There is a reawakening of interest in France in the question of research into social work. Already of longstanding concern, the issues at stake in such an approach make it appear timely that it should become part of the daily life of social workers. We can give some examples: in 2007

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regional resource centres for social work were set up by the recently renamed Direction Générale de la Cohésion Sociale (DGCS – General Directorate for Social Cohesion). These have since become PREFAS (Pôle de Recherche et d’Étude pour la Formation et l’Action Sociale – Research and Study Pole for Training and Social Work). Secondly, the UNAFORIS\(^3\) project (Union Nationale des Associations de Formation et de Recherche en Intervention Sociale – National Union of Associations for Training and Research in Social Intervention) has, since 2010, aimed to set up high level training schools in health care and social work (HEPASS). These operate at the same level of excellence as universities while exercising a professional interdisciplinarity which distinguishes them from purely academic institutions. Then there is the Paris CNAM project to investigate the setting up of a professional doctorate in social work via a conference to be organised in 2012\(^4\).

This current scenario is allied with the institutional development of three types of research tool to be integrated with social work:

- Research laboratories to be an integral part of social work training schools\(^5\) : the LERS (Laboratoire d’Étude et de Recherche Sociales – Social Study and Research Lab) of the IDS (Institut du développement social de Haute-Normandie – Upper Normandy Social Development Institute), the CERA (Centre d’Étude et de Recherche Appliquées – Centre for Applied Study and Research) of BUC Ressources in the department of les Yvelines, the IFSY (Institut de Formation Sociale des Yvelines – the Yvelines Institute for Social Training) and the EFPP (l’Ecole de Formations Psycho-Pédagogiques – Psycho-Pedagogical Training School) in Paris, the CREAS (Centre de Recherche et d’Études en Action Sociale – Social Action Study and Research Centre) of ETSUP (Ecole Supérieure de Travail Social – Social Work School) in Paris, etc.

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\(^3\) This association is formed by the fusion of AFFORTS and GNI, which have joined forces in the context of the HEPASS initiative.

\(^4\) This process was set in motion in the course of a study day organised by CNAM on 14 October 2011 : “Professional Expertise, Training Schools, Universities: how to justify research into and about social work?”

\(^5\) There is no official list of these self-styled research laboratories.
- National and international associations for the development of research in the field of social work: CERTS (Centre Européen de Recherche en Travail Social – European Social Work Research Centre), l’AFFUT (Association Française pour des Formations Universitaires de 3ème cycles en Travail Social – French Association for Graduate and post-Graduate training in Social Work), l’ACOFIS (Association des Chercheurs des Organismes de la Formation, et de l’Intervention Sociales – Association of Researchers in Training and Social Intervention Organisations), the FESET (European Social Educator Training) and AIFRIS (l’Association Internationale pour la Formation, la Recherche et l’Intervention Sociale – International Association for Training, Research and Social Intervention).


This whole process is allowing social work to be in a better position to carry out endogenous research from an institutional point of view. Nevertheless, it is the legitimacy of such research which is currently called into question, rather than its epistemology or its methodology. So social work research is focussing mainly on its right to exist rather than on what it studies, its results or how it is carried out. Our subject aims to go beyond questions of legitimacy and discuss the issues at stake when setting up a social work research project. Here we define social work research as a research activity carried out by professional social workers, their status and activities recognised by their registration with an institutional body. We take it as a principle that social work research involves members of social work training schools as defined by articles L. 451-1 to L. 451-2 and by social and medico-social institutions as defined by articles L. 312-1 of the Code de l’Action Social et des Familles (Social and Family Law). Social work research therefore involves close collaboration between researchers and social work professionals (workers on the

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6 Boucher Manuel, Belqasmi Mohamed, Pierret Régis, Moussu Gérard, Chauvière Michel, « Towards the development of scientific research within social work training institutes », ASH, N° 2653, 2010.
ground and management). In this way, social work research forms part of a participative approach, involving “a recognition of professional knowledge while taking due account of a complex reality.” (Anadon, 2007).

