

Renke Fahl & Morus Markard

The Project

“Analysis of Psychological Practice”

or:

An Attempt at Connecting Psychology Critique and Practice Research¹

Summary:

Using interviews and group discussions, researchers and students from the Free University of Berlin and psychological practitioners work together in a project called ‘The Analysis of Psychological Practice’, theoretically based on ‘Critical Psychology’². The aim is to find out whether and how practitioners deal with the contradiction between the experimental-statistical orientation of traditional academic psychology and the single-case-orientation of psychological practice. Can practitioners relate to ‘scientific’ psychology at

all? How do they deal with the contradiction that psychological practitioners are expected to cure psychological problems without having the possibility to change the objective conditions with reference to which alone psychological problems are understandable? How are ‘official’ academic or clinical theories and individual or team-related experiences combined? What can we learn from the explication and development of a ‘social-subjective knowledge of the context and contradictions’ of professional practitioners of psychology? We discuss theoretical foundations and problems in the empirical development of the project, and present – from our workshop – three examples or dimensions of our work: life problems and their transformation into psychological research problems, problems of and alternatives to traditional diagnostics, and common sense normative ideas in the guise of psychological theories.

¹ The text was originally written in 1994 for a publication following a conference on *Action Health Research*, organized by the Danish *Health, Humanity and Culture* group in Skagen, Denmark, 1992. When that publication was finally cancelled, we managed to persuade the authors to allow us to print the paper in the *Outlines* (ed.)

² Critical Psychology is translated from the German ‘Kritische Psychologie’. The capital letters are used here to signify precisely the branch of critical psychology that developed from the 70’s and on in and around Psychologisches Institut, Free University of Berlin. This follows the German use of a capital K, in contrast to the wider range of critical psychologies represented as ‘kritische psychologie’. In the following, this same tradition of Critical Psychology is also sometimes referred to as “subject-science” (German: Subjektwissenschaft).

I. The Project “Analysis of Psychological Practice” and the Basic Assumptions of the Work

The Project “Analysis of Psychological Practice” (PAPP) in which academics and nonacademic practitioners (and in certain cases student interns) work together was founded at the Psychologisches Institut of

the FU-Berlin in 1990. The project's goal is to define and determine the problems and contradictions of psychological activity with which practitioners must deal and to develop action possibilities.

The PAPP, its approach and research problem are based on the "Theorie - Praxis Konferenz" (TPK; cf. Dreier 1989). The practical occasion of this conference was the following. Practitioners complained that no articles dealing with practice were published in the journal "Forum Kritische Psychologie". The editorial board countered that this was not because they did not want to print such articles but because none were being submitted. A fact that should be dealt with jointly. The TPK developed out of this first meeting of members of the editorial board and participants from universities and practice-oriented organizations or institutions. In accordance with the occasion of its founding, the discussions dealt with the difficulties of discussing and/or writing about psychological practice or psychology-related practice. It soon became clear that these difficulties were in no way due to individual inabilities of the practitioners. They were, rather, a product of the gap between academic psychology and professional psychological practice, and, especially since the latter up until now has not been sufficiently defined scientifically, there is a lack of a related presentation and discussion culture. Thus the goal could not just be the development of *presentation forms* for psychological practice. Instead, it became necessary to analyze *practice and practice theories themselves*. Here the question was how the *mediation* of practice problems can be experienced and made comprehensible while taking into account both institutional circumstances and the theoretical status of the discipline of psychology - rather than attributing the problems immediately to a lack of individual competence or blaming them

on the practitioner's [lack of] experience, thus neglecting this mediation.

Our project, PAPP, explores these questions in the theoretical tradition of the TPK, and attempts, in a sense, to intensify the cooperation between theoreticians and practitioners. This is impossible in the TPK due to the very fact that the participants come from different cities and countries.

These definitions of the research problems of the TPK and PAPP are based on certain assumptions developed in *Kritische Psychologie* regarding the functions, possibilities and/or knowledge limits of existing psychology, as well as assumptions regarding the relationship between theory and practice in this discipline. Since some acquaintance with these assumptions is necessary to understand our work, we shall present them in the following³.

The *first assumption* relevant to a presentation of the project work is that a fundamental problem in the analysis and presentation of psychological practice is the neglect of the working conditions and their importance for the action possibilities and subjective sensibilities of the practitioner. Thus, as suggested by traditional psychological concepts, the conditions for or possibilities of acting and the subjective sensibilities of the practitioner are "torn asunder". The result is that the daily problems, fears, and disappointments, cannot be analyzed with regard to their mediation or reflection of the working conditions, and thus (!) the possibi-

³ Even where the individual ideas or concepts change with the research practice, these changes are conveyed with the assumptions underlying this research practice (and as changes understandable only with reference to these assumptions). Here we cannot deal further with the problems of which different levels of theoretical assumptions must be taken into account and which assumptions can be achieved with empirical research and which cannot (cf. here Holzkamp 1983, 23 ff. and 510 ff.; Markard 1988, 1991 b).

lities for change cannot be analyzed either. Instead, the causes must be sought in personal insufficiency. In our opinion, this belongs to the (dynamic) problems which lie hidden behind the difficulties of a presentation of psychological practice. If one shares our assumption that any type of practice is significantly structured by the institutional possibilities and limitations for acting, and that the demands and expectations of the practitioners on their practice are confronted with these same possibilities and limitations, then it will also be understandable that our project is not just dealing with a therapeutic self-mirroring of psychologists. Instead, our primary concern is the connection between individual and institutional reproduction.

The *second general assumption* of our work is related to the fact that the questions of psychological practice, and thus questions of the individual psychological competence, have to be related to the discipline of psychology. What is remarkable about this in a psychological project? We emphasize this relation because the gap mentioned between academic psychology and professional psychological practice certainly makes it easy for one to simply ignore academic psychology as irrelevant for professional practice. But in as far as professional psychological practice and competence conceives of itself as really *psychological*, then it is inevitably referred back to the discipline of "psychology". This also means, however, that the quality of professional practice must have something to do with the state of knowledge and development of the discipline. Psychology as a discipline and psychology as a professional practice both refer to human subjectivity and problems related to human ways of living. Therefore, possibilities and limits to the knowledge of both are of importance to psychologists *and* clients.

Here, one could object that the gap between academic psychology and professional psychological practice makes such contextual references practically impossible. However, this would simply say that, from the standpoint of psychological practice, *academic* psychology contributes little or nothing to the solution of practical problems. This, however, could not justify the claim that one, in dealing with psychological problems in professional practice, has no need *whatsoever* for psychology, conceived as a system of epistemology and knowledge. An essential reference point for psychological thought is, in a broader sense of the word, of course, people's problems; and psychology as a discipline, i.e., as a system of epistemology and knowledge, would be, seen in this way, the theoretical and methodological systemization of psychological thought. That is, of the thinking about subjectivity and related problems and possibilities in capitalist society. Problems of human subjectivity are older than scientific and professional psychology and they exist independently of these disciplines. But in as far as one deals with these problems in a *scientific* manner, then one must today inevitably maneuver on psychological terrain. Here the problem is how far does one succeed in clearly defining and methodologically grasping the developing questions. If *existing* academic psychology and existing professional psychological practice can only be brought together with difficulty, then this "only" says that just this type of psychology needs to be criticized and *developed*, so that the relation will become possible such that the requirements of practice are met in a scientifically demonstrable manner. In general, this means that the state of knowledge and methodology of professional psychological practice and the state of knowledge and methodology of the different schools in the "discipline" psychology can be related

to one another, and that from this a practical, relevant scientific psychology, as well as a scientifically based professional psychological practice, can be developed.

II. *The Connection between the Competence of the Psychologist and the Relevance of Psychology*

Obviously, both of the assumptions above aim at relating the problem of the professional practical *competence of the psychologist* to the practical *relevance of psychology*. The question of the relevance of psychology was, of course, an essential element of the psychology critique of the students movement, which also assumed that there was a gap between academic research and psychological practice. This critique of psychology in the first instance opposed the incorporation of psychology into social repression, selection and pacification strategies. By the way, it was, above all, the students who advanced this discussion. The opinions represented then were quite varied. They are still interesting for us and our context, especially today, when the psycho-boom threatens to drown out even the *question* of the relevance of psychology.

