to this understanding of social work, clients are not necessarily able to cope in every situation or every phase of their lives. At these times they need extra help and support. In line with this understanding, social workers' task is defined as arranging and providing such help. (Juhila 2006, 151-152) The stress on the caring aspect of social work might be seen especially fit when the clients are children or young people (ibid. 153).

Another interesting issue two of these texts discuss is interprofessional work. Through this discussion, other professionals of pupil welfare work are focalised. However, interprofessional work here is described in controversial terms reminding of the results of Sipilä-Lähdekorpi's research. Interprofessional work is obviously seen here as a crucial element of school social work. Nonetheless, it is discussed only in terms of the importance of school social workers' being able to bring out their own perspectives while the ability to listen to and appreciate other possible approaches is neglected.

On the whole, I argue that these three texts are similar in respect to their action orientation. All of them categorise school social work as social work in the strict sense and all of them use ontological gerrymandering to establish an account backing up their claim of only university education providing the necessary knowledge base and skills for school social workers.

I also claim that these accounts serve certain interests which can be detected by examining whose position the texts are written from. The focaliser of all three texts is the school social worker, thus this account of school social work is intended to promote their interests.

Consequently, arguing for the highest possible education can be interpreted as arguing from the position of the gatekeeper. The status of any profession is protected by guarding its boundaries and by maintaining high control of who is able to gain access to the expert knowledge claimed by the representatives of that profession (Fook 2002, 25).

By maintaining that polytechnic education is not sufficient enough for school social workers, the status as well as the labour market position of school social workers is protected. As Abbott (1988, 8-9) argues in his book on professions, professions attempt to establish and protect their status through control of abstract knowledge. The degree of abstraction is the “ultimate currency”, as Abbot calls it, in the competition between professions. In these texts it is claimed that school social work requires as abstract a knowledge base as social work does. This knowledge is contrasted with social services work knowledge which is argued to be insufficient, that is, not abstract enough. Thus, social work is contrasted with social services work, as well as university education is with polytechnic education. The acceptance of polytechnic education as adequate is argued to lead to the degradation of school social work. (see also Abbott 1988, 126-128)

Reading these texts as argumentations for professional status can also be supported by the picture they draw about school social work expertise. It is described in rather modernist terms with the emphasis on the importance of the theoretical and methodological knowledge base, on the caring aspect of the work based on vertical expertise as well as on individual competence even in the framework of interprofessional work.

In summary, these four opinions argue for different categorisations of school social work. One of them categorises school social work as not social work (but as social services work), while the other three ones categorise it as social work in the strict sense. The different accounts argue from different contexts: the former one from that of service provision, while the three latter ones from the context of the content of the work. However, both of these contexts are reshaped in the argumentations due to the focalisation of the texts. Service provision is discussed from the perspective of efficiency of recruitment with the stress being on the employers’ perspective. Thus managerialist values are brought into play. The description of the content of the work, on the other hand, is turned into an argument for the status of school social work. So the account becomes an argument in the “interprofessional battle of professionalisation” (Abbott 1988, xii). Since professionalisation is a modernist concept, school social work is described accordingly in

modernist terms stressing the abstract theoretical and methodological knowledge of school social workers.

#### 4.4. The Dispute Continues: The Comments

The dispute established in the Memorandum continues in the comments. Some of the comments can be fitted in with the above analysed argumentations, others, on the other hand, bring in new perspectives, new arguments and even new claims. As there are as many as twenty-one comments in the data, it is not meaningful to analyse them in detail one by one. Moreover, there are certain topics, arguments etc. that keep coming up regularly. Consequently, I decided to focus on the common points and group the comments accordingly to make my analysis easier to carry out as well as easier to follow for the reader.

After reading the comments through several times I decided to group the texts on the basis of the argumentative context they argue from, as it seemed their most obvious feature. Thus, I divided the text into two main groups: those that argue from the context of service provision and those that argue from the context of the content of the work. Nevertheless, it must be added that this division produces its own problems as any division does. Not all the texts can be fitted in these groups neatly and most of the texts use more than one argumentative context to back up their claim. Nonetheless, most of the texts rely overwhelmingly on either of these argumentative contexts and these groups give me a good starting point as well as make the process of analysis more manageable.

In the following sections, I will attempt to find out if there are any common features in the texts belonging to the same groups. I am not interested in the individual texts as such, neither in what individual authors claim. Instead, I try to find more general patterns. I am especially interested in how, depending on the argumentative context, school social work is constructed and categorised, in what interest a certain categorisation might serve. As for referring to the comments, I will use their number in the list given in the Appendix.

#### 4.4.1. Efficiency of Service Provision and Managerialism

Out of the twenty-one comments that discuss qualification requirements only three justify their argumentation relying merely on the argumentative context of efficiency of service provision (*texts 20, 22, 23*). These three texts are quite similar to the dissenting opinion of the Memorandum. Firstly, they are written from the perspective of the service provider, so the focaliser of these texts is the employer.

Moreover, all of these texts categorise school social work as not social work. Interestingly, however, they are not completely unanimous on the interpretation of “suitable academic degree”. One of the texts (*20*) argues for suitable higher academic degree (although not necessarily in the field of social sciences or services), the other one (*22*) in turn argues for suitable academic degree, and the third (*23*) for suitable academic degree in social sciences or social services.

The main argument of these texts remains similar to that of the Memorandum and the dissenting opinion discussed above: by extending qualification requirements service provision can be ensured.

In two of the texts (*20 & 23*) the issue of control is brought up again. Social work is constructed also in these texts as remedial and requiring judicial decision making, which is in opposition with the preventive nature of school social work.