Our project is to contribute to the discussion surrounding the institutional means available to researchers into social work. In other words, we need to evaluate how far social work institutions can support the establishment of social work research. More precisely, we shall focus our attention on skills and competence. We shall attempt to compare the criteria embodied in the referentials of competence of the three principal qualifications likely to include social work research with the skills which have actually been called into play. These qualifications are: CAFERUIS (Certificat d’aptitude aux Fonctions d’Encadrement et de Responsables d’Unités d’Intervention Sociale – certificate in management of social intervention units), DEIS (Diplômes d’Etat d’ingénierie Sociale – state social engineering diploma) et CAFDES (Certificat d’Aptitude aux Fonctions de Directeurs du Secteur Social – certificate of capability to direct a social service). These referentials allow us to assess the general level of expectations of the job and its functions. The question now is whether the criteria are in tune with reality when it comes to the skills and competence to be applied to social work research. The point is to measure the gap between what is agreed and what happens in practice: « Terminology used to describe the skills expected of employees is clearly not neutral: it carries an idea of what is fair and effective which has no connection with the reality of things (or of the environment) and which a part of the workforce – including middle management responsible for evaluation – probably does not share. »

To establish what happens in practice, we shall use a research project undertaken by a French social action association (AURORE) which responded to an invitation to tender for research (MIPES – Information Missions on Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Ile-de-France, for the Ile-de-France Region) in collaboration with the laboratory of a centre

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for social work training (CERA). It is in terms of the possible gap
between requirements and reality that we can help assess how far
French social work institutions are competent to carry out research
into social work.

Our approach, therefore, consists of suggesting some issues relating
to the development of social work research as a means of engendering
knowledge of a participatory nature. In the event, we will restrict
ourselves to a scientific collaboration within management.

OUTLINES OF A RESEARCH PRODUCT CARRIED
OUT BY SOCIAL ACTION PROFESSIONALS

AN INVITATION TO TENDER FROM THE REGION

In May 2011, the Ile-de-France Region (Unit for social development,
health and regional democracy) invited tenders for a public contract
(n° 1100292), to cover two research topics: « to draw up a map of
the sales outlets of scrap dealers in Ile-de-France and to carry out a
qualitative study of scrap merchants ». These dealers collect scrap
and make a living by selling it in various places in the region, nota-
tively on the outskirts of Paris. The aim of these studies is to gain a
deeper knowledge of where they live and work in the region, how
they operate and what their hopes and expectations might be. The
first topic is a cartographical study at a regional level, while the
second is a study of 20 dealers in terms of their geographical loca-
tion, as previously determined. As well as a better understanding
of the scrap trade, these two studies should allow the establishment
of recommendations for improved integration and social recognition
of the scrap-dealing community.

The aims of topic 1 are to:

- Present a methodology and tools to access the data required,
- Gather data giving the location of scrap sales outlets and evaluate
  the number of people involved in Ile-de-France by identifying
  those carrying on this trade at several different points,
- Produce a map accompanied by explanations allowing this geographical sample to be refined and better understood,
- Present the results in a full committee meeting.

The aims of topic 2 are to:

- Present the methodology and tools to be used to carry out the interviews,
- Carry out 20 interviews with scrap dealers,
- Transcribe and analyse these interviews,
- Produce a final report of analysis of the interviews.

Topic one is carried out over a period of 4 months, whereas 6 months are allotted for topic 2.

A WORKER IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL ACTION

AURORE was founded in 1871 and recognised as a public-interest organisation in 1875. Its current aim is the social and professional reintegration of individuals suffering exclusion and/or economic disadvantage. Set up within the ambit of the Société Générale pour le Patronage des Libérés (society for the support of ex-prisoners) en 1871, Aurore now provides lodging and support for more than 15,000 individuals a year. Aurore has a presence in 8 departments: Paris, Seine-Saint-Denis, Hauts-de-Seine, Val-de-Marne, Loire-Atlantique, Dordogne, Aisne, Val d’Oise. In 2011, it runs 60 services et has 850 salaried employees, as well as 100 on support contracts and 150 handicapped workers under the ESAT scheme. It manages 2,500 units of accommodation and hostel places. It supports and houses more than 1,600 people and supports 550 in their search for employment.

AURORE’s Integration Service responded to the invitation to tender. In 2010, the service had 8 separate sections with a total of 58 permanent employees. There are 65 on support contracts within the back-to-work scheme and 9 professionals to deliver training.

It is made up of:

- 2 reintegration sites (general household maintenance, Pont Blanc organic gardens),
Employment premises (Etoile du matin – Morning Star – is an operation for residents of Gagny, the Group Autonomy Contract is a service for the Aubervilliers treatment centre with the “Drug and Society” association),

« Lieu-dit » an educational support establishment for disaffected and at-risk young people, to help them reintegrate into society and the world of work,

A support service for 550 people on income support who are considered at risk (this became part of the Insertion Service in 2011),

The « Odyssée » integration project (training centre for young people in need of support),

the « Carré des Biffins » (Scrap merchants’ square, designed to provide a framework for their activities and to support their social integration).