One of the opinions represented here, articulated at the "Congress of Critical and Oppositional Psychologists" was that: "psychology was and always will be an instrument of the ruling class. It is thus only usable as knowledge of the ruling system." A contrary position was clearly formulated at a conference of psychology students in 1968: "We are presumptuous enough to assign psychologists an important position in society.... The knowledge that human behavior is based on specific natural laws makes it possible for psychologists to show how society must be changed in order to ensure

that its members have optimal possibilities for self-realization. It enables psychologists on the other hand to change individuals in such a manner that even in a repressed society they are able to liberate themselves from social constraints and thus liberate society."

"It seemed very simple", commented Peter Mattes (1989) in whose lecture these quotes were given, "psychologists are transformed from 'mercenaries of unfreedom' to partisans of freedom."

However, *neither* conception calls psychology as a *subject* or as a branch of knowledge into question. One position presented here sees psychology as a value-free instrument that changes its character with its users. Thus, *psychology* itself *need not* be changed in order to improve practice. The other position represents the opposite opinion where psychology *cannot* be changed because it is per se repressive.

III. *The Critique of Personalizing Thinking as a Prerequisite of Subject-scientific Research*

We want to once again relate these considerations to the question of the relevance of psychology. The first position (psychology as pure ruling science) means that in terms of social or individual emancipation psychology cannot be relevant. The second position never poses the question of relevance or irrelevance. According to this view, psychology is per se an unproblematic science since its meaning and function are solely determined by its application which is, in turn, determined by the actions of the *psychologist*. This, however, *transforms the problem of the social relevance of psychology into a question of the individual competence* of psychologists, and of the practitioner's ac-

tions. In other words: *the question of relevance is personalized*⁴. This should be emphasized in our research context because the problem of the *personalization of social circumstances* belongs to the fundamental insights of any critical psychology and thus to the theoretical *presuppositions* of our project. In our opinion, the problems associated with the personalization of the relevance question are aggravated when the actions, knowledge and intentions of the psychologists are forced into the background, and, as is increasingly the case, their person or personality is placed in the foreground. Since this mode of thinking is very common, (critical) psychological practice research also has to deal with it as a *special case* of personalizing thinking.

⁴ This type of personalizing conception of competence is – among other things – expressed in references to psychological “expertise”. This is fragile because these references must disregard the problems of the *discipline* to which, in the end, it must be related (cf. the examples in Markard 1991 a). As a result, such references to expertise are defensive and they cannot fundamentally eliminate doubts about the utility of psychology (cf. Holzkamp 1988). This is especially pertinent when one thinks of the functional critique which views psychology only in repressive functions. But are there not actually factors that speak for the functional critique? For example, does not traditional personality psychology aim at classifying people and sorting them according to social desirabilities? Or is the intelligence diagnostics not a means of selecting school children? Is not therapy often a, from the victims self-paid, adaptation to the real, capitalist, elbow mentality in the guise of self-realization under, as such, *accepted* inhumane living conditions, “to find oneself” and lose or give up the rest of the world? Since such question are by no means obsolete, the transition from critique of psychology to Critical Psychology includes *considering the contents and function of psychology together* and to develop concepts of the contents which run counter to the criticized function of psychology. *Relating problems of professional psychological practice to the discipline “psychology” also means, in this context, not loosing sight of questions regarding the connection between contents and function in practice research.*

When, in the following, we deal with personalizing thinking, then we also wish to attempt to concretize the general importance of psychology critique for practice research. In general, personalization means to *abstract* from the life circumstances of the person such that social *limitations are reinterpreted into subjective limitations*. What makes this way of thinking, where people are blamed for their own limitations, so tenacious and long-lived, is that the abstraction from particular life circumstances *appears in the guise of “hard” concreteness*. “I” am the one who cannot remember the vocabulary words, “you” are the one who does not comprehend the rule of three, “he” is the one who has difficulty concentrating. However with a bit keener view it becomes clear that this supposedly unobstructed direct view of people actually *obstructs* one’s view of reality. It does not consider, for example, that for every pupil with “concentration difficulties” whom we meet or hear about there is also a “boring” teacher. But even in considering this *interpersonal* constellation, one does not abandon personalizing thinking, the reinterpretation of social limitations into personal limitations. Here it may serve as a rhetorically attractive retort which inverts the pupil’s difficulties in concentrating into the didactic weakness of the teacher. This, however, would not consider that the teacher possibly is so “boring” because he or she leaves out the “more interesting” questions, blocks spontaneous developments in order to follow an obligatory curriculum, which was, in turn, developed by people under pressure from certain groups which etc., etc. This example shows clearly that *theoretical* efforts are needed to break through what Kosik (1967) called the “pseudo-concreteness” of daily life. The perception of the necessity of “breaking through immediacy” (Holzkamp 1983) is not a theoretical luxury but rather the only means of not be-

ing "tricked" by "common sense" ideas and quotidian ways of thinking.

A characteristic of "common sense" ideas and everyday modes of thinking (and of a psychology which blindly reproduces them) is becoming fixated on the immediate superficialities of the kind described above. Somewhat more generally formulated, this way of thinking can be characterized as a thinking in characteristics or traits which are assigned or attributed to people (intelligent, selfish, creative, productive, congruent with oneself, etc.) and with which they are labeled or they label themselves (sometimes as a result of psychological intervention, cf. Ulmann 1989, 1990). The comprehensive form of the assigning of attributes is the *assignment of "personality"*, with which people are attributed a certain existence or being (an ensemble of traits). The *assigning or attribution of a type of existence* or form of being associated with the assigning/attribution of a personality is extremely abstracting, from reasons and premises of acting, and from the fact that human behavior is not caused by or a product of qualities of being, but rather is "reasoned" on premises (Holzkamp 1983, 342 ff.; 1985). With this we mean the following: in the above analysis of the importance of institutional conditions we mentioned that for the individual there exists a particular life world as the quintessence of material and social reality. The constellation of meanings contained therein represent action possibilities. These action possibilities then become "premises" for the individual, when, in the course of given life problems and the associated emotional burdens, intentions for acting must be developed out of the subjective necessity of finding a solution. Accordingly, premises should be understood as concretized action possibilities seen primarily under the aspect of an improvement of the emotional state of the individual, or his or her vital interests

and the necessity for the individual to be able to decide and act on matters in his or her life starting from these concrete vital interests. The individual can and must behave and make decisions within the given constellations of meaning. The individual must decide how to act according to his or her interests given the existing constellations. This determines whether and how the individual makes something in the existing constellations of meaning into the premises of his or her actions. Premises are thus not simply aspects of constellations of meaning, but rather are chosen from them, based in the actual genesis of interests. Action or behavior become fundamentally comprehensible for the individual and for others from the connection of aims, intentions and interests, in more general terms, of the reasons and the concrete circumstances of life with which we have to deal as premises.

The clarification of the connection between premises and reasons is also one of the central subject science research questions. This research question, considered from the outset to be a conceptual precondition to empirical studies, should call into question the assigning of characteristics and personality in daily life and in a psychology fixated on immediacy. Of course, one cannot deny that traits "exist"; but one must remember that *traits are not explanations* – instead, *they should themselves be explained* (cf. Markard 1984, Ch. 7; 1991a, 145 f.). The same is true for "personality" (as an ensemble of characteristics)⁵. "Personality" is thus, in this perspective, a concept enforcing extreme abstraction, not at all a scientifically defined or unproblematic concept. Its *restrictive* function and/or interpretation con-

⁵ Certainly, there are many situations in which trait and personality assignments are functional, economic and even vitally important. Yet as scientific analyses they are unsuited.

sists of conceiving human beings as controllable and human "behavior" as "predictable" via assignments of forms of being in a *regulatory science*⁶. Typical of the classification of human beings according to traits or characteristics is that the specific elements of inter-subjective understanding between persons are lost. Another element missing is a proper conception of the premises for action and thus of just those life circumstances within which the persons' problems become comprehensible. This should be emphasized because when ignored, life circumstances cannot be the object of attempts at practical changes. They do not appear psychologically relevant. This does not mean, however, that they do not have a real effect. That is exactly the crux of the problem with the type of psychology fundamentally criticized by Critical Psychology. That psychology believes it can cure human suffering by ignoring the life circumstances which alone enable an understanding of this suffering. The only *apparently concrete* psychological view, the preconditions of which naturally include the attributing of traits and personalities, rends asunder the connection between people's problems and their life circumstances. These life circumstances then fall out of the "line of fire". The insight in Critical Psychology, fundamentally opposed to any possible *personalizing thinking*, that people can only change their lives and their subjective situation to the extent that they can change their life circumstances, is then lost. The apparent concreteness is in reality ab-

stract, that is, *personalizing* "pseudo-concreteness" (see above).