Two of the texts bring up a new argument to back up their claim. In texts 20 and 22 suitability for the job is opposed to paper qualifications. Official qualifications of social work are constructed here as not giving good enough basis for the choice of suitable staff. Thus, in these texts school social work is constructed as something outside what social work education can provide for. In text 20 it is even claimed that school social workers’ most essential tool is their personality and consequently social work education in itself cannot ensure succeeding in the job.

There is indeed some research that shows that service users value certain personal qualities in workers, such as warmth, empathy, openness, anti-discrimination, honesty and reliability (Beresford, 2007). Moreover, social workers’ personal qualities, such as being respectful, positive and supportive towards the client, seem to have a significant impact on the

outcome of counselling (Saarnio, 2000). Nonetheless, the same is true of other human professions, like teaching or nursing. Personality does matter in interpersonal work. Still, social work qualifications are hardly in opposition to the above mentioned personal traits.

These arguments are based on ontological gerrymandering inasmuch as social work qualifications are defined here as not good enough a basis for choosing employees, but other basis to define suitability is not introduced. Moreover, personal traits are opposed to paper qualifications, whereas they could be seen as supplementing one another.

At the same time, the focus of the argument is also shifted. While the dissenting opinion emphasised the availability of services, here the quality of services is stressed. Extending qualification requirements is argued to guarantee that employers have a better opportunity to choose the best staff to ensure high quality of services.

Client centeredness and the emphasis on the quality of services is part of both postmodernist and managerialist discourses. In line with the postmodernist approach to social work, client centeredness follows from the belief that every individual is the centre of his or her reality and change can only be achieved through dialogue and receptivity. Thus understanding and respect for clients' thoughts, ideas and wishes are seen essential to social work. (Parton and O'Byrne 2000)

The managerialist approach also accentuates client centeredness and high quality of services. It is connected to the implementation of the customer / provider –model of public services, where clients are thought of as customers. Nonetheless, in the managerialist discourse, client centeredness gets a different meaning and is connected to efficiency. According to managerialist ideas, efficiency is a crucial component of proper services. Dealing with problems swiftly is seen as the means to provide high quality services. (Juhila 2006, 73-74)

The above comments are clearly written from the service provider's point of view. Thus the main emphasis is on effective service provision, so arguing for higher quality of services through client centeredness can be understood here as part of a managerialist account of school social work.

There is yet another comment (36) that argues on the basis of efficiency. This document is written by the network of social services education polytechnics. Consequently, the authors argue from the point of view of one profession, namely that of social services workers (*sosionomi*). Here, the efficiency in utilising already existing resources is stressed. It is argued that the new degrees / professions brought about by changes in higher education should be utilised in social services in the best interests of clients. As Abbott (1988, 194) indicates, in most professions, efficiency has become the central claim of new groups. Thus, it is not surprising that it is drawn on in each argument where the claim is to include social services workers in the more or less established field of pupil welfare work.

Although the starting point of this argumentation is different, namely the professional endeavour of an occupational group, the strategy used here is quite similar to those of the above comments. The interests of clients are emphasised as well as the preventative nature of school social work is stressed while social work is constructed as relying on control and on the right to judicial decisions. At the same time, the difference between university and polytechnic education is defined as the preparedness to make such decisions. The validity of official qualifications is, however, not questioned in this account and school social work is categorised as social work in the broader sense.

Yet, it must be added, that this comment also contains descriptions of the content of school social work as well as social services education to back up its argument, to which I will return in the next chapter.

Another four of the comments (4, 10, 24, 29) also include the argumentative context of service provision, but their standpoint is the opposite of that of the previous comments. Namely, these comments criticise the argumentations based on service provision. They are more undivided as far as the categorisation of school social work is concerned: three (10, 24, 29) out of these four comments argues for the categorisation of school social work as social work in the strict sense and one (4) avoids categorisation.

All of these comments use ironising discourse and offensive rhetoric. They point out the ontological gerrymandering used in the criticised argument: the lack of properly educated workforce is a problem connected with the availability and need for services, not with qualification requirements. They also use comparison and contrasting with other professionals, and refer to the general lack of educated workforce in social and health care

services, as well as in education while pointing out that solutions for these problems are not sought through lowering qualification requirements. By comparison and contrasting they make their contra-argument easier to comprehend and accept, as well as they imply that school social work has the same professional status as any of the other professions mentioned. (Jokinen 1999, 153)

Interestingly enough, one of these comments (29) points out another ontological gerrymandering the representatives of the opposite opinion employ: Although it is argued that extending qualification requirements would increase the number of job applicants, it is not clarified how it would do that. Moreover, the authors also call attention to the possibility of the need for and development of such new pupil welfare services where social services workers knowledge and skills could be made use of.

Nonetheless, it must be added that none of these four comments argue only from the argumentative context of service provision. They also argue on the basis of the content of school social work, which I intend to discuss in the following section. It, however, draws the attention to the fact that the comments arguing for the categorisation of school social work as not social work justifying the argumentations based on service provision largely neglected the aspect of the nature of school social work.

#### 4.4.2. The Content of the Work and Managerialism

The majority, namely eighteen of the comments rely more strongly on the argumentative context based on the content of school social work. These texts, however, differ in their action orientation, that is, in how they categorise school social work. For the analysis, I grouped these texts according to their action orientation.

Interestingly, none of these comments categorize school social work according to the third option introduced in the Memorandum and supported in the three comments drawing entirely on the argumentative context of service provision. Three of the comments (4, 17, 28) avoid categorisation, another two comments (32, 36) argue for categorising school social work as social work in the broader sense, and the rest of the comments, namely thirteen (8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 35), argue for categorising school social work as social work in the strict sense. However, not all of these eighteen comments

contain detailed descriptions of the content of school social work. In the next section, I am going to focus mainly on those that do so.