Aurore does not normally carry out research. However, the association has specialist knowledge of the scrap trade after two years’ developing and organising the Carré des Biffins. This is an area with 100 marked and numbered pitches, allowing the dealers to sell their wares totally legally. It runs all year round on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays from 7.30am to 5.30pm, under the ring road flyover on the avenue de la Porte de Montmartre in the 18th district of Paris. Currently, 230 dealers (of whom 180 are members) are enjoying the facility. A team of 5 is on site, on a shift system, over the three days to carry out the following tasks:

Organisation of the Carré des Biffins: reception of dealers, pitch allocation, sales procedures,

Staffing of a bus parked nearby: this is a reception and information centre as well as a meeting place where dealers can chat over a coffee,

Personal social support for any dealers with problems of housing, health, legal issues, training or work hampering their better social and professional integration.

In 2010, 80 people received regular social support. 22 of them are now active job-seekers. Guidance towards various emergency
services has seen 120 individuals have their primary needs addressed. It is, therefore, on account of its proven expertise in the management of the Carré des Biffins and the social support given to the scrap merchants that AURORE wishes to respond to this invitation to tender.

A MULTI-PROFESSIONAL TEAM

Having neither a dedicated research service nor a researcher on the staff, AURORE has put together an *ad hoc* team with researchers taken on for the duration of the project. This team can therefore claim to combine legitimacy and the skills demonstrated both in the management of the dealers and in research.

First a project manager was appointed. A specialist social worker and doctor of anthropology, he is employed by BUC Ressources, a social work training centre in the department of Yvelines. This establishment has in internal research laboratory, CERA (Applied Study and Research Centre). Since 2009, it has been part of the movement already mentioned which aims to develop a research capacity under a coordinator, able to take this responsibility in the long term. He will have relevant qualifications (doctorate generally), experience and duties (full-time in the best-case scenario). CERA is a member of the PREFAS scientific committee in Ile-de-France and is participating in the development of social work research within institutions. It is a member of the editorial committee of the revue Sociographe, of the scientific committee of AIFRIS and of UROPSS, of the Social Solidarity Committee of the Paris City Hall – and so on. CERA aims to offer concrete research for social work professionals on the ground, as a subject of study and/or a scientific operator. In second place, the team has a cartographer, a geographer and an anthropologist. Finally, AURORE’s Insertion Service team is on board as a committee of technical overseers. Its Director, Assistant Director, the Manager of the Carré des Biffins and the Head of R&D are also involved in these two studies.
In this context, we shall assess the required and actual skills and competence of the three major players: the Director of AURORE’s Integration Service, who carries overall responsibility for the project, the Manager of the Carré des Biffins, in her capacity as technical expert on the subject of scrap merchants and the Research Project Manager, as overall technical coordinator.

FROM PRESCRIBED SKILLS AND COMPETENCE TO THOSE ACTUALLY USED

MANAGEMENT

Skills and competence set down in the competence referential:
The skills required to act as director of a social intervention establishment or service (CAFDES) are listed under 4 headings.

DC 1 : Development and strategic execution of a project to set up an establishment or service

1.1. Develop a project for an establishment or service in accordance with the plan of the managing legal entity and with the needs and expectations of users
1.2. Organise the external communications strategy
1.3. Initiate and organise partnerships
1.4. Guide and set up the project for an establishment or service and act as guarantor
1.5. Ensure the rights and freedom of users
1.6. Assess the issues at stake in the project in terms of risk and responsibility
1.7. Evaluate the project and develop the quality of services offered

DC 2 : Management of human resources

2.1. Set up an HR management system

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8 Executive decision of 5 June 2007, with regard to the Certificat d’Aptitude aux Fonctions de Directeur d’Etablissements ou de Services d’intervention sociale.
2.2. Assess and support future needs in terms of jobs and skills required
2.3. See to the good management of human resources
2.4. Develop and set up an internal communications policy

dc 3: Economic, financial and logistical management of an establishment or service

3.1. Develop and put into operation the budget for the establishment or service
3.2. Plan and oversee multi-annual budgeting and financing
3.3. Manage logistics and property interests
3.4. Carry out a risk prevention and management policy

dc 4: Expertise in social and health services in a region

4.1. Analyse the environment and its workers
4.2. Bring technical expertise to bear on a health or social problem as it affects a given category of the population in a given region

Skills and competence actually used in the context of social work research

Skills and competence required for CAFDES accentuate technical mastery of organisational management tools rather than detailed knowledge of a target public, against the reality of their daily life and living conditions. Looking closer, the area of competence first addressed is to « bring technical expertise to bear on a health or social problem as it affects a given category of the population in a given region » (DC4, 4.2). This technical expertise is a given in terms of close cartographical and sociological acquaintance with the scrap trade and its dealers in Ile-de-France. In order to set up this research, internal and external skills were needed. They facilitated the identification of collaboration opportunities, notably to maintain links with researchers. Also necessary was the ability to manage a
mixed team of professionals and researchers. Five other skills were especially vital: external communications, partnership, development of the service project allied with the new research skill, risk assessment for a service not a priori suited to these practices and organising the department’s work to take account of new demands.