IV. The Problem of the Construct of the Psychologist's or Therapist's Personality

What is important for our project is the following consideration: if the critique of personalizing thinking is, in general, indispensable and correct for the analysis of psychology relevant problems, then it cannot be superfluous and false for an analysis of the problems of those who work in psychology-related professions. A Critical-Psychology-perspective on professional psychological practice, thus, cannot operate with the common idea of the "personality" of the psychologist as its central analytical concept, even if this is presently the coin of the realm⁷. Psychology critique (as an aspect of any critical psychology) cannot suspend the criticism of personalizing thinking when it is the basis for comprehending the work of psychologists.

Thus, instead of attributing problems and possibilities of psychological activities to characteristics and personality of those working in psychological practice, the *subject-scientific* practice research faces the task of gaining access to solutions to problems of professional psychological practice via the analysis of the psychologist's premises and reasons for acting. Here, however, one must include in the premises of psychological work, as explained above, not only institutional conditions, goals of the superiors or employers or contractors, etc.,

⁶ Even when one conceives of characteristics or traits or personality not as innate or inherent, but rather, in a modern manner, as "socialized", one does not avoid this "characteristic or personality problem", since, even here, there is no striving for mutual clarification regarding the context and connection between reasons and premises, but rather only the biographical tracing of solidified characteristics or personality which are seen as determining behavior.

⁷ Here we cannot deal with how the concept of the therapist personality as a type of residual category for unclarified therapy effects has developed.

but also the theoretical and intellectual state of the discipline.

The empirical research of a "psychology from the standpoint of the subject" takes into account, in this context, the fact that it is primarily the affected practitioners themselves who analyze the conditions and possibilities of *their* work (see below)⁸. Since if reasons for acting are always in the "first person" (cf. Holzkamp 1988a, 313), then, if in practical research the "mode of the first person" is to be realized, the research questions and theoretical and methodological concepts must also be for the "affected" person.

The reconstruction and realization of true life action possibilities being the goal of the subject-scientific analysis, subjectivity is not the object of subject-scientific research.

"Rather, it is the *subjective way of experiencing objective societal action possibilities and constraints* which is the "object" of subject science. Here, the "subjects", those who experience, are not on the side of the object, but instead on the side of the "researcher", i.e., on the side of the subject of science" (ibid, 315).

⁸ The contribution of those who (can) professionally pursue research is that they organize the research process (invitations, meetings, transcriptions, etc.) and support the work in such a manner that practice research becomes possible for practitioners despite the daily stress of professional practice (see below).

V. Subject-scientific Practice Research as an Explication, De-mystification and Development of the Social-Subjective Knowledge of the Context and Contradictions of Professional Practitioners of Psychology.

The fact that professional psychological practice is insufficiently founded on a solid scientific basis due to internal problems of the discipline does not, of course, mean that the psychological practitioner practices "without theory". However, this means that theories are more or less unofficial and not explicitly stated. Their scientific dignity is neither explicit nor unclear. These theories feed on different sources: on everyday or common sense ideas or beliefs, on academic psychological or official clinical theories and on "unofficial" practice theories.

The practitioners in our project refer to these "unofficial" practice theories as specific approaches, "tracks", because they express points of view related to specific experiences, institutions, and problems and related to specific ways of acting or different strategies for acting.

An example of this is the treatment of men who beat their wives. The "Women's house track" refers in this context to the practice of forbidding men, as a rule, to enter the "Women's House". This track, however, is not embraced by women helpers in a live-in project for single mothers, since in homes for single mothers this often practiced policy of literally banning men must be revised and changed: the banning of a man is a result of his concrete behavior, a kind of "individual case" decision, with the concomitant problems in reaching a decision that the "Women's House" does not face.

Another example comes from a thesis project written in the course of our training project. Aumann (1993) studied conflicts in

relationships between staff and patients in a therapeutic residential project. There she observed special expressions or ways of thinking that could be analytically broken down and which functioned as action guides ("rules") in the theoretically uncertain terrain of psychiatric after-care. Aumann interpreted these ways of speaking and behaving as generalizations gained from earlier problems and conflicts. These are then abstracted from those concrete sources and "enriched" with common ideas about therapy which should guarantee the institution-specific and inter-subjectively held forms of dealing with conflicts. These manners of thinking and speaking are, for example, a way of "setting limits" (for example on the demands of the patients which then no longer have to be concretely examined as to their justification or feasibility), to "avoid overstepping boundaries or limits" (for example, the avoidance of erotic relationships between patients and staff, which on the other hand, to a certain degree, can be used to gain influence), and to "give it structure" (reason for deferring to the ideas of the staff in a conflict situation). The description of these ways of speaking and thinking already makes their problem regulating function clear. Aumann's interpretation of these ways of speaking and thinking actually aims at the isolation of the – counter-intentional – restrictive functionality which these ways of speaking and thinking have on the problem regulating practice of those involved. Examples here include their separation from the context of problems and their transformation into situation-independent claims to superiority by the staff, or the therapeutization of acute conflicts in the institutionalized living conditions and the establishment of a staff monopoly of interpretation. A female attendant, for example, delayed an acute conflict in which a patient felt patronized during kitchen work, by switching to a level

of conflict where the patient could not respond. In response to the patient's defensive reaction to a comment by the female attendant, the attendant asked the patient "Why does that make you afraid?" The subtle disciplining of the client in such interventions where a therapeutic context is made out of a "kitchen context" to the advantage of the attendant, can indeed, according to Aumann, again and again restore the routine. But significant problems at work (the relationship between client and the interests of the superiors/employer) are not dealt with, and that is exactly the restrictive function of these ways of speaking and thinking.

What is remarkable with regard to the "tracks" or the ways of speaking and thinking is the explicit use of "unofficial" practice theories as a justification of professional behavior. However, as Aumann's work shows, the *degree* of explication is quite different, since the naming of the "tracks", as shown, can certainly have the function of eliminating concrete and situation-specific justifications for behavior and of establishing mutual understanding among several practitioners dealing with the same case via the intentional reduction of possible behavior variants.

However, this function is significantly limited by two conditions. One condition applies to the case of the psychiatric after-care institution. It applies when the respective problems are so ambivalent and unclear that they cannot simply be dealt with through a subsumption within the "track" or when this subsumption creates new conflicts. The practitioners' concept of the "track" strives for a *self-understanding* based on mutually held *truisms*, which make it superfluous to discuss or deal with the concrete actions related to the track. This becomes problematic to the degree that the actions related to the realization of the approach can themselves vary. (The women's house track, prohibiting

men from entering, is, according to this point of view, not endangered because it does not limit variations in behavior but instead excludes them.) The other condition affects the case in which the ideas of the practitioners represent different, competing tracks. An example here is the conflict between an individual case worker from our project and nursery school teachers and a female psychologist regarding the question whether or not he should try to be a "replacement father" for the child. The ways of thinking and speaking, and the respective action track "Replacement Father" was here in itself controversial and thus *blocked* a conflict resolution. What is questionable here is not the possibility of subsuming an action under a track but rather under which approach it should be subsumed. The resolution of the conflict can thus only consist in working out the pre-requisites, case experiences and institutional circumstances contained in the track or way of thinking. But this means, quite in the sense of our concept of practice research, turning the track itself into an object of analysis.

Exactly this type of analysis can make clear how the different components of the practitioners' practice theory, academic and "official" clinical theories and "tracks" are amalgamated with individual practice and other life experiences and institutional reproduction requirements.