Comments 4, 17 and 28 share one common point: they include opposing points of view. The strategic focaliser of texts 4 and 17 is the employer (the educational institute and the municipality, respectively). However, the focalised of these texts is the school social worker, and the comments also argue for the demanding nature of the work. Arguing from the employer's standpoint results in arguing for extending qualification requirements, whereas considering the worker's point of view leads to demanding the highest possible education, as we have already seen in the dissenting opinions of the Memorandum. Accepting both standpoints leads to a situation where it becomes difficult to categorise school social work.

Text 28 is different inasmuch as here the focaliser is the work community. Moreover, the focus of the text is on two issues. The first focalised is the school social worker again, and thus the demanding nature of the work is emphasised. The comment, however, also includes a paragraph on social services work education. Consequently, a conflict of interests is recognised. This conflict is then solved by avoiding categorisation and claiming that social services education is a recent development thus it is difficult to evaluate its potential within psychosocial pupil welfare work.

None of these above three comments include detailed descriptions of school social work or of the expertise of expected of school social workers.

Comments 32 and 36 are written by representatives of polytechnic education. Thus it is not surprising that they argue for categorising school social work as social services work while also arguing for the necessity of higher polytechnic degree. Comment 32 uses distanced footing and its argument consists of only one sentence, where it is stated that the content of school social work corresponds to the curriculum of social services education as well as to the competence of social services workers. Nonetheless, this claim is not elaborated in any ways.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, comment 36 discusses the question of qualification requirements in detail. The focaliser of the account is clearly the social services worker. The argumentation is strengthened by referring to consensus and authority. First, an earlier

comment by the social services polytechnic education network is referred to, where it is claimed that higher polytechnic degree in social services should be regarded equal to a degree in social work. It is argued that higher polytechnic education provides the same knowledge and skills as university education does. Then a study and a report on social services education are quoted to show that the content of school social work and social services work are quite similar.

In these paragraphs, school social work, social work and social services work are also described in detail to establish the similarity between school social work and social services work. School social work is defined not as social work but as social welfare work (sosiaalialan työ), thus the category is extended to include social services work, as well. The main difference between social work and social service work is identified again as social workers' capacity to work with unwilling clients through the power and right for judicial decision making. This argument is used to establish the claim that such control is not part of school social work, and thus it should not be identified as social work in the strict sense. However, this argument is in opposition to the previous claim of the same comment, where it is argued that social work and social services work are similar.

In the comment, school social work is described in terms of vertical expertise, relying on the description given in the Memorandum on pages 26-28. In addition, school social work is also described here in terms of the skills required of the worker, the emphasis being on skills connected with interaction and interprofessional work. Thus, it can be claimed that the argumentation of comment 36 is based mainly on managerialist values both in the case of service provision and social work expertise.

#### 4.4.3. The Content of the Work and Modernism

The remaining thirteen comments categorise school social work as social work in the strict sense. Since not all of these texts contain detailed descriptions of the content of school social work, and there are some common aspects in the argumentations of the comments, I will not analyse them one by one in detail but focus on the common features.

Five of the comments mention interprofessional work (comments 8, 10, 18, 26, 35). Nonetheless, their focus is not on interprofessional skills. Instead, interprofessional work is

described in terms of interprofessional competition which aim is to get one's own professional perspective recognised. Consequently, these texts neglect the importance of multivocality of interprofessional work as well as the importance of appreciating other perspectives.

The interprofessional context of school social work is turned around to support the professional claims of school social workers. In these comments, it is claimed that school social workers should have a strong professional identity as well as respected professional expertise to be able to carry out their work as they are surrounded by representatives of other and stronger professions. Strong professional identity and expertise, in turn, is understood as being ensured by having university education. Thus, interprofessionality is viewed in a modernist context where professional expertise is seen as developing with education and as something that should be well delineated as opposed to the expertise of other professions. At the same time, postmodernist understandings of expertise stressing the importance of multivocality and of those processes through which knowledge is constructed through interaction are neglected.

This argument is especially interesting, as school nurses, another important occupational group in the pupil welfare team, do not have a university degree, but a higher polytechnic degree ([www.ammattinetti.fi](http://www.ammattinetti.fi)). Thus, the claim that university degree would enable school social workers to participate more effectively in interprofessional work is based on ontological gerrymandering to some extent.

There is yet another argument, employed in two comments, based on the modernist concept of professional identity and professional boundaries. Comments 29 and 35 argue for the importance of differentiating social work and social services work. They both argue that social work and social services work are different professions requiring different educational paths as well as different degrees. These comments protect professional boundaries in both directions, while giving higher value to university education over polytechnic education. Nonetheless, in both comments the question is also asked whether there would be need for social services workers in schools and a suggestion is made for further investigation of this question.

The argumentation of yet six comments (8, 10, 11, 18, 26, 31) is also based on arguments connected with the modernist understanding of expertise. In these arguments, theoretical

and methodological knowledge is given the main emphasis when describing school social work expertise: these comments argue that school social workers need the same theoretical and methodological knowledge as social workers do. Theoretical knowledge is defined as the knowledge of social sciences, social policy or social work theories.

The question of judicial decision making as a defining feature of social work is only brought up in one of these thirteen comments. In comment 29, it is argued that such decision making is not a crucial feature of social work as it is not a defining feature of other pupil welfare professions either. Thus, corroboration is used to argue against the claim that sees such decision making as a defining feature of professions.

In five of these thirteen comments (10, 25, 29, 35), the quality of services is also discussed. Here it is perceived as related to the education of the worker. The focus of these arguments is on the client. Interestingly enough, arguing for and from the clients' point of view brings completely the opposite results as in comments 20, 22 and 23. In comments 22, clients' interest is constructed as the availability of services, which is seen as best ensured by extending qualification requirements. Comment 20 and 23 are similar to the arguments under discussion here inasmuch as they also define clients' interest as the right to high quality services. Nonetheless, they turn the argument around claiming that requiring university education from school social workers is in opposition to the requirement of high quality services and consequently to the interests of clients.