CORRELATION OF THE PRESCRIBED AND THE ACTUAL

Above and beyond the tasks set down in the referential and their relation to actual work, some skills called into play are not identifiable according to CAFDES criteria. They are more complex in their function since they have to do with knowledge and culture, as well as specific psychological skills. On this last point, it is primarily a question of reactivity and this is probably the most testing. It needs a virtually permanent close watch via IT and management on public contracts and tenders in our sector of integration, notably the scrap trade. It also requires the capacity to respond, taking account of competition with research laboratories. Then it is essential to be constantly on the alert in the course of the project, in order to respond as fast as possible to the needs of the various researchers on the ground. The ability to respond to invitations to tender for research demands intellectual and compositional skills to offer – at short notice – a relevant and coherent research proposal, based on strictly apt ideas and definition of terms. Throughout the process, it is vital to be available remotely (phone, email). This collective and individual availability creates considerable pressure and requires psychological skill to balance work time and personal time.

We suggest that, for the director, setting up a research project involves going beyond abilities in a given context and showing that carrying out the task depends fundamentally on its shape and quality of legitimacy. The collaboration between researchers and workers reflects the way the director conceives the project: as a « man of reason » whose knowledge is authentic and based on practical experience, rather than as a « technical manager » of a plan.
SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL EXPERTISE

Skills prescribed by the competence referential:

The skills required for the posts of training supervisor and head of a unit of social intervention (CAFERUIS) are set out in six sections.9

DC 1: Conception and guidance of projects for a unit or a service within the institutional framework

1.1 Devise and set up a project or a unit.
1.2 Take part in the development of individual or group projects and supervise their running.

DC 2: Technical expertise

2.1 Be able to put into perspective the foundations and general trends in social policies and French and European political, legal and administrative organisation.

2.2 Develop an expertise in the sector based on general knowledge: plans of action, management methods and financing.

2.3 Be able to give technical support to workers in terms of professional culture and practice and in case of any ethical or deontological problems.

2.4 Be able to assess the needs of different groups based on methods of diagnosis appropriate to the relevant area, the field or the nature of the group.

DC 3: Team management

3.1 Lead, manage, mobilise and motivate a team within an organisation.

3.2 Organise and coordinate effective responses.

3.3 Develop individual and group skills and competence.

DC 4: Organisation of work, administrative and financial management of a unit or a service

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9 Executive decision of 8 June 2004 relating to the certificat d’aptitude aux fonctions d’encadrement et de responsable d’unité d’intervention sociale.
4.1 Supervise the organisation of work and the administration of the unit or service.

4.2 Develop, present and manage the budget of a unit or service.

DC 5 (transversal): Communication, interface and management of partnerships

5.1 Ensure effective internal communication, upwards and downwards, as well as the circulation of information, including that for the benefit of users.

5.2 Propose, negotiate and take decisions.

5.3 Develop partnerships and networks.

DC 6 (transversal): Qualitative evaluation and development

6.1 Evaluate the project, its organisation, its running, its results, the services offered and the action of workers in the unit or service.

6.2 Maintain and develop the quality of services delivered.

ACTUAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCE USED IN RESEARCH INTO SOCIAL WORK

Over the last two years, my work with scrap merchants on the ground has given me detailed knowledge of their living conditions, the organisation of their work and the political issues surrounding this trade. I was a member of the supervisory committee of the study as an individual with insight into the problem. I helped to define the subject of study: the scrap trade. I contributed to the text setting out our research ethics. I supplied the researchers with a list of all the collaborators with whom I work at the Carré, whether institutions, private organisations or charitable associations. I made available all the studies on scrap dealers, by students or researchers, which I have been collecting for two years. I helped to report to the commissioners of the study on its progress. I have noted and understood how scientific research differs from a report written at the request of politicians, in terms both of the issues at stake and of working practices.
I enlisted the help of social workers on the ground to facilitate the work of two researchers on the Carré des Biffins, the geographer and the sociologist. We shared with them our knowledge and experience in managing the dealers. For the qualitative part of the study (interviews) the sociologist wished to operate by a system of concentric circles, starting with the Carré. We therefore introduced him to some dealers on the site so that a feeling of confidence could be rapidly established and he could easily make contact with the community. The social worker responsible for the social and professional integration of the Carré team took the researcher to visit other scrap dealing sites, her easy relationship with the dealers smoothing his way.