These different elements of practice theories can be made even more analytically fruitful if one relates them to a concept that Holzkamp (1988b) developed out of the work of the "Theorie - Praxis Konferenz", the *concept of the "social subjective knowledge of context and contradictions"* which is necessarily contained in practice but still requires clarification. Here the discussed contexts and contradictions mean: (1) to the conditions of psychological practice belong very contradictory demands made by the

different parties involved, the superior or employer, clients and institutions (2) there exists the general, falsely assumed expectation in psychology that the practitioners cure or remove psychic suffering by excluding the material life circumstances which provide the only way to gain an understanding of the problem. Assuming from the outset that the practitioners are not without interest, i.e., assuming that they are interested in protecting the interests of those consigned to their care, therapeutically, consultatively, pedagogically and preventively, then they have to experience how this interest collides with conditions determining their actions and their action possibilities. In our opinion, it is these experiences, among others, which are mixed with the official psychological theories available to the practitioners, the super-individual, more or less unofficial, practice theories and with their individual, practice-related, theoretical ideas. In this "mixture" they may be defined or interpreted as the contents of what Holzkamp refers to as the social-subjective knowledge of context and contradiction. What these different ideas look like and how they are specifically combined with one another and with the working conditions, which dynamic processes in the collision of interests described above then mystify this knowledge and how this kind of practitioner's knowledge can be further developed, is a central topic of subject-scientific practice research. Practice research is thus the explication, demystification and development of social-subjective knowledge of the contexts and contradictions of professional psychological practitioners, and the relating of this knowledge to problems of the working conditions and to psychology as a scientific discipline.

From this also follows that, in a research project like ours, the topics or the background of the participants are not necessarily limited to a certain area of the discipline

(like therapy, school psychology, or drug counseling) but, rather on the contrary, an area-overlapping mix of practitioners is quite desirable. (1) Areas of psychological activity contain numerous facets of psychological work, for example the area "school psychology" deals with the following: diagnostics, teacher counseling, pupil counseling, drug-abuse prevention, etc. (2) Theoretical statements regarding professional psychological practice can only be gained from concrete professional activity. This, however, does not mean that their validity is only restricted to that one specific area of psychology. Their range of validity is more dependent on the dimensions of the topic. Thus, for example, those aspects of professional psychological activity characterized by the "burn-out" phenomenon are area-overlapping. In as far as (3) *psychology*, with the problems described here, is one of the points of reference for professional psychological practice research, then the different types of professional psychological practice can be related to one another as *psychological*.

The form which the empirical results in this type of research context are given, is, as is evident from our comments above, the form of *connections between premises and reasons*. Here, as in every subject-scientific analysis, a concrete, in this case a professional practice problem forms the starting point for the study. The goal is formed by the theoretical dimensions of practical problem solving in the *form* of connections between premises and reasons. In the process of practice research one deals with a problem that is inaccessible for the practitioner. The resolution of this problem is exemplary and hypothetically valid wherever practitioners can be considered to be in a similar position and to be able to "subsume" themselves un-

der similar connections between premises and reasons⁹.

VI. *Development, Methods and Approach of the Project "Analysis of Psychological Practice"*

There were several motives which led to the founding of the PAPP: (1) we were familiar with a number of practitioners who were fundamentally interested in Critical Psychology or were interested in a discussion and dialogue with Critical Psychology and were looking for a practical occasion where they could discuss their practice problems together with other practitioners and with academics interested in psychological practice in a manner different from supervision (see below). (2) We ourselves were interested in meeting with practitioners with whom we could pursue questions regarding the theoretical foundation of practical psychology. The questions that interested us were partially the result of a training project for students under our aegis. (3) We were searching for cooperative relationships with practitioners with whom our student trainees could work together. We sent a letter, in which we presented our general goal and suggested a first meeting, to approximately twenty practitioners from different professional areas (psychiatry, psychiatric after-care, live-in projects for different types of patients, individual case work, school psychology, out-patient and in-patient handicapped care, private and institutional psychotherapy) who we knew were inter-

⁹ Here we cannot deal in depth with the developing methodological problems and concepts (cf. here Holzkamp 1983; Markard 1985, 1993).

ested in cooperating. Nearly all the practitioners to whom we wrote came to the first meeting and many continued to come to the following meetings. At the first meeting the suggestions made by us with regard to approach and method were accepted. We will explain these below.

In the course of the work of the "Theorie - Praxis Konferenz" a theoretically founded guide for the analysis of professional psychological practice was developed by formulating, in the form of questions and explanations or theoretical hypotheses, those dimensions which had proven to be of importance to the work of the "Theorie - Praxis Konferenz" (the "Practice Portrait"; Markard & Holzkamp 1989). The core of our project, PAPP, consisting of three academics (the authors and Gisela Ulmann) together with about twenty practitioners (and trainees from our university training project doing their internship with one of the practitioners from the PAPP) was to concretize and further develop dimensions contained in the "Practice Portrait".

We used the following methods. First, the interview. Depending on the respective practitioner's area of professional psychological practice, we (R.F. & M.M.) formulated a guiding motif from the dimensions of the "Practice Portrait". On the basis of this we performed an approximately two hour long interview with the practitioner. We then transcribed and reviewed the interview, adding comments, noting problems and additional questions according to general project research questions. The practitioner interviewed was then given a copy of the transcript which he or she could revise. They were given, as it were, the last say in order to make sure that their opinions were clearly represented in the text. The version of the interview authorized by the interviewee was then given to other practitioners in the project as the basis of a monthly *group discus-*

sion (the "Plenum"). The group discussion represents the second method in which we attempted to work out, if possible with reference to a concrete practice problem from the interviewed practitioner, on a case by case basis, the institutional and practice-structuring elements of the respective area of professional practice, and then relate them to the experiences of the other project participants from other areas of professional practice. The transcribed minutes of the group discussions represent further material for the theoretical analysis of the discussion, leading to suggestions for changes in practice¹⁰.

This "two-pronged" approach (interview and group discussion) in the PAPP is based on the idea that, even if, to the extent that we can reconstruct in the interview the concrete institutional conditions in those dimensions in which practice is "thought" and "made", it can be made comprehensible how important conditions are to practitioners' dealing with concrete practice situations; these conditions still remain abstract compared to the specific, case-related, concrete professional problems. That is why the group discussions start with an acute practice problem presented by the affected practitioner. This should also make it possible to hypothetically explicate, and relate to other fields of professional activity, the *institutional and discipline related dimensions* and their importance for *case-specific* possibilities or limitations to acting. Thus, for example, in an interview with a male psychologist who coordinated and supervised the work of helpers in an organization for the out-patient care of physically handicapped persons, it was possible to make clear that the most significant

¹⁰ The project Racism/Discrimination used a similar approach (cf. Osterkamp 1990).

difficulty with the job was that he was expected to psychologically "iron out" all the institutional deficits of the organization. But only in a concrete case discussion did it become clear which ideas he used to practically deal with the tasks presented to him, which hindrances he encountered and at which level these hindrances could or could not be approached.

Other methods of our project are, thirdly, to have well-prepared *theoretical discussions* in which certain problems that have come up in the group discussions, for example regarding different functions of supervision, diagnostic categorizing and the concept of competence, are pursued further. Also of importance is the *cooperation with student interns*.

This cooperation, by the way, proved to be very fruitful for the entire project. When students in our training project have an internship with the practitioners in the PAPP, then this is not only interesting for the students (and teachers), but also for the individual practitioners, because they are then exposed to "external" perspectives on their own practice via the intern. In addition, these practitioners participate in the university seminars when the interns report on their experiences during the internship.

A preliminary evaluation by the university employees showed that many of the practice problems previously mentioned in the group discussions can be hypothetically classified as interdisciplinary "dimensions" (e. g., problem transformation, see below). We are further interested in, among other things, more narrowly defining these dimensions in their theoretical and practical relevance.

In the course of the research process, hypotheses which could serve as a basis for the analysis of practice problems were further developed. The development of these hypotheses contributed to deciding which pro-

blems of which practitioners were discussed. This is similar to Glaser & Strauss' conception of "theoretical sampling" (cf., for our view, Markard 1991b, Ch. 5). The ultimate aim is to establish the relevance of the hypothesis for change.

In this phase, we began to diversify our approach. For example, an attempt with "collective" questionnaires or guides was less than successful. These were developed ad hoc from the different discussions with reference to problematic aspects of practice (e.g., meaning of supervision for practical work). These questionnaires were to form the material basis for concretizing these practice aspects in the individual practice areas. However, it soon became clear that only a few of the practitioners were willing to fill out the questionnaires because, for among other reasons, it took too much time. The questions were open-ended and formulated with reference to the discussions so that answering them was a very time consuming task.