In these five comments, on the other hand, clients' interest is defined again as the right to high quality services and the best possible experts. However, best is understood here as having the highest possible education. Thus, all of these five comments argue that it is in the clients' interest that they would have the highest quality of services possible which can be best ensured by the most highly educated professionals providing these services. This argument then can be related to the modernist understanding of professional expertise inasmuch as expertise is understood as developing linearly, with education.

There is only one comment (comment 35) amongst these thirteen ones that can be read as relying, at least to some extent, on postmodernist understanding of social work expertise. As it was stated in the previous paragraphs, some of the arguments of this comment are in line with the modernist discourse. Comment 35 also describes interprofessional work in terms of "interprofessional battle", argues for clear professional boundaries and

understands best possible professional knowledge and skills as attainable through highest possible education. Moreover, social sciences theoretical knowledge base is enlisted as an important element of school social work expertise.

Nonetheless, this comment also includes references to those academic meta-skills that are required of the worker to enable him/her to combine the academic and the vocational sides of social work expertise and to analyse complex phenomena social workers deal with as well as the ways knowledge about such phenomena is created. These kind of reflexive analytical skills are then argued to be the outcome of university education.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS: PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS VERSUS SERVICE PROVISION**

The three main questions of my research were the following:

What discourses can be identified in the theoretical literature concerning social work expertise?

Are these different discourses present in the research material?

What interests do the different constructions of school social work expertise serve?

As my research was theory inspired, I set out by identifying the major discourses concerning social work professional expertise on the basis of theoretical literature. I found three different discourses on expertise: the modernist, the managerialist and the postmodernist. The modernist approach emphasises the importance of a well-defined theoretical knowledge base. Modernist expertise is also described as the property of the individual as well as cumulative and linearly developing inasmuch as it is seen as growing with education and experience. It is also described as vertical and universal, as expert knowledge is seen as superior to lay knowledge and as reliable, valid and applicable in any situation.

The managerialist description of expertise can be connected to the discourse of efficiency. In the name of effectiveness, general professional orientations and professional knowledge are replaced by a focus on outputs, routinised procedures and concrete skills. Thus professional expertise is re-defined in accordance with these skills. This process can clearly be connected with the growing significance given to market ethos and is often described as the process of deprofessionalization.

Postmodernist (and social constructionist) theories question the universal validity and reliability of any knowledge thus also questioning the modernist understanding of expertise based on such knowledge. Instead, emphasis is placed on contextuality, multivocality, ambiguity and reflexivity. For social work, it means emphasis on receptivity, dialogue and interpretation. Accepting uncertainty can also enable social workers to approach each situation respectful of difference, which has always been a crucial aspect of social work.

The majority of social work literature stresses the significance and relevance of postmodernist perspectives with respect to social work. At the same time, managerialist

and modernist perspectives are criticised as being in opposition to the main values of social work.

As far as the literature on school social work is concerned, most authors would describe it in postmodernist terms, its most essential feature being the negotiation between different perspectives, between different understandings of the same reality. However, research shows that modernist and managerialist features are also present, at least in school social workers' own descriptions of the work.

In my analysis, answering the second and the third question are closely connected. Thus, while I was looking for these above discourses in the documents I also carried out a rhetorical analysis to find out what interests are behind a certain construction. As my sympathies lie with postmodernist understandings of social work expertise, I was hoping to find descriptions of school social work that emphasise the importance of reflexivity, multivocality and ambiguity. To my disappointment, in these documents, school social work expertise is constructed mainly in accordance with the managerialist and the modernist discourse. Some of the texts emphasise the efficiency of service provision while neglecting aspects connected with the actual content of the work. Other texts stress the content of the work, but argue only for the importance of a common knowledge base rooted in social sciences and attainable through university education. Nonetheless, the lack of the postmodernist discourse can be explained with the help of rhetorical analysis.

To make my research more feasible, I have constructed a list of rhetorical devices to start with. In my analysis, however, the different devices were given different emphasis. Examining the argumentative context and the focalisation of these texts has proved central. As far as the action orientation of these texts is concerned, categorisation has become the most essential concept of my analysis, as all these texts argue for a certain categorisation of school social work. In addition to it, I also relied on the concept of ontological gerrymandering. Amongst the devices used to establish the epistemological orientation of these texts, footing and corroboration have proved to be the most important. Moreover, the analysis of the epistemological orientation of the texts did not turn out to be especially meaningful in answering my main research questions and consequently it was given less emphasis.

Nonetheless, it must be added here that grouping these texts is somewhat problematic, as any grouping is. Hardly any of these texts can be described in purely managerialist or modernist terms neither do they rely on only one argumentative context or have only one focaliser or focalised. Nonetheless, most of these texts show clear tendencies belonging to a certain group and there is a certain connection between the action orientation, the argumentative context, the strategic focaliser and the way school social work expertise is constructed.

The main purpose of these texts is to argue for a certain categorisation of school social work, to define it whether as social work in the strict sense, social work in the broader sense or as not social work. These different categories then have quite a clear correspondence to the discourse on which the text relies in its construction of expertise. Categorising school social work as social work in the strict sense relies overwhelmingly on the modernist discourse (three dissenting opinions and comments 8, 10, 11, 18, 25, 26, 29, 35), while categorising school social work as social work in the broader sense or as not social work relies more strongly on the managerialist discourse (the Memorandum, one dissenting opinion and comments 20, 22, 23, 36).

So it can be argued that the construction of school social work expertise depends on the categorisation of school social work the texts argue for. Nonetheless, this does not yet explain whose interests these accounts and a certain categorisation of school social work serve. This question can be answered by looking into the argumentative context and the focalisation of the different texts.