**CORRELATION BETWEEN THE PRESCRIBED AND THE ACTUAL**

My collaboration on this study allowed me to use the various skills and competence acquired during my experience at the Carré and also required in my duties as middle manager in the socio-educational field. My knowledge of the legal and political framework surrounding the problem of the scrap merchants, my familiarity with the people we were dealing with and motivation of the team on the ground, the awareness of the dealers of the study being carried out and my involvement in a close partnership network were all useful skills I brought to bear on the study.

On the other hand, the specific framework of the study allowed me to identify deficiencies in what was expected of my duties in the work I do at the Carré. The Carré des Biffins is an experimental and innovative project. For our commissioner, its experimental nature was seen far more as a trial whose objective was not a deeper knowledge and understanding but rather a response to a political demand. In other words, this experiment needed to work and to be effective. This contradiction put me under great pressure as I needed both to study the situation and produce results.

My experience of the research activity was as a breathing space apart from issues of hierarchy and professional obligations. I used it to
create a distance for myself and come to an understanding of the tensions inherent in the Carré. In this period, I was able freely to question the notions of experimentation and innovation. Further, the joint effort of acquiring knowledge during this study of the scrap dealers in Ile-de-France awakened a real need to understand and analyse the Carré experiment in terms of professional skills and meaning. Through the good collaboration between researchers and social workers, the study allowed us to discuss the other subject – the Carré itself – and thus restore some legitimacy to the experimental nature of the action.

During this process, it became clear that a written analysis of this two-year exercise was vital. We therefore had to persuade our association of the ethical and professional value of this analysis. It is now recognised by the institution as a necessary step in the continuation of our work at the Carré. I consider this sort of collaboration between researchers and social workers to be of great value in imagining, developing and describing new skills and working practices at the heart of areas of profound social change. So I see my participation in the study in terms of a collaboration in a sharing of knowledge and skills, both in content and in a working framework.

COORDINATION

Skills prescribed by the competence referential:

The skills and competence required to carry out the duties of social work engineer (DEIS) are set down in three categories\(^{10}\).

DC1 : Production of knowledge

1.1 Undertake analyses within a context of complex social problems applied to a social issue, an area, an organisation

1.2 Develop observation and social monitoring procedures

1.3 Guide study and research

\(^{10}\) Executive decision of 2 August 2006 concerning the diplôme d’État d’ingénierie sociale.
DC2 : Project development and leadership

2.1 Guide prospective analyses
2.2 Develop a system of projects or programmes
2.3 Set up methods of evaluation

DC3 (transversal) : Communication and human resources

3.1 Evaluate and put in place the resources necessary to lead a project, provoke change and encourage the transmission of professional knowledge
3.2 Promote training initiatives to develop individual and group skills and competence
3.3 Coordinate, lead and supervise working groups
3.4 Provide communication and information channels to enhance efficiency and the sharing of knowledge

SKILLS AND COMPETENCE ACTUALLY USED IN RESEARCH INTO SOCIAL WORK

My function as project head led me to take charge of the overall coordination of the research and of all those involved (commissioner, operator and researchers). I ran the steering and monitoring committee before (agenda), during (as chairman) and afterwards (minutes). Over and above the transmission of information, I was also guarantor of the scientific coherence of the project. I thus drew up the initial statement of ethics, the definition of the subject, the method of procedure, evaluations at intervals, progress reports to the commissioner and the operator and the final version of the reports submitted. In this way, my function required general competence in research methodology, communication and coordination. Above all, given the political nature of the commissioner, managing this project involved constant adaptation of the process of recording knowledge acquired at the behest of the region, which put us under a lot of pressure to produce the desired results. These would allow investment decisions, already voted in, to be taken organise the scrap trade outside Paris.
CORRELATION OF THE PRESCRIBED AND THE ACTUAL

Generally speaking, the skills used correspond fairly closely to those set down for the DEIS. This is logical insofar as this function is very much on the research side, in its setting up in a group framework and even in its coordination. However, this research has the specific quality of being undertaken within a major territorial community involving political issues and a partisan viewpoint. In this situation, the role of the project manager is to deal with scientific matters, certainly, but these are affected by political issues. It is therefore necessary to analyse demands, issues at stake and the means of taking into account certain needs in order to respond without losing sight of scientific principles. The other major issue with this type of research is that it cannot be published as the researcher would wish, since the commissioner expects confidentiality. Electoral considerations are so important that any desire to make our results part of general scientific discussion is impossible at the moment. These issues put the question of the engineer’s legitimacy with regard to commissioners likely to represent weighty authorities. In that sense, the status of doctor could facilitate negotiations over the subject of study between scientific principles and the pressures of the commission.