Instead of continuing to pursue this approach, we went back to performing interviews with practitioners whose work had a certain dimension in common (like for example competing views of, and thus manners of speaking about, the different approaches of the different professions like psychologist/teacher or psychologist/nursery school teacher, or between different psychologists in one team). These interviews were then processed as described above, and served as the basis for the group discussions in which the relevant problems were specified more exactly and analyzed by having the other practitioners confront themselves with the difficulties mentioned in the interview. Do I have these problems too? What are they like in my experience? How are they different, etc.? The goal was to develop solutions relevant to the specific problems

and to test their feasibility. This method also lead to problems because it was not sufficiently successful in finding a mediating position between the analyses developed and the practical action possibilities.

The difficulties remained even though we scheduled special meetings to discuss the problem of relating the results of practice analyses with practice problems. Among other things, it became clear that the differences in interpretation became more pronounced at this level. Interestingly, the group was divided not between "theoreticians" (academics) and "practitioners". Instead the division split both groups. Here, there were and are no clear camps. As these discussions became more heated, the dynamic competitive problems in the group also became apparent. For example, the schism between salaried practitioners and those working for hourly wages who are dependent on the salaried practitioners for contracts and work.

The overriding influence of one's individual material standpoint on the respective argumentation was not immediately clear. Controversial discussions among the practitioners assumed the form of doubting and questioning competence. A dispute, for example, on whether or not the psychologist must "confess" his or her limited possibilities to help the patients at the beginning of the intervention, thus being "honest" and "responsible", remains an abstract comparison of competence until the institutional premises of different approaches are made apparent. It is much easier for a salaried school psychologist (counselor) to reject, in his or her opinion, unrealistic client expectations than it is for a case worker paid by the hour who must first convince his or her formal employer, the affected family, to accept him or her as "competent". Moreover, the school psychologist has the real possibility of changing the levels of his or her ac-

tivity, for example, by attempting to react to the problem of becoming "stuck" on new and newly produced individual cases by engaging in preventive teacher counseling.

A consequence of the dynamic problems of the group discussions was the attempt to pursue the specific case-related discussions at the same regular time (Friday, 6:00 p.m.) but in smaller groups. This has not been possible, though, because "everyone" comes anyway. Presently, we face the problem that the number of discussions desired by the participants exceeds the number of meetings scheduled, even though we have scheduled extra meetings. In addition to these meetings, there are now practice consultations between the academics and the individual practitioners from the PAPP¹¹.

The connection between the different institutions, cases and practitioners was primarily created by the theoretical dimension (cf. the example in Section VII) with reference to which the discussions were often very controversial. Part of the continued development of the PAPP is that practitioners sometimes write and submit papers themselves. These papers are then intended to form the basis for the plenum discussions or the discussions in the interested subgroups which are formed for specific institutions or individual cases.

Sometimes, during the discussion of specific cases, to our surprise, the practitioners suddenly refused to provide any further information. Later, however, after a certain period of time, the same practitioner brought up these cases again and wanted to discuss its further developments. This could be due to the fact that the practitioner could not relate the group discussions to his or her

¹¹ This is a problem that increased with the number of meetings. We did not have the ability to transcribe all the meetings. The available funds were quickly exhausted.

case or, on the other hand, was not able to relate this problem to the project discussion or did not believe it productive to discuss the case in the group. Here it is at first unclear whether the cause of these problems is, for example, *competing* hypotheses regarding the case (like the relevance of bilinguality for a Turkish girl's learning difficulties in a Berlin school; cf. Section VII b) or whether more or less undisputed hypotheses prove to be too abstract in practical application because they ignore the institutional conditions for acting. The project discussions attempt to solve these problems, related to real life actions and, above all, by trying to determine the *relationship between the theoretical assumptions* in the arguments and hypotheses and *empirical data*. It is obvious that such discussions do not, at that moment, reduce the complexity of the case but instead increase its complexity. In addition, it is never certain whether or when the discussions will lead to practical, action-related results. Thus, under certain circumstances, it may be that exactly these types of discussions are viewed by the practitioners as not very helpful and instead as a burden or bother which additionally complicates the case, so that, at least temporarily, he or she withdraws from the discussion¹². This is also a reason why the material collected up until now and already partially evaluated is not yet unitary.

Eleven of the approximately twenty original participants are still working in the project. Of those who are no longer participating, three moved away, two explained their absence with an increased work load or dwindling interest and one person gave no

explanation. Others have joined the project so that, at present, after two and an half years, we have 17 participants. The cooperative relationships existing outside the project also lead to situations where other professionals (teachers, colleagues) participate in the discussions of certain questions or cases. This resulted in one case in the desire to become a member of the project.

In addition, different project members (school psychologists, private therapists) sometimes work with the same case. However, this is not of *systematic* importance for the project's approach. As was made clear in the presentation of our project goals, for us the most important element is not to determine the *different* views of different professionals and non-professionals of the same case and to analyze them according to their dependency on a specific standpoint or perspective and their relations to one another¹³, but rather *to analyze the views of the professionals as to their theoretical ideas*. As we presented in Section V, these were the individual amalgamation of common sense ideas and beliefs and academic and "unofficial" theories taking into account individual experiences and interests. For this it is, of course, necessary to include the non-theoretical empirical data, as encountered by the professional, and to study the degree to which these prove to be resistant to the practitioners' theoretically-based practice. However, it is not necessary for this specific project goal – the analysis of the contents and function, i.e. practice relevance, of psychological modes of thinking and their dependence on specific interests and positions in psychological practice – to register or col-

¹² In as far as there were any tendencies to conflicts between the theoreticians and practitioners in the theoretical controversies mentioned, then they were related to the question of the relevance of the hypothesis to the concrete, practical requirements.

¹³ This is different in the project "Racism/Discrimination" (Osterkamp 1990), in which the mutual tendencies to marginalization and the attribution of guilt, and the reflection on these matters, forms the central focus of the analysis.

lect empirical data, in a methodologically different manner, *independently* of the perspective of the respective practitioner. In this respect, our practice research project¹⁴, which aims at the explication of the relation of premises and reasons, is not "action research" in a narrow sense (cf. our view: Markard 1991 b, Ch. 3); an essential element of which is that the epistemological principle of the unity of knowing and changing, is, in principle, realized by all those involved in the research process "in the field", e. g., within the institution "school psychology". The emphasis of the PAPP research however does not exclude changing practice and finding new possibilities for action by the practitioner. On the contrary, these are certainly desired since the theoretical reflection of practice aims at an analysis of the theoretical and practical obstacles and the overcoming of these in order to create new possibilities for the practitioner.

VII. *Work-in-Progress: Examples of Dimensions which have proven Relevant for Case Analyses in the Project*

As one can infer from the foregoing description, the project is not yet finished and with regard to the individual case discussions and dimensions there is a non-unitary and quasi non-simultaneous data situation. In order to present the work of the project more clearly, we want to describe some of the approximately twenty dimensions which

crystallized in our minds relatively early as examples from our project. They possess a degree of generality that should make them comprehensible without any further special explanation. The following are examples of those dimensions recognized by us as important for the case analyses during the interviews and group discussions and for which we aim to develop case specific results in our continuing work.

(A) LIFE PROBLEMS AND THEIR TRANSFORMATION INTO PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

In the interviews and discussions the question always arose how does it come about that (1) a given situation or constellation is *defined* as a problem, that (2) it is decided that this problem is suited to be "processed" psychologically and (3) which fate befalls the views of the problem in the course of the institutional "treatment" of the original problem. We characterize this aspect of practice as the "*transformation problem*". Very informative here was the fact that questions and related answers are dependent on perspective and theoretical position. This obviously leads to the question: who defines whose problem and how (cf. here our school example in Section III). In other words, for example, the characterization by third parties of persons' life situation as psychologically problematic can, of course, be called into question. It is also questionable whether, or to what degree, the problems seen as psychological or entrusted to psychologists as psychological and thus as amenable to or curable with psychological means, are psychological problems in a narrow sense. The fact that individual life situations are viewed as psychological or as psychologically treatable problems is, of course, to be expected from psychological practice. However, this also means a profes-

¹⁴ Basically, practice research in psycho-social areas is the attempt to transform problems of psycho-social professional practice into empirical research questions and programs (cf. For example Heiner 1988), which extends from evaluations studies (e.g., Nielsen et al. 1986) to career training model experimental projects (e.g., Filsinger & Kleiber 1987) to the organization of single case micro-analyses like in our PAPP.

sional specific interpretation which simultaneously limits other possibilities of acting or understanding. This is a situation which must be explained and thus must be open to critique.