Those texts that categorise school social work as social work in the strict sense and construct school social work expertise mainly in modernist terms argue overwhelmingly from the argumentative context of the content of the work. More interestingly, however, they also show quite a clear pattern as far as the strategic focaliser is concerned: in most cases it is the school social worker. One of the dissenting opinions as well as comment 29 and 35 also argue in the name of the social work professional community. Thus, these texts can be interpreted as arguments supporting the professional aspirations of school social workers.

One dissenting opinion and comments 20, 22 and 23 categorise school social work as not social work and rely overwhelmingly on the managerialist discourse. They rely mainly on

the argumentative context of service provision. Not surprisingly, the strategic focaliser of these texts is the service provider. However, it must be added here that the main emphasis of these texts is on effective service provision and not on the description of the work itself. Still, it can be claimed that managerialist descriptions can be connected to service providers' interests and they do lead to the downgrading of the school social work profession.

The Memorandum and comment 36 categorise school social work as social work in the broader sense. They rely on both of the argumentative contexts of service provision and the content of the work. They are also similar inasmuch as they both refer to the question of judicial control as a crucial component of social work as opposed to school social work. Nonetheless, they show some clear differences in their focalisation. The strategic focaliser of the Memorandum is clearly the school social worker while in comment 36 it is the social services worker. The comment can thus be interpreted as an argument in the service of the professional aspirations of a new occupational group. As mentioned before, new occupational groups rely often on discourses of effectiveness, which is the case also here. However, as the account serves professional aspirations, the argumentative context of the content of the work is also profited here.

In the case of the Memorandum, the categorisation and the description of school social work are constructed as a compromise between the two extreme positions represented by school social workers' professional aspirations and by service providers' aspiration for effectiveness. As it can be observed from the dispute the Memorandum has triggered, this compromise is neither a satisfactory nor a convincing one.

Thus, it can be claimed that postmodernist perspectives concerning school social work expertise get lost in the dispute between professionals aspiring for high status and service providers aspiring for more effective service provision. The threats managerialist values propose to social work are analysed in social work theoretical literature quite broadly and are also discussed here in the previous chapters. Although these official documents refrain from prescribing how the actual work should be carried out, their final conclusions are still in line with the results of theoretical analyses of the same processes. The professional knowledge of the worker is downgraded their professional autonomy being reduced at the same time.

Professional aspirations also seem to bring about their own challenges. As Fook (2000, 108) reminds, from a postmodernist perspective, professional thinking in social work exhibits some dangerous modernist tendencies such as oppositional thinking. Models for such professional practice have been constructed on the basis of dichotomising particular categories, often privileging one part of the binary over the other, for instance social workers' knowledge over clients' knowledge. Also in many of these texts, the descriptions of school social work are based on the idea of vertical expertise, which privileges the worker's knowledge over that of the client and consequently treats clients as the objects of social work. In these texts, such an approach also results in opposing social work expertise to the expertise of other professionals, of teachers or psychologists, for instance. Consequently, interprofessional work is often described as a battle between different occupations and not as a possibility to give voice to multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Professionalisation, however, as Payne (1996, 209) asserts, is a characteristic of our society. Social work is also forced into it, as it is an essential means to compete for resources. It is not any different in the case of school social work. Professional power means how access to and the standards of an occupation are controlled. In practice, it is done mainly through education. In the Memorandum, the present definition of school social work standards is problematised when educational requirements are questioned. Thus, it is not surprising that the reactions of the occupational group in question are strong.

Education however could be viewed in different ways, as it is done in the research material. In accordance with the professionalisation view, education means maintaining standards, and at the same time also maintaining occupational closure. However, in such a case, professional power advantages the occupation but not necessarily the clients, as it is the case with those texts here that argue for the necessity of university education. In line with managerialist ideas, education should be defined by employers, which means the negligence of the practitioners' and clients' interests. This view is strongly present in those texts that are written from the service providers' perspective. The reflexive view on education then emphasises the development of relevant skills. This view is largely neglected in these documents, except for comments 35 and 36. (Payne 1996, 213-216)

Furthermore, professionalisation is not necessarily in opposition to postmodernist understandings of social work expertise. Healy and Meagher (2004, 251-257), for instance, in their article on professionalisation, talk about classical and new professionalisation. They

describe classical professionalisation in social work as using exclusionary strategies to elevate the interests of professional social workers over those para-professionals who increasingly occupy social services roles. The texts arguing for the exclusion of social services workers from pupil welfare work can then be understood as representing this approach. However, Healy and Meagher (ibid.) add, this approach is inconsistent with social work commitment to equality and democracy.

They (ibid.) then describe new professionalism as striving for the recognition of professional knowledge to be used in the interest of the client while maintaining wariness towards elitist professional claims. This approach recognises the distinctive expertise of professionals whilst also providing opportunities for collaboration with other groups and highlighting workers' and service users' shared interests in high quality service provision. Unfortunately, this approach is more difficult to detect in the texts analysed. The main text of the Memorandum argues from such a perspective claiming that both social workers and social services workers having a higher polytechnic degree should be qualified to work as school social workers. In addition to this, only comment 35 and 28 argue for high quality services, for the recognition of social work knowledge as well as for further investigation to establish the possibilities of utilising social services workers' expertise in pupil welfare work.

So while it is clearly difficult to accommodate the managerialist discourse with postmodernist social work values, it would be possible to argue for professional status relying on those values. Yet, it does not happen in the majority of these texts, which is in clear opposition to what social work theoretical literature argues for. So the question arises: why the modernist approach to social work expertise is still so strong?

I argue that the different accounts of school social work expertise can be read as an example of how the field of Finnish social care is changing in general. As Karvinen (1996, 35) reminds, the power relations of professions, as well as of educational and research institutes, employers, funders and government institutions producing expertise are in a flux. These shifting power relations are also influencing social work, as social services are being re-organised as a result of these changes. Consequently, the expertise of the social is being contested and re-defined.