ISSUES CONCERNING DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH FUNCTIONS WITHIN SOCIAL ACTION

COMPETENCE, QUALIFICATIONS AND REFERENCE CRITERIA

From 1985, the notion of skill and competence has been seen as a way out of a fixed and conventional approach to working situations, notably linked to the old idea of qualifications. Nowadays competence is considered to have five features: it is separate from the post, focussed on the subject, includes know-how, operates in a context, has momentum and is based on negotiation. In this ap-

proach, professional competence is at the dimension of the employee who uses it, in a particular situation and constantly adapting to the constraints of that situation. Qualifications, on the other hand, are linked to the capabilities necessary to hold a post or do a job. Between the two, classification tables allow various professional functions to be arranged on a rising scale. Salary levels are appropriate to the position in the hierarchy and the system is based on agreement between parties. This process has a central place in group working relations:« In the French system of working relationships, these scales are an integral part of negotiated agreements. They have been worked out at branch level to establish a legitimate hierarchy of jobs and salaries. To this extent, they are rooted in branch history and culture and thus constitute the pivot of branch professional identity. Their legitimacy comes from the fact that they have been negotiated and therefore express a compromise accepted by all involved. » The advent of competence referentials within diplomas is an attempt to synthesise the body of elements which make up the social construct of a competent and qualified professional. This approach therefore is the synthesis of a double contradictory movement, a « process of instrumental rationalisation » linked with an « impetus towards individualisation » The process of establishing referential criteria of competence in professional training began in the 1980s, at the instigation of François Mitterrand, then president of the Republic. From March 1989, the education system organised a huge consultation process, based on 850000 questionnaires. 28 conferences took place, involving some 13

000 people. In parallel, a National Curriculum Council was formed (CNP), removing that responsibility from the Inspectorate. In 1992, the curriculum charter was officially published in the Journal Officiel. It laid down a series of requirements: interdisciplinarity, competence and contractual elements. In this new context, the curriculum is less an end in itself than a guide to attain desired objectives, in this case the acquisition of skills. This objective revolutionised the act of teaching insofar as it involved a change in evaluation. In fact, evaluating a skill involves measuring the instrumental function of the teaching, in contrast with the old approach aiming at a cultural function. In other words, considered from the point of view of competence, training is seen as an operational end, whereas our tradition favoured qualifications, aiming to educate the mind regardless of any practical application.

The movement from cultural to instrumental training puts the professional approach back at the heart of training thinking, historically undervalued in France. In this sense, referential criteria of competence allow the development of practical training programmes, appropriate to vocational qualifications. However, there are a number of risks in the process, notably that of a liberal management ideology. Here two approaches are possible. The first aims at efficiency, ie the most cost-effective method. This is a liberal approach. The second aims at effectiveness, ie the closest match between the stated aims of the action and its results. This is an evaluative approach. If cost-effectiveness is easy to define, effectiveness, by contrast, involves a precise, collectively agreed and established definition of the aims of the action. As far as social work is concerned, this process is extremely hard, given the elusive nature of the end product of the profession. In

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this sense a scientific approach is essential to ensure the collective formal expression of the end product. This will allow evaluation outside the simplistic perspective of cost-effectiveness. To do this, social work needs to develop research skills and competence. As this article attempts to demonstrate, referentials of competence form a basis for mediation in order to carry out a strict evaluation of the means recognised as pertaining to social workers.

RESEARCH AS A TRIGGER FOR INNOVATION

Setting up this research allowed not only scientific progress on the scrap dealing question from the outside, but also from the inside made progress possible on the Carré des Biffins project given the support for its innovative nature. Hence we can claim that research into a project provokes and stimulates innovation in social action. Innovation is synonymous with development in that it recombines elements in a new way. In that sense, innovation is synonymous with « the development of different, alternative working practices, new approaches, experimentation with new and innovative schemes, etc »17. In this sense, innovation is distinct from invention in the strict sense of the term. However, there are various levels of innovation, going from an important development to a complete break. In both cases, innovators are generally perceived as a kind of deviant proclaiming their difference18. (Moscovici, 1979). The strength of the rejection faced by an innovator is in proportion to the effect the change he proposes will have on the environment in which he is acting. All too often, innovation is just a prestigious label, justifying an ideological position which one wishes to protect from objective examination. This trend has been so powerful that the scientific nature of the concept has long been treated with caution19. In the field of social action,

innovations are changes of an « experimental » et « transferential » nature which « allow the freedom to divert from usual practice and build alternative working methods ». Finally, these processes need to be viewed long-term, since they aim to modify not only professional practices and values but also the systems of representation proper to members of the organisation. Recent research has shown that innovations respond to the following indicators: ability to favour development of the professional context (historical, legislative, sociological, economic, professional), key figures who can take responsibility for the changes wrought by the innovation they wish to bring in, figures both inside and outside the relevant sectors seen as having proven legitimacy, conflict in the field or with its usual collaborators, belonging to a dissident movement, the involvement of volunteers, problems defining institutional references and the demand for new practices.

