AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF LONDON'S EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICES
1870-1990

1. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The results were threefold:
1. The charting of London’s education welfare services between 1870 and 1990
2. Conclusions drawn from the study
3. Implications for future policy development.

1. The historical account

It was found that the education welfare services of London have their roots in the period following the 1870 Education Act, which introduced universal schooling. The London School Board organized the enforcement of school attendance by employing ‘School Board Men’. Voluntary organisations set up systems to provide poor children with school dinners, clothing and medical care, to enable them to benefit from their right to an education; later, they helped them to prepare for life after school. These efforts were harnessed by the London County Council (LCC) in 1907 to form volunteer groups of Care Committees, which were supervised by paid organizers. Both kinds of service -- attendance and welfare -- relied on visits to a pupil’s family, creating a bridge between home and school that was not normally provided in any other way.

This dual service of welfare and attendance was unique to London: most education authorities in Britain started with an attendance service only, which gradually took on welfare duties. Repeated recommendations were made to merge the parallel services in London. In 1970, they were combined to form the Education Welfare Service (EWS), which dramatically reduced the number of voluntary workers. Pressure grew for the EWS to become primarily a social work service and it was renamed the Education Social Work Service in 1986. In 1990, when the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was dismantled, education welfare care was devolved to the individual boroughs of London.

2. Conclusions drawn from the study

2.1 Care versus control

Running through the story of London’s education welfare services is a tension between care and control: care of the needy and control through compulsory attendance. However, this was not a straightforward dichotomy: welfare provision was also used as a means to enforce certain kinds of behaviour, while making children go to school also served as a liberating force.

2.2 The value of the services

The services achieved varying degrees of success at different times (see 2.3 -- 2.7 below).

2.3. The absence of children’s voices

Children have been given little voice in the development of education welfare services and are barely visible in documents and reports. If anything, they appear to have become less visible over the years.
2.4. Social class
Education welfare services have always been targeted at working-class children. The early attendance officers were working-class; and the volunteers and the Care Organisers were educated middle class or upper class. The post-1970 EWOs have been professionals on low pay.

One of the aims of the Care Service was to integrate the elementary school leaver into so-called ‘civilised’ society. This may be interpreted as the inculcation of middle-class values, which were perceived as superior to working-class modes of behaviour.

2.5. Issues of gender
Care committee volunteers, who were mostly women, had higher status than attendance officers, who were nearly always men. This was because of their higher social class (see 2.4).

The pool of women available for voluntary service started to shrink between the wars, when middle class women began to work for pay. Even when they remained at home, their availability was eroded by the shortage and expense of servants to do their family’s domestic work.

Boys and girls were treated differently by attendance officers.

2.5. The ‘problematisation’ of the child
After the creation of the welfare state, the Care Service sought to survive by shifting its concerns away from material difficulties to problems of behaviour -- away from children with problems, to children who were seen to be problems. This shift was also linked to the growing influence of child psychology.

Evidence suggests that the Care Service ‘treated’ a range of so-called behavioural problems where this was inappropriate and without the necessary training.

2.6. The impact of professionalisation
The survival of the Care Service in the Fifties was driven by the growing professional status of the paid Organisers. For them, as members of the first generations of qualified working women, the service provided a means of marking out the boundaries of new professional territory.

2.7. The value of the volunteer
Many families were more comfortable with a visit from a volunteer than from a professional social worker. Parents often feared the power of social workers, who acted on behalf of the state and could even arrange for their children to be taken away. Volunteers were not seen as threatening in this way.

The fact that volunteers worked without pay was seen as a testament to genuine concern. They were regarded by many families as real advocates for children in their relationships with school and the state.
3. Implications for future policy development

3.1. The weighting of attendance and welfare
An important question thrown up by the research was whether future education welfare provision -- in London and nationally -- should be a social work service or a service focussed on attendance.

Future plans need to take into consideration that the merger of the attendance and welfare services in London in 1970 was not so much a natural development, as one that developed out of external pressures.

On the one hand, welfare and attendance service providers share the aim of helping children at school; moreover, both kinds of service require home visits and non-attendance may be underpinned by social problems. But on the other hand, there is not an inevitable relationship between attendance and welfare duties. Criticism of the services before 1970 centred on the problem of duplication: but the duplication sometimes lay in the fact of the home visit, not in its purpose. This issue is underpinned by the tension between care and control (see 2.1 above).

3.2 Between home and school
The ‘bridging’ aspect of education welfare work -- between home and school -- has been regarded as its great strength. But since EWOs represent the state, they may not be trusted as a disinterested friend in the same way as the volunteers (see 2.7). This may be a reason for developing a new voluntary mechanism that is based on the successful aspects of the Care Committee system.

3.3 Consulting the children
Children have always been the focus of attendance and welfare care, in the sense that without their needs, there is no reason for the services in the first place (see 2.3). Consulting their views may provide a way of better meeting their needs.

3.4 The question of social class
Investigating the historical background to the social class dimensions of education welfare service provision (see 2.4) may be one way of interrogating the low rank of education welfare in the current hierarchy of social services. It may also serve as a first step to giving a voice to children, the service users.