Here, as mentioned above, the question of who gives jobs and work to whom, plays an important role. Therefore, in our opinion, the institutional referral of the task to the psychologist, the type of reformulation of the task in a psychological reference system and the remaining problem reference are all significant aspects of the discussions. If one also considers that even outside the psychological mainstream, as in "clinical" conceptions, fundamental psychological questions are controversial, then no clear answer can be expected to the question of the theoretical foundation of a psychological perspective on a problem and thus of a view of a problem with reference to the discipline "psychology". In this context, further questions must be asked, e. g., how can one in individual cases provide a theoretical foundation for what is here comprehended with psychological theory? What can be achieved at all in psychological practice? How can activities in the interest of those affected be delineated from simple pacification and legitimation strategies? Where are non-psychological factors (size of the apartment and family relations, organizational questions in the out-patient care of the physically handicapped and the relations between helpers and handicapped etc.) simply reduced to psychological problems between people? And finally, how can, with clear reference to psychological conceptions and thus, in this sense, clearly identified as psychological, those problem constellations be determined where "a change of levels" from psychological practice to, for example, administrative or political practice becomes necessary and which new problems could that create?

Here concrete new problems appear with which the practitioners in our project see themselves confronted. For example, the "administrative intimidation" by the employees of a Educational Counseling Station of a continually abusive immigrant father. They threaten that the "case" will be transferred to another authority so that the possibilities for influence by the Educational Counseling Station are eliminated and they can no longer control the possibly anti-foreigner consequences of their administrative step. This is simultaneously an example of the extent to which institutional divisions of labor determine only apparently theoretically based psychological activities.

In the context of such questions it becomes clear that the delegation of responsibilities only represents another variation of the "transformation" problem. This helps make other problems confronting the practitioners visible. Because (1) tasks turned over to psychological practice can just be using the psychologist as an alibi for the failures of the employer or institutional provider in order to downplay the importance of the real obstacles, excluding and jumping over the ability to change problematic life circumstances; (2) those affected could approach the psychologist in the hope of "delegating" their own life conduct within increasingly problematic situations to "specialists".

The formulation of such research questions implies criteria for differentiating psychological and non-psychological problems, which are to be explicated and more precisely formulated in the *answering* of the questions. The differentiation of psychological and non-psychological problems cannot be done in a general manner. It can only be undertaken in an approach or theory dependent manner, and in our research context, within the theoretical tradition of the functional critique of psychology outlined

here (in Sections II through IV). The *research questions* are thus fundamentally based on the consideration of the problem of the reinterpretation of social restrictions into subjective limitations, the ignoring of material living relations and conditions and relations of dependency and power and in general of the interests of the person or institution providing psychological care. This also brings into consideration the problem of the "range" of psychological methods (cf. our example of the individualistic¹⁵ diagnosis and intervention with the pupil who had "difficulties concentrating" in Section III). Here, the degree of complication of the criteria for differentiation of psychological and non-psychological problems becomes more clear. The attempt to overcome the individualistic limitations of psychological diagnostics and intervention, and thus the attempt to take into account traditionally ignored contexts and connections, may not only lead to the *expansion* of possibilities for psychological activities, but also make their *limits* clearer. The realization of the context and connection of individual and social reproduction *should counter the lifting of the limits of psychology and its practice brought about by psychologization*. The clarification of practice relevant criteria for the differentiation of psychological from non-psychological problems is thus related to determining the *relationship* between expansion and limitation of possibilities for psychological action. Since, in our opinion, this determination cannot *in concreto* simply be a matter for theoretical reflection, but rather must be a part of practice research, then we view the answer to this question as

¹⁵ The centeredness on the individual as the terminological and practical separation of the individuals from *social* reproduction is not fundamentally overcome even when, as in family therapy, diagnostic and intervention are related to the way *several individuals* live together.

part of our project. The explication and more precise formulation of these criteria should be performed in such a manner that the relevant problems cannot be ignored in practical case work and practice discussions. Instead, they should be included as systematically as possible in practice and the resulting possibilities and limitations for acting analyzed. The dynamics of this type of discussion is, among other things, based on the fact that the research question itself prevents that discussions about psychological practice per se end in a demand for the absolute quantitative expansion of psychology so convenient for professional politicians (cf. here for example, Cramer, et al. 1983.)

Important for the transformation of life problems into psychological problems was, among other things, how the (original) problem of the person affected or the person sponsoring the psychological task for which the affected person became a problem, is submitted to changes in the course of which the authentic problem context is nearly lost from sight. These transformation and delegation processes thus mark an area in which theoretical positions become practically relevant and in which, if necessary, an "ideal client" with treatable symptoms is "formed" out of a suffering subject in problematic life circumstances (cf. here the linguistic aspect, Ulmann 1989). For this reason, these kinds of transformation and delegation processes with their redefinitions belong to the central points of intersection with the work of the PAPP. The subjective relevance of such analyses for the practitioner is a result of the following circumstance: so long as these transformations and delegations cannot be reflected upon with reference to a psychological concept because this concept systematically eliminates such contexts and connections, it becomes a purely personal problem for the practitioner to find out the con-

nections and contexts of problems with which he or she must deal in an action-relevant manner, also vis-à-vis the common and problematic ideas of those affected¹⁶.

We have only hinted at a consideration which came up for us as we posed questions regarding the connection between problem transformation and the function of *supervision*. To explore that, one must scrutinize more exactly how the concentration on the problems in the relationship between the psychologist and client and between the psychologists themselves leads to a renewed transformation of the clients' and the psychologists' work-related problems. Yet its potential for solving problems is left open and unanswered. This raises the question of whether the shift from concentrating on the problems of the clients to the problems of the psychologists as they, according to the experience of the practitioners in the project, often structure the discussions in the supervision meetings, is not really primarily to be understood as a further hardening of the problem transformation in psychological practice discussed above. This would make supervision the site of solution strategies for psychologists' problems which tend to be removed from their original, real context. Here the extent to which the original real context is removed appears to make a concentration on the personality of the psychologists inevitable. At a linguistic level, this personalizing tendency is demonstrated when they speak of the psychologist's personality "sharing" the problems of psychological practice. In as far as the client problematic is thus related to the *person* or the personality of the psychologist, then this context, in which the client's problems ori-

ginally were found, must be lost from view, especially since the latter was not allowed to "share" in these meetings.

Supervisions in which psychologists do not or cannot relate their *own* problems, fears and uncertainties in their practice to their *working conditions*, thus actually represent, seen in light of these considerations, an institutional, organized special case of psychological problem transformation. This further legitimizes "defining away" people's practical problems in life. If that is so, supervision is not a contribution to the solution of problems, but instead the costly organization of their professional legitimation and, thus, a relief for the psychologists at the cost of the client. However, in as far as such a systematization of personalizing viewpoints will not be able, in the long run, to suppress the problems of this practice and of the clients, then the psychologists must bear the costs: besides the financial, also the psychic costs that accompany repression of a problem.

Our argumentation is thus not directed against the fact that psychologists can discuss and solve their problems in psychological work. We only doubt that this is possible independent of the clients' problems and the given institutional framework in which both act. From this perspective, supervision is less *analysis* than an *object* of analysis.

(B) DIAGNOSTICS

The question of problem definition is inevitably, as its more formalized aspect, bound up with the question of diagnostics. This question proved to be a problematic element for the practitioners at many different moments in the PAPP discussions. If one discusses psychological diagnostics in light of the transformation problem, then it should be seen as an attempt at more precisely formulating a problem already assumed to be

¹⁶ This situation of being thrown back upon oneself theoretically can, quite rightly, be a further aspect of absolutizing the importance of the "psychologist personality".

psychological. That is, an attempt to capture the problem, as a psychological problem, in professional-psychological terminology and, if necessary, with a tendency towards psychological interventions.