The experiment at the Carré des Biffins has certain characteristics of social innovation. In effect, if running a market is nothing out of the ordinary, it is the process of building the project and the relevance of its links to the background which makes it innovative. Its construction and results are the fruits of a two-year experiment carried out by professional social workers. To justify the term innovative, we owe it to ourselves to study and analyse the material gathered. To this end, we need to build ourselves an opportunity to theorise about professional social work practices.

Setting up the Carré was the result of desires and interests, common and divergent, among the dealers themselves, local residents, elected representatives, associations, etc. Amid all these tensions we responded to the project. It was a collaborative venture around a very sensitive topic and our experiment took place against this background. We needed to respond to different groups who each

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have their own definition of the Carré and strongly felt expectations of this « innovative » process. Also, in the course of these two years, many researchers and students have taken an interest. We have responded to many surveys and studies with the idea that this project would work thanks also to the interest generated in the scientific community. So we have seen social science, political science and sociology students, an anthropologist, a town planner, social work professionals and many social sector publications take an interest and write about our project. However, the team has gradually suffered a sense of loss of direction and a professional staleness.

Our experiment has turned out to be a sort of raw material, fashioned by various people according to their own wishes. For researchers and students, the fact that theirs was an external approach did not satisfy our need for formal expression from the inside. For two years, we were a subject of study while also being the prime movers in the project. We had not capitalised on the knowledge intrinsic to our undertaking. The material gathered over two years needed to be transformed into knowledge. Our involvement in a research project (the study of the scrap trade in Ile-de-France) allowed us to begin the process which now leads us to write the analysis of our experiment. If drawing theory from an experiment is essential to stimulate innovation and produce knowledge, how would it have been possible to capitalise on these two years if Aurore had not collaborated in a research project, even though it pursued a different aim?

It is worthy of note that setting up an internal research project triggered a significant thought process firmly anchored in practice. This process was initially applied to the project which needed a theory to be constructed, according to the fact that « technical innovation often goes hand in hand with organisational changes expressed in decentralisation of responsibilities, destratification of functions and increasing polyvalency, usually requiring additional qualifications ». Thus it seems that research into social work also triggers expertise in social action as the theory of practice continues to be developed.

RESEARCH AS A METHOD OF IDENTITARY NEGOTIATION BETWEEN COMPETENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

The role of director in the social and medico-social sector can be viewed according to the criteria set down in the CAFDES referential. As we have seen, we are aware of the discussion surrounding the notion of competence, within and without the social work sphere. Many criticisms point out the growing use of the term along with other liberal-sounding ones such as partnership, contract, evaluation. To support their opinion, teachers and social workers see a tension between the ideas of competence and qualification. The first concerns new initiatives close to circumstances on the ground, whereas the second simply repeats past definitions and depends on established positions.

This debate can be illustrated by two hierarchies which, in the course of research into the scrap trade, compromised on the skills prescribed by the referentials defining their institutional functions (CAFDES and CAFERUIS). We suggest that these transactions between prescribed and actual skills are the product of a definition of identity, where each is caught between the identity conferred by an institution and its own social and biographical trajectory. These two entities therefore need to define themselves more or less according to professional referentials setting out what they should become in a work context.

Sociological identity theory according to Claude Dubar, with its two central ideas of identity for others and identity for oneself therefore seems relevant as it is characterised by the Freudian split of division of the self as the prime manifestation of identity. This consistency

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23 On this new terminology inspired by business, in social work Chauvière Michel, Too much management kills social work, La Découverte, 2007, especially chapter 3.


25 Many respected names have attempted to get past this obstacle by setting out mechanisms to oppose the process of affirming identity from the inside: Goffman, P. Ricoeur and C. Dubar.
sought by individuals, in the event the two Aurore managers, is thus part of transactions between themselves and others. *Identity for oneself* is constructed by «acts of belonging» which express what type of person you *want to be* whereas *identity for others* is produced by «acts of attribution» which aim to define the type of person *you are*. In effect, there is a possible conflict of identity between that given by systems of action and the balance of power derived from them on the one hand and, on the other, an active interiorisation as individuals incorporate their own identity.