According to Karvinen (1996, 39), one sign of this change is the taking shape of a new professional structure marked by the purchaser/provider-model as well as by the emphasis on efficiency and output. This new perspective is clearly represented by the documents written from the service provider's point of view. On the other hand, Finnish social work is exceptional inasmuch as it has been highly academical from the 1970s on, raising the education of social workers to MA level in 1981. This academisation meant giving the discipline a scientific theoretical foundation and took place mainly in the framework of social sciences research. (Satka and Karvinen 1999, 119 - 120) These documents show that the emphasis on this academic and scientific side of social work expertise is still quite strong. University education represents this academic side of social work and thus it is in opposition to the more newly established polytechnic education which focuses more on the practical side.

Consequently, if these official documents are read as examples of how the field of social care is changing, they tell about the growing influence of service providers and of the managerialist approach which is also in accordance with the story social work theoretical literature tell. Moreover, the strengthening of service providers' perspectives does bring about the devaluation of the social work profession inasmuch as established qualification requirements are questioned.

However, in social work theoretical literature, the managerialist discourse is juxtaposed by postmodernist understandings of social work expertise, whereas in these documents it is contested by the modernist approach. This approach can be connected to the professional aspirations of social workers and consequently interpreted as a counter-reaction to the attempts to devaluate the profession. Nonetheless, theoretically it would be possible to accommodate postmodernist understandings of social work with professionalisation. Yet, these texts rely overwhelmingly on modernist discourses. I argue that it can be the consequence of the strong academic and scientific tradition in Finnish social work.

Nonetheless, this modernist approach to expertise is in conflict with postmodernist constructions of expertise stressing reflexivity and multivocality. Furthermore, postmodernist understandings of social work expertise do not seem to fit in well with service providers' interests either. Thus, in these documents, those elements that the postmodernist approaches to social work consider central, such as the acknowledgment of

uncertainty, indeterminacy and reflexivity, are overlooked for the most part. Consequently, the internal culture of social work is overlooked as well and made to take a silent form.

## 6. REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Writing this thesis has been a long process. I decided on the subject during my work placement in 2006. At the same time, I got also interested in discourse analysis on my research methodology course. However, putting all the pieces together (finding the exact research topic as well as the research material) took me almost a year. Even though the final form of my thesis describes my research as a more or less linear process, it was more like wandering around, back and forth and often also getting lost in dead ends. Accordingly, I am also aware that during this process I could have made other decisions and my research could have gone in other directions.

Moreover, there are still some questions that could have been examined in more detail, such as the question of occupational title as well as confidentiality regulations, further education and the use of statistics in pupil welfare work.

The first issue concerns school social work particularly whereas the latter three topics are raised in connection with pupil welfare work in general. One of the dissenting opinions of the Memorandum introduces the question about the occupational title of school social workers. As I mentioned in chapter 4.2., the official Finnish title “koulukuraattori” (“school curator”) has no explicit reference to social work. Clearly, the lack of such a straightforward reference to social work makes it easier to question qualification requirements, as pointed out also by the abovementioned dissenting opinion. There, it is claimed that school social workers’ occupational title should be changed to “koulun sosiaalityöntekijä”, that is, to “school social worker”, so that it would clearly express the occupational requirements of the job.

Besides this dissenting opinion, five of the comments (11, 24, 26, 29, 30) also argue for changing the occupational title. All these texts support their argument by pointing out that changing the occupational title to school social worker would only confirm and make explicit the traditional role and occupational as well as educational requirements of school social workers. In addition, it would also help avoid such disputes as the present one in the future.

There is only one comment, comment 36, that argues openly against changing the occupational title. This comment is written from the perspective of social services workers,

thus the claim is not surprising. According to the argument, the occupational title should not be changed for two reasons. First, school social workers have been called “koulukuraattori” ever since the first posts were established in Finland. Second, explicit reference to social work might lead to the stigmatisation of pupils using the services.

From a social constructionist approach, it is interesting that the question of naming is given such importance. As Fook (2002, 66) reminds, even in the case of social work, it would be interesting to speculate about the different terms which could be used or are used, for instance, in Europe. As she suggests, the various titles, such as ‘social therapist’, ‘social educator’ or ‘social practitioner’, imply different roles and different statuses between the professional and the service user.

Still, I am not sure how the replacement of the official occupational title of school social workers would improve or worsen services? Would the explicit reference to social work really scare away pupils and their families? Would it really stigmatise them? And on the other hand, would it strengthen school social workers’ professional identity as social workers? And would that be of any use for clients?

Other issues I omitted from my final analysis are connected with more general questions of expertise and concern all pupil welfare professional. These are the sections on confidentiality regulations, on the use of statistics in pupil welfare work as well as on further education.

As for confidentiality regulations, in chapter 3.5. of the Memorandum, the question is asked how confidentiality should be taken into account without making interprofessional work impossible. Many of the comments also stress the importance of clear regulations. The members of pupil welfare teams are not only representatives of different professions but also of different administrative fields, such as education, health care and social care. All these fields have more or less well-defined regulations concerning confidentiality. Nonetheless, there are no such regulations that would give detailed and applicable instructions for day-to-day pupil welfare work. It has been up to the members of the pupil welfare team to decide how much information they should share with their co-workers without endangering the privacy of their clients.

On the one hand, clear regulations for pupil welfare would certainly serve clients' interests inasmuch as their rights to privacy could be better ensured. Specific regulations would also ensure the better transparency of pupil welfare work which would be of clients' interests. For example, at the present there are no regulations concerning the registration of pupil welfare clients or the documentation of pupil welfare work in general. Consequently, it is impossible for the clients to check what is done, when, how and why.