This can be demonstrated more clearly by the example of a discussion in our project. While discussing an interview we noticed that it is a practice problem to convince oneself of the "standards" with which the clients are "measured". The school, for example, appears in the diagnostic perspective (here in an institutional setting of outpatient /inpatient care for young people in psychiatric care as recounted in interviews regarding the respective practice) simply as a specific, more or less objective ensemble of performance demands; not, however, as an aspect of the "real world" in which the children live, nor as the child's horizon of experience. The requirements and demands in school can be simulated, if only to a limited extent, in a test, for example HAWIK. But the subjective experience "school" given to the child remains inaccessible to testing psychologists. Still, the resulting problems of justifying and demonstrating the validity of psychological diagnostics appears manageable in practice. The trick is to relativize the testing practice as simply an aspect of the so-called "clinical judgment". According to Fisseni (1990) "one speaks of forming a clinical judgment", when "quantitative and qualitative data exist (e.g., test scores, grades, behavior reports, etc.) and when their combination is based on the expertise, experience and intuition of the diagnostician without explicitly naming all the rules and elements involved in the formation of the judgment" (258). As one can readily see from the comments in this essay, neither rules nor other elements can be explicitly named, since the "expertise" is disputed (in its relevance), experiences are for the most part unexplained, and intuition, which is it-

self based on experience, is exceptionally problematic seen in light of the problems of expertise and experience. Thus the diagnostician is faced with the problem of how to legitimize the objectivity *suggested* (cf. Grubitzsch, 1991) by test values, in relation to the overall evaluation or judgment. Thus, for example, individual data from tests in the form of statistical codes are not at all compatible with the "intuitive" speculation of the psychologist about subjective experiences and beliefs of the client irrespective of the problematic nature of the latter. They cannot be related to one another, even when they appear to point in the same direction¹⁷. The relation of these different types of data, however, becomes obviously and clearly problematic when intuition, etc. and test results contradict one another. The shaping of the contradictory data into a clinical judgment can, as the practitioners demonstrated with examples, be achieved in two different ways. The first possibility is to "bend" the data to fit the picture. It can hardly be a satisfying professional practice, though, to have to resort to such underhanded methods in diagnostic practice. The second possibility is to accept the contradiction in the data as a challenge to one's own psychological competence and to demonstrate one's competence by trying to build interpretive bridges between the data by coming to especially "profound" conclusions. Here profundity should be taken to mean a combination of theoretical instability and methodological uninhibitedness which, in the end, serve to hide rather superficial common ideas. These kinds of interpretation are required when inevitably ambiguous data from different methodologies and procedures, which prac-

¹⁷ The basic and applied scientific counterpart of the clinical practitioner's judgment is the concept of "triangulation", which seeks to make credible the complementarity of incompatible data (cf. for critique Markard 1991 b).

titioners are forced to use in the accomplishment of a therapy, must be shaped into a single finding.

Obviously, in both cases the problems of the clients are presented in a way that does not sufficiently address the practical, relevant difficulties in the analysis of their life problems and possibilities. This raises the question of practical alternatives to the present testing procedure, beyond a simple critique of testing. The difficulties of these alternatives become apparent when one considers what Dreier (1985) determined as implicit assumptions in traditional diagnostics: the rigid demands for predictability of behavior and the traditional diagnostic instrument of assigning characteristics as a special form of personalization. These are not compatible with subject-scientific conceptions of the development of subjective action possibilities, neither do they help procedurally mediate diagnosis and intervention. These assumptions are particularly functional for the institutional administration of psychological practice in which the financing of the case work is made dependent on treatment plans and progress prognoses which must be submitted after only a short time (e.g. two meetings). Searching for alternatives to a diagnostics that believes, in the shortest amount of time, without knowledge of the specific context, and based on untenable assumptions about human subjectivity, that it can reach well-founded judgments means, on the one hand, tendentially an endangering of the material basis for one's own existence as psychologist and, on the other hand, doing without the practical assistance in reducing the complexity of one's situation (cf. Markard 1989) offered by the diagnostic procedures.

The dominance of traditional diagnostic procedures proved to be especially crass in our project in decisions regarding the con-

tinuation of individual case help for children. Here, tests performed with the affected child by a psychologist from the work-approving institution form the central basis of the decision. The experiences and evaluations of the individual case worker, a university trained psychologist, who has often spent several hours a week with the child for over a year, presented in the form of reports and sometimes discussions (but here diagnostics, in a narrow sense, are not a part of the job) have almost no influence on the decision about whether to continue¹⁸.

Yet it is also a problem in this constellation (both sides of which are represented in the project: psychologists in institutions who authorize individual case work, and psychologists who work on a case by case or hourly basis) that the "alternative" diagnostics are not very developed. In one of our project discussions, several individual case workers protested vehemently against the in their opinion problematic test diagnostics. At the same time, however, when the individual case workers reported on their "cases", their diagnostic judgment with regard to the clients' fear and lack of abilities was methodologically incomprehensible, and the reaching of the decision could not be reconstructed and subjected to critique. This way, it was ill-suited to replace traditional diagnostics and compete with its representatives in the institutions.

¹⁸ One cannot simply dismiss the fact that it also played a role in the weighting of factors that the individual case worker had a financial interest in continuing. This is also the case when psychologists working with traditional diagnostics apply for continuations, so the core of the problem remains the different modi of forming judgments.

Understanding diagnosis as a procedural¹⁹ aspect of practice does not prevent it from being presented analytically as a separate aspect (cf. Dreier, 1985, 241). It includes the elements of practice in which the questions as to problem (re-)formulations and further steps or determining dimensions of a change are accentuated. In our project we attempt to structure or reconstruct such elements of practice.

The development of a hypothesis regarding a special aspect of the case of a seven year old Turkish girl (S.) may serve here as an example. The girl attracted attention at school because she practically never spoke, or when she did, she spoke only in one word answers and not in whole sentences. Near the end of the school year, the teacher was afraid the child might have to be held back or sent to a special school for "dull" children if S.'s performance did not improve. A number of teachers, a psychologist, an Educational Counseling Office, and a psychologist working as an individual case worker assigned to the case by the psychologist at the Educational Counseling Office, are professionally involved in the case. Both psychologists are members of the PAPP.

It is unclear to those involved what role speech problems play in the total picture because S.'s mother says that her child speaks often and gladly at home. Together with the individual case worker, S. hardly speaks, but still more and better than at school. This, so it was thought, might have something to do with the fact that the teacher assigns topics and questions while the case worker asked what S. wanted to say or do. According to the considerations in the PAPP, in these

situations the case worker could determine whether S. was capable of non-contextual argumentation. That is, if she is able to compensate for the listener's lack of context knowledge. For example, when S. speaks about her brother P., in contextual speech it is enough to mention the name. In non-contextual speech she has to add that P. is her brother ("my brother") to make up for the listener's lack of knowledge. The degree to which she is able to take the perspective of the other person into consideration could be determined by the degree to which she could present previously unknown situations to the case worker. This explanation was seen as diagnostically relevant because the hypothesis was developed in the PAPP, that S.'s *different* articulation possibilities could be made understandable through the respective and different contexts. Here one must examine whether the *domestic* communication demands can be met by *contextual* speech acts.

With regard to diagnosis, one would have to clarify the following points here: (1) What type of communication takes place within the family? Can the communication realized there be defined as extremely contextual argumentation in which, for example, only phrases and simple words are spoken, because certain factors indicate that only those aspects are discussed that are based on common experiences or familiar contexts. Can other speech situations and linguistic contexts be identified in S.'s case? (2) With which speech situations is S. familiar, which does she know and with which can she already deal, which situations can she learn to deal with quickly? (3) How does S. react to the different speech situations? (4) Can non-contextual speech situations be created in the family or is the communication always brought back to a common familiar context by others? In other words: does S. have or use possibilities to present

¹⁹ This is not identical with "process diagnostics" where psychological procedures are applied in order to determine changes in the dimension selected by the procedure.

other, new facts? From this situation, we deduced the following diagnostic possibilities:

1. Find situations where empirical data could be developed to test this hypothesis.
2. Reconstruct whether S.'s different possibilities for dealing with speech situations could be better understood with the concept of competence in non-contextual communication.
3. Create situations which would provide S. with the possibility / necessity of presenting non-contextual information even within family communication. For example, by reporting on an event that no other family member knows about, like a visit to the zoo by the case worker and S. alone.
4. Analysis of the family's reaction: is the report limited to the common familiar context or can S. report the event?
5. Explication and analysis of the context which must be realized and in which school argumentation is practically based. This raises the question of how one can create possibilities for realizing non-contextual argumentation, if necessary against the tendency in the family. In the school there are a number of possibly intimidating factors which must be dealt with by the pupil, and which are perhaps relevant here: control at all times, public situation, expectation of explanations, performing assigned tasks and requirements instead of deciding oneself, time plan, comparison with others. Perhaps it would be possible for S. and the case worker to play school, so that the case worker can see how S. argues, as the teacher, as herself, and as another child.
6. Analysis of the resistance in the family (if present) to these forms of communication.
7. Painting sometimes brings out fantasy stories related to the painted object. Telling fantasy stories is necessarily non-contextual, given that the other does not live in or is not yet familiar with the fantasy world. Therefore these stories and answers to questions could be informative.