For example, when the CAFDES referential is described as « accentuating technical mastery of tools of organisational management over an extensive knowledge of communities benefiting», we can see that they do not wish to be dubbed *technical manager*, subject to a tutelary system often perceived to be atrophied and domineering. This does not seem to fit with the idea this figure has of itself. The fact of responding to a public contract, competing with research laboratories, relates probably to to a wish to claim an identity as a researcher; even if it is a question of *playing* researcher rather than *being* a researcher.

The manager of the Carré des Biffins speaks of the need for a written analysis of these two years of innovation. From the start, she has asked for *time to write and to think*. Writing and analysis would therefore come from an identity strategy to counter a too pragmatic *identity for others* which would reduce this former social worker to the rank of sub-contractor to a public contract. So we suggest that the professional identity of executives within the hierarchy who have taken part in this research is not based only on the interaction between prescribed skills and actual skills, but also on that between skills and qualifications. It is perhaps not fortuitous that the DEIS training, taken as a prescriptive reference by the researcher, is one

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of the qualifications of the director (to be precise, the DSTS which preceded the DEIS) and is the qualification that the Carré des Biffins manager is currently working towards.

CONCLUSION

Development in social work research is making real progress in France, within the framework of a shared approach to the generation of knowledge between researchers and social work professionals. AURORE’s setting up of a research project dealing with scrap dealers in the Ile-de-France is a perfect example. Aurore has put itself outside its normal sphere of competence and CERA has established a partnership with social work professionals which is also unusual. This experiment allows the assessment in situ of certain issues involved in the process of setting up research into social work. This research is examining skills and competence called into play as well as social work’s ability to innovate. It is also, finally, questioning the identity of the professionals involved. The referential criteria of supervisory bodies (CAFERUIS, CAFDES and DEIS) allow prescribed professional skills to be seen in perspective. The advent of research into social work will see these left behind as reality takes over. If DEIS seems clearly more adapted to the production of knowledge, research also needs to be conducted by middle management and directors. That is the only way to strengthen the expression of intrinsic knowledge. So, the development of a supervisory framework is essential if social science research is to coincide with the reality on the ground and the function of social workers. Therefore it is crucial that the hierarchy move towards development and innovation and away from existing management requirements. Qualifications nowadays are based on referentials measuring the necessary compromise between requirements and conditions on the ground.

Social work research therefore depends on its ability to establish a participatory process at the very heart of the aims and methods of social action services and institutions, involving all those who have a role to play. Otherwise the knowledge acquired would certainly be endogenous from an institutional point of view, but not intrinsic.
In other words, the research undertaken would not feed from within professionals in social intervention. As our submission has shown, social work research is a trigger for innovation, above and beyond current practice. It also gives action a direction by closely combining theory and practice. In other words, research into social work is likely to put social workers at the heart of the production of knowledge that their work generates. Hence a sort of empowerment is applied to the professional know-how of social workers.

Résumé
LA RECHERCHE EN TRAVAIL SOCIAL : UNE DÉMARCHE PARTICIPATIVE AU PRISME DES RÉFÉRENTIELS DE COMPÉTENCES. L’EXEMPLE D’UNE ÉTUDE SUR LES BIFFINS EN ÎLE-DE-FRANCE

La mise en œuvre d’une recherche concernant les biffins en Ile-de-France, pour la région, l’association AURORA a dépassé son cœur de métiers, lié à l’action sociale à visée intégrative. Cette expérience permet de mesurer les compétences mises en œuvre des professionnels qui l’ont encadré. En utilisant les référentiels de compétences des qualifications des métiers de l’encadrement du travail social (CAFERUIS, CAFDES et DEIS), notre propos consiste à mesurer quelle est la compétence aujourd’hui du travail social à encadrer le développement de la recherche en travail social en France. En fonction de l’amplitude entre le prescrit et le réel, il est alors possible de dégager quelques enjeux en matière de compétences, d’innovation et d’identité professionnelle.

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**Synopsis**

Setting up a research project on the scrap trade in Ile-de-France, for the region, the association AURORE went beyond its usual remit, linked to social action with an aim to integration. This experiment allows an assessment of the skills of the social workers as applied to this process of shared research. Using referentials of competence of the professional social work qualifications (CAFERUIS, CAFDES and DEIS), our submission consists of assessing how far social work is capable of conducting the development of social work research in France. Given the gap between what is set down and what happens in the field, it is possible to identify issues of skills and competence, innovation and professional identity.