On the other hand, pupil welfare work, just like social work, is carried out in circumstances where problems are complicated and not necessarily open to simple solutions. It is difficult to imagine such detailed and precise confidentiality regulations that would apply to any situation. Furthermore, too strict rules would narrow down the autonomy of pupil welfare professionals in giving necessary information. In that sense, arguing for detailed regulations has resonances of the managerialist approach to expertise.

Statistics and further education are not so relevant topics in the Memorandum, taking up only half a page each. However, quite a few of the comments stress the importance of these issues. In the case of statistics, the discussion again echoes modernist and managerialist perspectives. At the present, there is not much actual information on pupil welfare work, thus it is difficult to evaluate what is done and how effectively it is done. Having such information would help to evaluate these services as well as develop them and make them more effective.

It, however, would mean that pupil welfare work should be defined and described in such objective and comparable ways that would make such statistics possible. Nonetheless, Finnish circumstances make comparability a challenging job. It is almost impossible to define pupil welfare work according to similar expectations, for instance, in the Helsinki metropolitan area with its dense system of schools of considerable size and in areas where smaller schools are situated tens of kilometres apart. Such things clearly influence the availability of and need for professionals to be employed and the way the work can be carried out.

Moreover, the same problems apply to statistics as to confidentiality regulations. Some features of the work, such as the exact targets of the work, the reasons why pupils use these services or the kind of help given them, are impossible to describe in objective terms defined beforehand.

The issue of further education can be connected with the notion of lifelong learning. On the one hand, in a rapidly changing world, knowledge should be updated regularly. On the other hand, pupil welfare work is seen as a special field and, consequently, experts working in this field are expected to gain special knowledge, which can happen also through further education. In this sense, further education is a way to require and update the knowledge base used by these professionals.

Moreover, further education is also described as facilitating interprofessional teamwork by improving communication and cooperation skills, as well as improving working methods, leadership and communality of work communities. In fact, in the Memorandum, it is this latter aspect that is emphasised.

Although the authors of most comments agree on the necessity of statistics and further education, they rely on different arguments emphasising different aspects of expertise. Some draw on the modernist understanding of expertise, emphasising the need for objective knowledge (represented by statistics and well-defined particular knowledge base). Others, relying on managerialist discourses, argue for effectiveness and see statistics as a way to evaluate and improve pupil welfare activity; and further education as a way to improve necessary skills to enable pupil welfare teams to work more efficiently. Nonetheless, some draw the attention to problems connected with the reliability and applicability of statistics when it comes to such matters as health and social care, and yet others raise the issue of finance, which leads to a debate on who is supposed to pay for all these planned improvements.

It would have been interesting to explore these above topics in more detail. The conversation on confidentiality, statistics and further education could have provided an interesting extra perspective on how different approaches to expertise are gaining place in human professions. Nonetheless, these questions were not raised only in connection with school social work. Consequently, their analysis would belong to the discussion of more general questions of the expertise of pupil welfare professionals.

Focusing on certain topics while omitting others was only one of the choices I made. I also chose a certain way of interpreting these texts, even if not necessarily fully consciously. Consequently, I am aware that my reading of these texts is only one of many possibilities, as well as my understanding of what social work expertise should be. However, all through

this text, I tried to write my epistemological standpoint and my lines of reasoning open, so that the reader can follow it, and agree or disagree with it.

Many times I was also concerned about the language. Doing research in a foreign language is as well demanding as increases the possibility of misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Writing in English also raises some problems and many times I have considered changing the language of my thesis to Finnish. My research material is in Finnish and I am conscious about the problems that translation might bring about, especially in the case of close reading required by rhetorical discourse analysis. For these reasons, Finnish would have been a better choice as the language of my thesis. However, writing in English comes more naturally to me. Although I understand and speak Finnish well, it has never truly become an academic language of academic writing for me.

In my opinion, however, my reading was influenced more strongly by other issues than those connected to the choice of language, such as my sympathies with postmodernist and social constructionist theories as well as my personal experiences as far as school social work is concerned.

I have been working as a substitute school social worker in Helsinki since August. The question of qualification requirements has been quite a sensitive issue for many of my colleagues. Still, at the time of writing, there is no consensus in the question. Personally, I disagree with the third option introduced in the Memorandum. I do not think that any suitable academic degree would do for school social workers. I do believe that school social workers should be experts in the field of social care. Pupil welfare groups are interprofessional teams with representatives of different fields, such as special needs education, health care, psychology as well as of the administrative side of educational institutions. The perspective the expertise of the social can provide is as important as any of the other fields and could not be substituted by or interchanged into any of those. However, as I am not the least familiar with social services education, I have no opinion on its adequacy or inadequacy.

In contrast, I have a strong opinion on school social work expertise. I am also aware that my vision is influenced by the affirmative postmodernist perspective, as well as by the circumstances I have carried out my work in. My experiences of school social work are strongly connected to Helsinki. As far as schools and work communities are concerned, I

have been working in six different schools already, so in that sense, my experiences are somewhat broader. These six schools have provided six completely different frameworks for my work and thus forced me to reflect on my activity and try to find what is crucial for me.

I was not left alone with these questions. During supervision and training sessions as well as in the monthly meetings of Helsinki school social workers, one re-occurring topic has been the definition and delineation of one's own practice. Even after approximately forty years of the establishment of the first school social worker post, the same questions are still being asked. How should school social work be described? What is essential to it? To me, this ongoing discussion tells about the changing and reflexive, that is, the postmodern nature of this work.

Of course, the answers coming from different workers differ from each other. Some think that school social workers represent one perspective amongst the many other voices of pupil welfare. Accordingly, the aim of their work is to give voice to social science and social work perspectives. Some also think these perspectives are more defining than others. Accordingly, teachers are sometimes constructed as the enemy and interprofessional work as a battle where one should win. These opinions thus strongly reflect the modernist approach to social work expertise.