These ideas were *incorporated in a strategy of a real reduction of demands* in school. Here it was important that the psychologist from the Educational Counseling Office could take over the responsibility to relieve the teacher of pressure from the school administration.

The development of these types of hypotheses is a privileged object of our project. In general, the object of the field of diagnostics is to search for points of access where psychological diagnosis can become a procedurally and methodologically demonstrable "analytical explanation" of problems in life contexts²⁰.

However, this also raises the question of what should be analyzed. Moreover, it re-emphasizes the undeveloped state of psychological theory. The decisive factor in our approach is to reinterpret and develop *diagnostics as a special aspect of the exploration of relations between premises and reasons*. As is evident from our general sketch of this relation, a *diagnostics that is understood as a discourse on reasons for acting, and on the relation to premises for actions*²¹, should inevitably include the client's life cir-

²⁰ Here one must also study to what degree these traditional diagnostic procedures can be reinterpreted by reformulating certain intelligence tests as simple simulations of demand structures (see above).

²¹ It must be clarified in each particular case to what extent physical handicaps also belong to one's particular premises for action.

cumstances, and exclude individual-centric ideas as well as attributions of character and personality. In the PAPP we intend to further pursue the question of how such an approach can be realized not only in research settings (cf. Markard 1985) but also in different institutional settings of psychological diagnostic²².

(C) COMMON SENSE NORMATIVE IDEAS IN THE GUISE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

In conclusion, we would like, as a third example of the "work in progress" in the PAPP, to explore the manner in which *theories* are employed in practice and present *function critical* considerations (cf. also Markard 1989, in press).

In this context, speech strategies with which theoretically non-specific circumstances and concepts were subject to *usurpation* by certain theoretical conceptions proved to be important and problematic in practice.

This can be clearly seen in the example of "role play". Requesting clients, sometimes literally, to play, or to put themselves in the position of someone else, is altogether possible without concepts from role-play theory. But reference to the theory offers the possibility of claiming this practice per se as "belonging to" the theory. In addition, it offers the practitioner the opportunity to present his or her actions as "expert" and guided by theory.

In the project discussions the *dynamic function* of such a "demonstration of expertise" by referring to theory became clear to us as we related such stylizations of one's own approach to the problem of personalizing thinking. So long as psychological

practice is for the most part conceived as a function of "psychologist personalities", then the theory of psychological practice transforms itself unexpectedly into a theory and thus also a diagnosis of the personality of the practitioner. If the practitioners meet with massive problems in their work, or if they are confronted with others' criticism of their work, under these circumstances, they must relate the problems or criticism to their own person. This way, the practitioners must see their work, and perhaps, in a competitive situation, in the end must see *themselves*, placed in question. On this basis, and with the simultaneous lack of a factually based theoretical reference system, it is understandable that the practitioner attempts to avoid the problematization of his or her actions by utilizing a professional *vocabulary* when he or she has problems in practice. The professionalism of the language facilitates shifting the burden of a lack of success onto the special difficulties and complexities of the case. At any rate, the real practice problems can be *kept out* of the linguistic presentation of practice. In this respect, it is an aspect of the personalizing view of psychological practice when even the mere question as to what the practitioner really does is practically considered obscene. Yet even if real practice problems can be excluded from presentations by using professional speech, these problems must be dealt with in practice. This is another aspect of the psychic costs of the repression of practice problems mentioned in section VII a.

In the project discussions we also observed that discussions *in practice* were often carried on as a sort of *meta-discourse*, apparently unproblematic, that allowed an understanding between and among the theoretical schools²³. Exemplary here are terms like

²² Compare here the ideas of Reichert (1992) on the diagnosis of the ideas of the "mentally handicapped".

²³ Compare here also our discussion of the "tracks" above.

“nearness – distance”, “therapeutic experience”, “unconscious”, and “being able to become involved”. These are dimensions of presentation and understanding which themselves are conveyed with the hypostasis of the overwhelming importance of the psychologist’s personality. Relating this “meta-discourse” language use to practical problems, we found that there are actually no “meta-theories” hidden behind it at all and mystified in the personality of the psychologist, but rather quite simple common sense ideas (e.g., on education). The structuring function of the ideas practically qualified them as normative ideas or concepts.

In general, considerations about state interventions in a family can be related to how tidy an apartment is in the eyes of the professional, whether he or she considers the time that the TV runs to be too long, or how he or she judges the way meals are taken. Do family members eat together or alone? Do they eat at regular hours or not?

It is remarkable here, among other things, that the claim of theory to question common sense ideas (e.g., on family life) has been abandoned, since it is exactly these quotidian, common sense norms that should be subjected to a demystifying psychological analysis and critique. But in this supposedly (self-) critical, analyzed discursive form, the relation between theory and object has been inverted. That which should really be analyzed by theory first, instead becomes the protective cover for what is actually done in psychological practice.

These considerations should make evident that the development of a culture of discussion about practice is not simply an academic question, but rather an eminently practical problem with a dynamic that should not be underestimated. Here the most important point is not just the psychology related debates, but rather the practical consequences for the clients, for whom the

theoretical and practical relevance of psychology should be conceived and developed. This factor is often lost from sight in the discussions about practice. The development of a culture of discussion about psychological practice is, in our opinion, an important prerequisite for relating the individual competence of psychologists to the scientific relevance of psychology. This type of discursive practice research can be conceived of as an attempt at the practical realization of Lewin’s maxim that there is nothing more practical than a good theory.

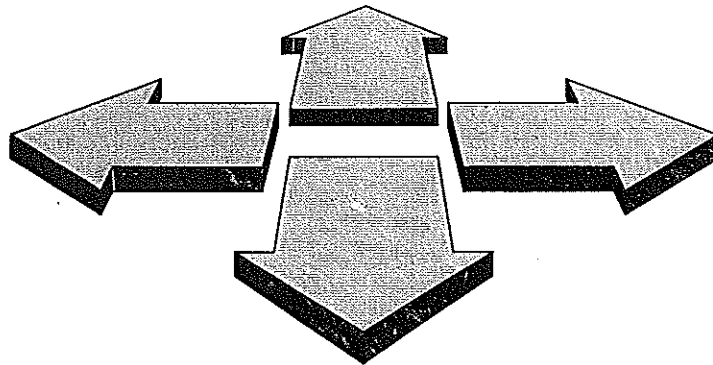
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OUTLINES

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About the authors:

Ole Dreier, Dr.Phil., is professor of Personality Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen
[email: dreier@axp.psl.ku.dk]

Ritva Engeström is a sociologist and researcher at the Center of Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, University of Helsinki

Hysse Birgitte Forchhammer is neuropsychologist, Ph.D., at the Neurological Department at Gentofte Amtssygehus, Copenhagen, and Center for Elder Research, Copenhagen City Hospital
[email: hysse@post6.tele.dk]

Brenda Goldberg is an Associate Fellow of the Discourse Unit, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, The Manchester Metropolitan University [email: B.Goldberg@mmu.ac.uk]

Morus Markard is Privat-Dozent, Dr. phil. habil., Dipl.-Psych., at the Studiengang Psychologie at the Free University, Berlin
[email: mmarkard@zedat.fu-berlin.de]

Renke Fahl, Dr. phil, Dipl.-Psych, was an Associate Fellow at the Studiengang Psychologie at the Free University, Berlin, and now works in a private research institute