On an official level, managerialist perspectives are also gaining place. In Helsinki, school social workers already keep track of their work by means of statistics. The results are collected annually and analysed with regard to efficiency. There has also been some talk about audit and merit pay. Recently, consultative approaches have also been given emphasis as they are considered cost effective when compared with more traditional client work.

Nonetheless, how actual practice is formed largely depends on the worker herself, as school social workers work alone in an interprofessional environment in a "host" institution. Although advice can always be gotten from colleagues and superiors, ultimately it is the worker herself who makes the decisions about what to do and how to do it in a given situation. It is also the worker's responsibility to evaluate his/her own activity. In this sense, reflexivity is a crucial component of school social workers' expertise.

On the other hand, however, school social workers' efforts alone are hardly ever enough to advance the situation of any pupil. In each case, there are many people involved: pupils, parents, teachers, possibly the school principal, the school psychologist or other officials. They all have their own versions of what happened already and what should happen next. In this sense, school social work is inherently characterised by multivocality.

For me, the reflexive and multivocal nature of school social work practice has proved essential. Consequently, I would define school social work expertise in accordance with postmodernist understandings of social work expertise emphasising the respect for individual experience and difference, the acknowledgement of uncertainty and ambiguity as well as the commitment to indeterminacy, dialogue and reflexivity.

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## APPENDIX: THE RESEARCH DATA<sup>1</sup>

“Memorandum of the Working Group preparing a reform of the pupil welfare legislation”  
Oppilashuoltoon liittyvän lainsäädännön uudistamistyöryhmä (2006) Oppilashuoltoon  
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selvityksiä 2006: 33. Helsinki : Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö.

(p.72)

### The Comments

1. \*Ombudsman for Children (p.3)  
Lapsiasiavaltuutettu
2. \*Ministry of Education (p.5)  
Opetusministeriö
3. \*Ministry of Labour (p.1)  
Työministeriö
4. National Board of Education (p.6)  
Opetushallitus
5. \*The Office of the Chancellor of Justice (p.2)  
Oikeuskanslerin virasto
6. \*The Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman (p.10)  
Tietosuojavaltuutetun toimisto
7. \*National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health  
Stakes (p.8)
8. State Provincial Office of Southern Finland, Department  
for Social and Health Affairs (p.4)  
Etelä-Suomen lääninhallitus, sosiaali- ja terveystoimisto
9. \*State Provincial Office of Southern Finland, Department for  
Education and Culture (p.4)  
Etelä-Suomen lääninhallitus, sivistystoimisto
10. State Provincial Office of Eastern Finland, Department for  
Social and Health Affairs (p.6)  
Itä-Suomen lääninhallitus, sosiaali- ja terveystoimisto
11. State Provincial Office of Western Finland, Department for  
Social and Health Affairs, county doctor (p.3)  
Länsi-suomen lääninhallitus, Sosiaali- ja terveystoimisto / lääninlääkäri
12. State Provincial Office of Western Finland, Department for  
Social and Health Affairs (p.3)  
Länsi-suomen lääninhallitus, Department for Social and Health Affairs
13. \*State Provincial Office of Western Finland (p.4)  
Länsi-suomen lääninhallitus, Malmin terveydenhoitoalueen ja Lapuan  
terveyskeskuksen terveydenhoitajat
14. City of Hämeenlinna, Board of Education (p.3)  
Hämeenlinnan kaupunki, Opetusvirasto
15. Municipality of Janakkala, Board of Education (p.2)  
Janakkalan kunta, Opetustoimi
16. \*City of Kemijärvi, Department for Social and Health Affairs (p.3)  
Kemijärven kaupunki, sosiaali- ja terveystoimisto

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<sup>1</sup> The English name of organisations, institutions etc is given whenever an official translation exists.

17. City of Kuusankoski, City Council Kuusankosken kaupunki, kaupunkihallitus	(p.3)
18. City of Lahti, Board of Education and Culture Lahden kaupunki, sivistystoimi	(p.2)
19. *Municipality of Lapinlahti Lapenlahden kunta	(p.2)
20. City of Porvoo, Board of Education and Culture Porvoon kaupunki, sivistystoimi	(p.1)
21. *City of Vantaa, Board of Education and Culture Vantaan kaupunki, sivistystoimi	(p.4)
22. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities Suomen kuntaliitto	(p.2)
23. The Health Care Federation of Municipalities of the Forssa Region Forssan seudun terveydenhuollon kuntayhtymä	(p.5)
24. Trade Union of Finnish Social Workers Koulukuraattorit – Skolkuratorer ry	(p.6)
25. The Central Union for Child Welfare in Finland Lastensuojelun keskusliitto	(p.2)
26. The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto	(p.4)
27. *Nuorten ystävät ry	(p.1)
28. Trade Union of Education in Finland Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö	(p.8)
29. The Union of Professional Social Workers Talentia	(p.3)
30. Sosiaaliasiamiehet ry.	(p.1)
31. Finnish Psychological Association Suomen psykologiliitto ry	(p.2)
32. South Carelia Polytechnic Etelä-Karjalan ammattikorkeakoulu	(p.2)
33. *University of Jyväskylä, Institute for Educational Research Jyväskylän yliopisto, Koulutuksen tutkimuslaitos	(p.3)
34. *University of Lapland, Planning and Financing Lapin yliopisto, suunnittelu- ja rahoitus	(p.2)
35. University of Kuopio, Faculty of Social Sciences Kuopion yliopisto, yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	(p.3)
36. Sosiaalialan ammattikorkeakoulutuksen verkosto	(p.3)

\* The documents marked by asterisk do not belong to the final data